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NEW OR OLD?



# NEW OR OLD?

THE CHRISTIAN STRUGGLE

WITH CHANGE AND TRADITION

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by

Ernest C. Colwell  
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## INTRODUCTION

WHEN I was invited to give these lectures, references were made to my competence in New Testament studies and to my ability to relate them to the present work of the ministry. I felt that the invitation bestowed an aura of authority upon me that might be misleading. If I am to maintain any integrity, I must make a disclaimer.

When I was still in my thirties, I was seduced into academic administration. Administrative work steadily corrodes the bright metal of scholarly study. Every full-time professor recognizes this fact, and I have been an administrator for thirty years. To expect me to reflect the brilliant results of scholarship is to expect a tin can after thirty years on the rubbish heap to reflect the bright light of the Virginia sun.

Yet I have not been entirely defeated. I am like the graduate of a Presbyterian seminary. He enters his parish equipped with Biblical languages, theology from Calvin to the post-Bultmannians, a psychological mastery of interpersonal relationships, sociological mastery of the urban and rural community, personal counseling and creativity through small-group experiences, the understanding of the kerygma, the mastery of methods for its proclamation, and the use (and repair) of the instruments of mass communication, not to mention the administration of the local church in line with its historic polity and in relation to current ecumenism.

He often decides to take just one of these arrows from his quiver and sharpen it.

That is what I have done. I have progressively narrowed the areas in which I read and study until nothing is left but the study of the manuscript tradition of the Greek New Testament. My expertise is limited to the area of lower criticism: for example, I am an authority on Byzantine paleography. I can date undated Greek manuscripts from the medieval period as well as anyone in the western hemisphere. But outside the manuscript world I am an amateur.

Thus, in speaking of a ministry to the world and the church today, I am a true amateur, a lover of the sport. I have never served as the pastor of a church. I lack even the authority of ordination. But I am a member of the church. Jesus Christ mastered me many years ago, and my ministry through many of these years has been an effort to improve the ministry of others.

In these chapters I struggle with the problem of continuity and discontinuity, of tradition and change, of old and new. I confess that I see no reality in these as alternative options. The reality I know as a historian and as a reflective human being is a continuum, a process—one that includes both past and future in the present.

Why, then, do I choose “New or Old?” as the theme of these chapters? Because the tension between these two is felt more strongly by today’s minister than by anyone else. He feels it because his work puts him in the middle between opposing forces. The culture to which he is supposed to minister is addicted to the new. The institution through which he is supposed to minister is devoted to the old.

#### ONLY THE NEW IS GOOD

That only the new is good is one of the basic beliefs of Americans today. Our contemporary American culture is

addicted to novelty. It is hooked on the new.

This is true in business. What can be sold to the American public? The new. Turn on your TV for two hours. Of the thirty or so commercials that you will hear in that period, twenty-nine will use the word "new." For example—

It is not enough for a detergent to be called "Cheer" or even "Super-Cheer"; it has to be called *New Super-Cheer*.

Again, a mother rushes frantically out of the house, calling, "Betsy! Betsy!" A neighbor asks, "What's the matter?" Mother replies that the child went off without brushing her teeth with Gleem, and "who needs cavities?" The neighbor exclaims: "But Gleem! Come off it! Use this." Mother says, "But that's Gleem!" And the neighbor triumphantly explains, "*New extra action Gleem.*"

Just before it fell more than a dozen points on the New York Stock Exchange, Standard Oil of New Jersey was recommended to me by my investment counselor as a growth stock. So I now receive their reports to stockholders. Recently the report was illustrated in color by an attractive tiger wearing huge boxing gloves, and the print read: "New—the first gasoline of its kind. Now the Tiger has an extra punch! Put the *new* Tiger in your tank!"

I have not heard the commercials for the 1969 automobiles. But I remember 1968's, and I am confident that the 1969 models are *entirely new*. When I first heard that there was to be an entirely new auto, my imagination ran away with me. I expected to see a car running on seven wheels instead of four, without a windshield, with the engine on the roof, and no headlights. But the only new thing I noticed in a hurried inspection was that the speed of the windshield wipers could be controlled.

In government also, what can be sold to the American public is the new. And every candidate for office knows it. A brief glance reveals the power of the "*New Deal*," the suc-

cessors of which have changed the labels but have kept the emphasis on *new* programs.

The Peace Corps is new—even though what its members do was formerly done by missionaries from churches. Our consciences became outraged because those missionaries opened doors to “economic imperialism,” but today our consciences are insensitive to the outright political imperialism implicit in these agents of government. Why? Because it is *new!*

So also in the fine arts, novelty is king. Peter Ustinov (on the *Today Show*, September 12, 1967) exclaimed over the narrowing of the gap between the generations. He said, in effect, that when he was young, a man of forty would refer to a twenty-year-old as a member of the younger generation. But now a twenty-four-year-old says he can't understand the “younger generation,” and he's referring to a twenty-three-year-old! Ustinov's explanation was that the combination of instantaneous mass communication and the desire for the new outdates everything rapidly. He was worried lest his play about hippies, *Halfway Up the Tree*—then just opening on Broadway—would therefore be dated before it had a chance at a long run.

Similarly, Russell Lynes, in *Harper's Magazine* (August, 1967, pp. 19–20), comments “on the speed with which tastes come and go.” “The hungry maw of the mass media,” he says, “is equalled only by the hungry maw of the public seeking new sensations. Tastes get used up at a rate hitherto undreamed of: today's avant-garde is tomorrow's square. It used to be that an artist with new ideas hoped that he would be discovered before he died; now he can't avoid being discovered, and he hopes to be *revived* before he dies.”

Therefore, when we turn to religion, we are not surprised to find that there, also, only the new is good. The church may or may not be relevant to our society, but it certainly is in-

volved in it, and influenced by it—nowhere more than here in America.

If a team of research sociologists landed from Mars and studied our secular society (ignoring religion and morality, which would be par for Martian sociologists), what would they say when interviewed on the *Today Show*? Although they would disclaim any direct knowledge of religion and morality, they would doubtless be asked to comment on them. So, their spokesman would say, and I quote: “This culture is so enamored of novelty, and so confident that change is good, that I have no hesitation in hazarding the following predictions about religion and morality in the U.S.A.:

“1. If there is a revival of traditional orthodoxy, it will be called the *new* orthodoxy or, perhaps, neo-orthodoxy.

“2. If there is a revival of historical interest in Jesus, it will be called the *new* quest of the historical Jesus.

“3. If there is an increase in interest in Biblical interpretation, it will be called the *new* hermeneutic.

“4. If serious study of morality should arise again, it will be called the *new* morality.

“5. There will be no critical inspection of *new* translations of the Scriptures, or *new* editions of the original, even when the only significant change is the number of the edition, or even if the new edition’s superiority lies only in its type font.

“6. Religion must be relevant to its culture, and this culture’s cult is novelty. In this American culture, exotic cults from far enough away to have been previously unknown will succeed *because they are new*.

“7. If the church is to be reformed, it will not be called reformation but re-*new*-al. The cry will be for the repudiation of all existing ecclesiastical institutions, and for new patterns and new revelations that will save the world because they are new.

“8. If the new United Methodist Church launches a significant program, its slogan will be, ‘A New Church for a New World.’”

Thus spoke the Martian.

The Bible text for American culture today is from the book of Revelation, ch. 21:5: “And he who sat upon the throne said, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’”<sup>1</sup>

### THE OLD IS BETTER

In our society, one institution repudiates novelty. It is an institution that is dominated by one dogma. That dogma is, “The old is better.” That institution is the university.

The professors sometimes champion change off-campus; but when they are speaking about their own institution they say, “The old is better!” In the university, the very age of the institution is a credit. The oldest university’s delegates lead all processions. Academic man wears a medieval cap and gown. His Ph.D. union card is acceptable because it is old. All faculties avoid “a dangerous precedent,” or “an entering wedge,” and they are very sensitive to the unripeness of time. In the academic world, novelty is tolerable only when its antiquity can be established.

Professors champion the old to preserve their own established interests. When they “pursue truth,” the pursuit of truth turns out to be the same thing as the professor’s pursuit of his own advancement in prestige and cash. Or the professors proclaim a spurious objectivity, pretending that they make no ethical judgment. And, finally, the professor strives to upgrade his institution. He does this by admitting only those students who are best prepared to do his work as he is now doing it. Actually, the professor teaches and applies the research methodology that is currently orthodox.

A national award was being given to a distinguished scien-

tist. I happened to be sitting near him. As the citation was being read, he turned to me and said in a disgruntled tone: "I've done better research than this. The only reason they're excited about this is that it saves human lives." When, in some shock, I reported this comment to the dean of a faculty of science, he said: "The professor was right. He *has* done better research than that." What counted was the brilliance of research methodology—not any other value.

These are some of the fruits of the dogma that grows so vigorously in academia: The old is better.

The Biblical text for the university is Luke 5:39: Jesus said, "No man having drunk old wine desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'"

#### THE PREACHER HERE AND NOW

All that I have said above is a parable. The church is like the university. Everything I have said about the university is true of the church.

As a seminary president, I visited more than a hundred Methodist churches in a hundred towns. Scores of them were named "The First Methodist Church," meaning the oldest Methodist church in that city. But I have never been in "The Fifth Methodist" or "The Seventh Methodist Church."<sup>2</sup>

If the professors wear medieval clothes, what shall we say of clerical garb? The liturgy of the classroom is not more traditional than that of the church. In my church, the liturgical revival has upgraded the aesthetic quality of the parts of the Sunday morning service, but the same old components are still there: three hymns, special music (regularly "special"), two prayers, a profession of faith, Scripture, a sermon, and a benediction.

As in the university, so also in the church—the professionals are the Establishment. The clergy are the great de-

fenders of the tradition. To the churches' lay members, they often seem radical. But as is the case in the university, they are radical about other people's business, not in regard to the inner workings of the church. Here most ministers are conservative—conservative of their own vested interests.

Moreover, I indict the clergy with self-deception in the proclamation of the goals they seek to reach. How do the clergy really measure each other? My examples come from the church I know best, the Methodist Church.

In the late twenties I attended my first Methodist Annual Conference. At this Conference—under the sanction of our founding father—the character of the ministers is inspected and judged. As a recent seminary graduate, I was fascinated by this procedure. A district superintendent would call out a minister's name. The minister would rise and say: "Well, Bishop, we had a pretty good year: 10 accessions by profession of faith, 20 baptisms, 45 transfers by letter, 96 percent of current budget paid, 87 percent of Conference apportionments paid." Whereupon the bishop would bang his gavel upon the pulpit and exclaim, "Character passes!"

With slight variations in the statistics, this procedure was followed with man after man until a white-haired minister rose to his feet. "We've had a bad year, Bishop," he said. "A loss of 65 members, 65 percent of current expenditures paid, nothing paid on Conference apportionments." The bishop's gavel beat a tattoo on the pulpit as he expressed a low estimate of this minister's character, winding up with the indignant question, "Don't you have a single Methodist layman who would give one dollar to Methodist Benevolences?" "No," replied the minister, "I don't have a single Methodist layman in my church. They all moved out of town when our industry closed down, and our Baptist supporters limit their support strictly to the local church."

At the time I was under thirty and not yet harness-broken;

so I exclaimed in indignation to the minister seated beside me. "Don't waste your sympathy on him," he said. "There's nothing the bishop can do to him—he already has the worst church in the Conference. Sympathize with me. I have one of the strong churches of this Conference. Before I came to this meeting my official board instructed me to reject any increase in Conference apportionments. Yet they are being increased. I have two daughters entering college next year, and the bishop can move me down a steep hill, fast." He was obviously a man under strong pressure to have his character passed.

Among my Methodist clerical friends, I often heard references to a man's "standing in the Conference." Only gradually did I become aware that the reference was to his salary level. To maintain or improve his standing in the Conference inevitably finds its place among the minister's major goals. When several district superintendents (who can serve only a fixed term at a relatively high salary) go "off the district" at the same time, the bishop often has difficulty in finding appointments for them that will maintain their standing in the Conference. When I was young I heard a rumor (you know how gullible the young are in regard to rumors about the Establishment) that a bishop could not find a single church willing to receive an ex-district superintendent at his "standing" level, but that he solved the problem of maintaining the man's standing in the Conference by appointing him to be a professor in a theological seminary. Any personnel manager in a major industry would find this story credible. But when will the professional leadership of the church disentangle its standards from those of a gross materialism? At present, preachers seem to me no better than professors.

When a school measures its excellence by the size of the student body, the number of new buildings, and the size of its budget, it has very little to boast of. When a preacher

measures his church in this way, he has forgotten his Christian mission—but he may well advance to higher-salaried churches. Whom is the preacher serving when he concentrates on these things? His own career, for ordination—like the Ph.D. degree—does not obliterate our liability to sin.

Thus far we have seen that preachers are like professors because they wear medieval clothing, because they give priority to the old, because they limit their radicalism to outside things, and because they degrade the high ideals of their profession to goals that serve their own selfish needs.

Some of our preachers are like those professors who profess an unattainable objectivity. These ministers abstain from confessions of their own faith in preaching. They shrink from speaking from a position. They talk about the kerygma, but they don't "keryg" anything. They discuss, they dialogue, they summarize contemporary books—but they have nothing to proclaim. My ears burn with desire to hear some preacher say: "Here I stand. I can do no other!" If the university professor should expose his own values to challenge, how much more the Christian minister!

Is the minister or his congregation like the professor who strives to "upgrade" his university? Do we strive to create a more satisfactory and equable church atmosphere by the indirect exclusion of the unwashed? Few of us today would consciously echo the repugnance with which a generation ago the custodian of a well-to-do Presbyterian church in a Northern city exclaimed to me that "sometimes people came in off the streets to attend services!" Yet more often than not the church is the prisoner of the economic homogeneity of its community. To escape from this Babylonian captivity, the minister must find resources that transcend his own local church or his own denomination. To work so that the members of the congregation become more and more like each other in economic and formal educational level is not to

strengthen the church but, rather, to dilute its quality. To upgrade its quality calls for the use of ways and means still largely unidentified. But clarity as to the nature of upgrading can be achieved today, and it is the first essential step.

What can a student of the past say to the preacher in the present? He can help him to identify the new.

When I was young, a judge in Denver advocated trial marriage as a cure for divorce. At the same time I was translating from the Greek a Trial Marriage, dated A.D. 36.

In the third century A.D., a letter from a boy at college to his father tells father not to worry about the boy's studies—he studies hard, but then he also rests; so he's getting along fine!<sup>3</sup>

In Professor Clinebell's superb booklet on drugs, we are reminded that Herodotus mentioned the smoking of marijuana 2400 years ago, and that in India a root was used as a tranquilizer for at least a thousand years before it was hailed as a new miracle drug (reserpine) in America.<sup>4</sup>

Yet much indeed *is* new. Clinebell identifies new drugs as well as old. The truism of our day is that there has been more change since 1900 than there was up to 1900. In communication and transportation, and in man's control of natural forces, this is beyond challenge.

The physicist Harris Purks (a college classmate of mine) summarized the rate of change in a speech made as director of the North Carolina Board of Higher Education. "It is trite," he said, "to say that the 'know-how' of the blacksmith is no longer needed in quantity. But before we have produced enough vacuum-tube technicians, the transistor appears; . . . before we have trained enough radiologists who can be trusted with x-rays and radium, we have cobalt 60; . . . before one wonder drug has been recorded in the latest pharmaceutical text, another and better one has replaced it; . . . by the time we have enough mills for cotton, we have synthetic

fibers; . . . before we have learned to operate the latest machine, an improved model has appeared to take its place, momentarily before it too becomes obsolete.”<sup>5</sup>

New drugs, new technological advances, all the new things, have been followed by new attitudes, particularly on the part of the young. *Impatience they know in a new dimension*. If man can fly to the moon and make artificial hearts, then hunger and disease could be eliminated today—not tomorrow—not a generation from now. Moreover, the customary rebellion of the young against compulsion finds a new target in the university, for higher education is now an economic necessity. Without it, no young man can hope to gather the fruits of the good life that the technological miracles make possible. Therefore, the students react strongly to this compulsion. Paradoxically, they react in opposite directions at the same time. They rebel against campus authority in which they have no share and strike out wildly against the very existence of the institution. But they also demand that the university admit and cherish those underprepared candidates who have no chance at a rich life without university education. Student rebellion is an old thing, but this one is also new.

To identify the new, man must know the old—the tradition. Otherwise he may think he is riding the wave of the future when he is actually sliding downhill into the past. Or he may splash prematurely into the trough of a wave because he has not learned that his fathers nearly drowned trying to ride that same wave.

Nowhere is diagnostic knowledge of the past more essential than in the current excitement about taking the church out of the churches into secular society—or, more extremely, of finding God’s word “out there” and not inside the church. Involvement in secular protest against social injustice and oppression is the newest gospel.

A member of my own generation, a seminary administrator, recently commented on this with some bitterness: "What do they mean 'new'?" he asked. "I was in jail three times before I was twenty-eight!"

In the prosperous twenties and the depressed thirties, an entire generation was swept along on the enthusiasms of the Social Gospel. We learned the tragic by-products of unorganized labor in Company Town and Cotton Mill Village *before* the Depression, and in that Depression we saw human misery so massive that it stammers our tongues when we try to talk to an affluent society. But we found out eventually that a purely "social" gospel was an inadequate gospel. We impoverished our message theologically. The present generation may impoverish it in the same way.

Thirty-five years ago, in 1934, I wrote some verses in which Jesus speaks to a modern doubting Thomas:

Would you see the marks of the Roman scourge,  
And the pits where the nails were driven?  
They are all hidden under fresh wounds.

Much more than forty lashes have I borne since Calvary;  
Blows aimed at striking labor have bruised my body sore;  
I've known the torture of my kinsmen by the Gentile mob;  
My back is raw from lashings by heroes, masked, at night.  
Wherever man was beaten, I was whipped.

You see this scar?  
'Twas a bayonet in Flanders.  
You eye this bruise?  
A slave's chain pinched me there.  
My shoulder's stoop?  
Under the heavy load of labor.

But—

You would see the marks of the Roman scourge  
And the pits where the nails were driven?  
They are all hidden under fresh wounds.

This poem is now again in great demand from people who have no idea what happened in 1934 and do not know about the rise and fall of the Social Gospel.

The would-be religious leader needs to avoid being a mirror of his culture—capable of saying to it only what it says to him. Mirrors lead men nowhere; they only turn left into right. An echo is nothing but a weak reinforcement of the original yell! Mirrors and echoes create complacency. And, in society, complacency creates nothing—except decay.

The historian knows that “old” and “new” are arbitrary labels when applied to the process of human history, in which the old is always an element in the new complex. In the “here and now,” the traditions the layman champions seldom go back farther than his own childhood, yet he blithely assumes that these are the characteristics of Christianity in its pure, golden age. In his fight to preserve this old-time religion, he assumes that he is supporting New Testament Christianity. If the first century and a half of Christian history can be vividly presented to him, he may become more open to the gospel for here and now. Thus these chapters are rooted in New Testament times, moving back from A.D. 150 to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. If everything that Christians did down to the year 150 were written down, the world itself could not contain all the books; but these things were written to enlarge your knowledge of how God dealt with man then so that you may serve Him now in the renewing of his church.

My text for this book comes from Matt. 13:52: Jesus said, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

# I

## THE PAST REJECTED:

### MARCION'S NEW BIBLE

**T**HIS is an invitation to a time-capsule trip. Destination: the beginning of the second Christian century. The going is rough. The visa requirements are openness of mind and a rugged imagination.

When you reach your destination, you are in a strange country. In that country, human history has reversed its direction. With us, human history climbs uphill. We welcome the new; we look down upon the past either with contempt or with a smug, patronizing attitude. But there, human history ran downhill toward disaster. This dogma permeated both secular and religious cultures. History was running downhill fast, and it always had. All early Christians believed that the golden age was in the past. But this did not differentiate them from pagans. Pagans believed it too. Christians believed that what was earlier was better than what was later; so did pagans. That age believed that unity preceded diversity, that truth was corrupted into error with the passage of time, that purity became adulterated. This article of faith was universal.

Listen to this in Tertullian's vigorous language! "For inasmuch as error is falsification of truth, it must needs be that truth precedes error. . . . On the whole then, if that is evidently more true which is earlier, if that is earlier which is from the very beginning, if that is from the beginning which

has the apostles for its authors, then it will certainly be quite as evident, that that comes down from the apostles which has been kept as a sacred deposit in the churches of the apostles.”<sup>6</sup> In this last clause, Tertullian represents the end of the century, not its beginning.

Two other dogmas were accepted widely, but not universally. They were as popular among Christians as they were among pagans. The first was a dualistic exaltation of the spiritual and a depreciation of the material: flesh versus spirit was one of its formulations. The second was a syncretistic tolerance and acceptance of a variety of cults, creeds, and diverse religious traditions. “All these gods are the same god,” said one Corinthian to another. And an Alexandrian pointed out that by using allegory you could find Platonism in Homer and almost anything in anything. Thus, allegorical interpretation and a prosyncretistic attitude led to a superficial harmonization of the most diverse elements.

Christians in that strange world used words familiar to us, but the words did not have the familiar meanings. They said “religious,” but they did not mean something that can be separated from a major area of life called “secular.” The state—that is, the government—was not separate from religion. To suggest that it should be was both blasphemy and treason.

Those Christians said “Bible,” but they did not mean your Bible. They meant the Jewish Bible. Your Bible has two Testaments. Not theirs. They sometimes referred to it as “The Law and The Prophets,” but it was a one-volume Bible; their common name for it was Scripture. They took it over from the Jews, both the book and the concept of an authoritative closed canon.

Christians then had lively debates about “prophets.” But they were not talking about Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos.

They were talking about John Doe, James Smith, Emanuel Simpkins, who had come wandering into town and into their church, full of the authority of the Spirit, blessed with new revelations from God or from his Son, Jesus Christ. They assumed the leadership of the local church and led it through stormy days. So “prophet” did not mean a foreigner wearing strange robes and a hippie’s beard in the remote past; it meant this living man, in town today, stirring up the church.

They never spoke the word “church” with a capital C. A church was a local organization. Today we speak glibly of “The Church Universal,” but the only thing universal about their church was its outreach, its mission. The word “catholic” in any of its legitimate meanings for us was meaningless then.

When a Christian minister enters the second century and is struck with its strangeness, part of the strangeness is that familiar structures are missing. Some of these are physical: no building that looks like a church; and when one asks his host for a Bible, the man is embarrassed to have to say that he doesn’t have one. Actual copies of the Bible were rarer than we can imagine. No hymnbooks, no Episcopal Prayer Book, no Presbyterian Book of Order, no Methodist Discipline, no choir, no lectionary, no fixed order of service.

Pliny reports to the Emperor Trajan what he had found out from some renegade Christians: “They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind.”<sup>7</sup> Granted that

there are defensive overemphases in this report, its reference to a hymn, moral instruction, and a (later) common meal does not testify to an extensive and regimented liturgy.

Massey Shepherd says that “we know very little about the development of the Church’s worship in the generation following the death of the original apostles and leaders”; and he dates the beginning of information about the generally followed pattern of the liturgy at the middle of the second century.<sup>8</sup> His earliest witnesses are The Acts of the Apostles and Justin’s Apology. But the situation into which we are moving existed fifty years before Justin.

Of all the blanks in that early Christian world, the strangest is created by the absence of the apostles, and most especially of the apostle Paul. Later on, from 150 to 250, apostles are swarming all over the place. In that later period, they are authors of canonical books and of noncanonical books, founders of every important church, and guarantors of sound doctrine. But here in the early second century, we do not often find appeals to the authority of the apostles; and among those writers whom the later church revered, there is a general silence about Paul—occasionally, an apologetic reference.<sup>9</sup>

If as a Christian in the early second century you made your living as a traveling salesman, you would find a variety of church governments as you visited churches in different provinces and towns. You could attend a church that was organizationally episcopal. Or you could attend a church with a presbyterian government. Or, again, you would find that the church you attended was governed by teachers and prophets, a charismatic government. Nothing has been discovered in the last forty years to reverse Streeter’s conclusions as to the variety of governments in the churches of this period. His thesis is still sound: “The history of Catholic Christianity during the first five centuries is the history of

the standardization of a diversity having its origin in the Apostolic Age." Nowhere is this truer than in the pattern of church government.<sup>10</sup> Here confusion reigned.

In the early second century, we tourists will find an equally great diversity of doctrine. There, a large variety of Christian faiths is available. Studies and discoveries in the last generation have reversed Streeter on this point. He seems to have made an exception of "sound doctrine." Here, he felt, the early fathers are serious about the appeal to history.<sup>11</sup>

Subsequent studies in various areas support Streeter's main thesis that diversity originating in the apostolic age preceded standardization. And they make his exception less probable. Thus Carroll's survey of the variety of New Testament canons fits the pattern of movement from diversity to unity.<sup>12</sup> Carroll argues, in fact, that "the earliest New Testament appeared in Rome sometime between the years 170 and 180," although it took several centuries to get final agreement on all the contents.

Moreover, recent studies based on the Dead Sea Scrolls claim that in the period in which Jesus lived, Judaism itself was much more diverse than we previously believed. Professor Cross believes that "the normative Judaism" which we used to locate in Jesus' lifetime did not conquer the variety in Jewish religion until the third century A.D.<sup>13</sup> This reinforces the probability of diversity within primitive Christianity.

Streeter's exception of doctrine from this general process is striking in that its illustrations (the unity of God and the reality of Christ's manhood) are specifically referred to the struggle with the Gnostic heresy. Walter Bauer's epochal study of orthodoxy and heresy was needed to demonstrate that orthodoxy was one of the unities which the Christian churches slowly and partially achieved.<sup>14</sup> The evidence for theological diversity was advanced by the discovery of a

sermon on the passion by Melito, bishop of Sardis (died before A.D. 190).<sup>15</sup> The theology of Melito is revealed as being far from orthodox. He speaks of Jesus as "born as a Son, led forth as a lamb, sacrificed as a sheep, buried as a man, he rose from the dead as God, being by nature God and man. Who is all things: in that he judges, Law; in that he teaches, Word; in that he saves, Grace; in that he begets, Father; in that he is begotten, Son; in that he suffers, a sacrificial sheep; in that he is buried, Man; in that he arises, God" (8-9). Again, in his peroration on the crucifixion (95-97), Melito identifies the Creator with Jesus: "God has been murdered; the King of Israel has been slain by an Israelitish hand." Professor Bonner tends to explain this as either naïve, unguarded speech or as emotional rhetoric; and in either case, as departure from an existing orthodoxy. But Melito supports Walter Bauer's thesis that what we call orthodoxy was a secondary development. Melito's modalistic, patripassian theology without a true doctrine of the Holy Spirit is heretical, like all primitive Christian writing, because it antedates the formation of orthodoxy. These startling sayings are not unorthodox because they are the unguarded speech of a layman; on the contrary, they are the formal, studied utterance of the Bishop of Sardis.<sup>16</sup> Melito demonstrates the unreliability of Streeter's claim that the bishops were historically accurate in handing down the great doctrines of the faith. The demonstration of primitive theological diversity was completed by the discovery of the Nag Hammadi Library.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in every area of Christian experience from A.D. 100 to 150, diversity was the rule.

In these first fifty years of the second century, the diversities within Christianity tended to polarize around the old and the new. The conditions which favored this were complex. Vigor, energy, drive, characterized the Christian

movement. It was expanding in various directions at a rapid rate. This was partly due to its awareness of its newness, or rather of its climactic nature in God's revelation. The old was institutionalized for it in the Scriptures—an ancient, sacred, and authoritative book. But, paradoxically, this new revelation was rationalized, theologized, as no more than the intention of this very ancient book. This was done through two identifications. Jesus was identified as the Jewish Messiah, and the Christians were identified as "the true Israel." But Christians were excused from obeying the commandments in their Scripture, and they denied that the mission of Jesus was to the Jewish people who refused to identify him as the Messiah. Yet the Jewish Scriptures were the primary authority for the Christian churches at the beginning of this century—as I Clement plainly shows.

Into this diversity and confusion, the reformer Marcion came with vision and energy. He came from Sinope on the Black Sea, where he was a shipowner, a wealthy member of the upper class in that seaport. From there he went west, ultimately to Rome. In Rome, in A.D. 144, he was expelled from the Christian community and founded his own Christian church. This Marcionite church had an amazing success, and spread "over the whole of mankind." Justin Martyr testifies to this within a single decade. Toward the end of the century, Celsus, the cultured critic of Christianity to whom Origen replied, seems clearly to imply that the Christian options were (1) the emerging catholic church or (2) the Marcionite church. Tertullian's general attack on heresies put Marcion front and center; and, unsatisfied with this, Tertullian wrote a comprehensive work in five books, *Against Marcion*. Harnack's list of Marcion's enemies is drawn from all the provinces of the Empire and includes almost all known leaders of the churches.<sup>18</sup> Marcion wins the gold

medal as the best-hated Christian of the late second and early third centuries. His popularity and unpopularity declined thereafter, although some of his churches survived at least into the fifth century.

The tremendous sweep and impact of Marcion's movement is the more impressive when we remember that he banned all sexual intercourse and marriage. His new members were all converts. How high would the quantitative growth of our churches go today if we were under the same restriction? If Roman Catholics didn't count the baptized infants and if Protestants didn't count the recruits from the Sunday school, our success wouldn't begin to compare with Marcion's. No other Christian had as great an impact on the development of Christianity in the second century. Any careful student of Harnack's must share his conclusion: *The Great Church became the Catholic Church through its struggles against Marcion and through its imitation of him.* How did he do it?

He achieved this influence first of all through his realistic analysis of the condition of the churches and the consequent definition of their needs. He saw a fourfold need: (1) The Christian churches needed a Christian Bible. (2) They needed apostolic (i.e., primitive) sponsorship. (3) They needed a consistent theology—Biblical, centralized, authoritative. (4) They needed to become one universal, connectional church. Marcion undertook to meet these needs.

In the first two points, he had "something old and something new." When he said "Christian Bible," he meant a Bible that was uniquely and distinctively Christian—a *new* testament. He had no use for the old Jewish Bible. When he reached for apostolic sponsorship, he was a typical reformer—going back to the beginnings of the Christian faith. Thus he could meet the damaging accusation of novelty by claiming to present the original (and, therefore, pure) gospel.

That the Bible question was a troublesome one is shown by the numerous "Dialogues" between Christians and Jews, as well as by the eagerness with which Christians adopted allegory and typology to eliminate the difficulties involved in saying yes to the Jewish Bible.

The oldest answer and for a long time the universal Christian answer was: Hold on to the Scripture that Jesus used: the Hebrew Bible (or for convenience, its Greek form, the Septuagint, a somewhat longer Bible). In the first generations, the Christians were Jews, the apostles (including Paul) were Jews; their Scripture was the Jewish Bible. They didn't have an Old Testament or a New Testament; they had a Bible. And they hung on to it. There were reasons for this: (1) its rootage in the beginnings of the Christian movement; (2) its antiquity, in an age when antiquity had prestige; (3) its moral quality and its religious monotheism.

But there were strong reasons against keeping it: (1) It was Jewish, and anti-Semitism was as strong then as now.<sup>19</sup> (2) The mass of Jewish people and their vocal leaders did not recognize Jesus as a Biblical figure, as predicted in their Bible. (3) Its dietary and liturgical requirements were strange and unattractive to many of the Gentiles who early became a majority in the churches. (4) The identification of its God's interests with the interests of one nation shocked many. (5) Its "legalism" or "moralism" or "emphasis on works" offended many Christians who shared Paul's view on this issue. (6) Its identification of God as the Creator of all physical things offended a large majority who were attracted by dualism and asceticism. So Marcion said, "Let's drop it and adopt our own Bible."

Marcion's Bible had two parts: Gospel and Apostle. He was the first Christian to use "Gospel" with reference to a written book. For him, "Gospel" was its complete name. He called it "The Gospel." He did not call it "The Gospel Ac-

ording to Luke"; he sought no sanction from authorship. To Marcion, the value of The Gospel was that in it Jesus himself opposed much that Marcion was opposing.

His Gospel was probably a revised edition of our Luke, or possibly a revised edition of an earlier form of our Luke. His enemies accused him of butchering Luke, but this is certainly overstatement. He lacked the opening two chapters and such anti-Marcionite verses as ch. 5:39. But ch. 5:39 is also absent from MS. D and the Itala. Harnack thinks that Marcion removed this and similar verses and thus influenced the content of these "Western" witnesses. But Harnack also believes that the Gospel of Luke that Marcion used had already been harmonized to Matthew and was already "Western" in nature.<sup>20</sup>

Marcion's *Apostolikon* contained ten letters, which he regarded as Paul's own work. Paul was *the* apostle par excellence. Paul had received his authentic gospel, the true gospel, straight from the risen Jesus. Paul saw clearly the antithesis between gospel and law, most clearly in the epistle to the Galatians. Naturally Marcion put this letter first in his collection of Paul's letters. He edited these letters, as he edited the Gospel of Luke, removing "Judaizing corruptions" from the text. Marcion was Paul's disciple. In this, as in other matters, he set a pattern for later reformers of the Christian faith.

So Marcion offered the Christian churches a Christian Bible: The Gospel (essentially our Luke) and The Apostle (those ten letters of Paul). This twofold canon was certainly influenced in its form by "The Law and The Prophets." It was a canon in that it had definite limits; the book had covers on it. And it was authoritative. Jesus and Paul were its sanctions. And it did *not* include the Jewish Bible. That omission was deliberate and, for Marcion, based in sound doctrine.

Marcion insisted that his followers drop their previously accepted Bible—not because he disbelieved it, but because he believed it. He read it open-eyed and believed it literally. He repudiated all allegorical and typological interpretation. He insisted that the Hebrew Scriptures meant what they said. And he was bothered by what they said.

In them he read that God was a God of justice, demanding righteousness and punishing the unjust; but he observed and felt that man was incapable of achieving this righteousness. To obey all these commands, to please God by an accumulation of good works that would outweigh bad works, this looked to him like a dead-end road. Paul delivered him from this difficulty. From Paul he learned that the law had been abrogated through Christ, and he accepted this with a rigorous simplicity. If the law is canceled, let's drop it and replace it with the good news of Jesus Christ. And this good news he meant to be news, to be something new.

In the Old Bible, Marcion found a Jewish Messiah, anointed by the God of justice and judgment—a Messiah who would come to judge the world, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked. Jesus Christ, Marcion claimed, came not to judge the world but that the world through him might be saved. Thus Marcion had two Messiahs as well as two Gods, in each of whom he believed.

He disliked the Hebrew Bible for an additional reason—its God was the Creator of this physical universe. Marcion brought to his Christian faith an ascetic dualism. The functions that man shared with the animals nauseated him. Thus, his repudiation of the Old Bible rested not only on his preference for love over justice but also on his detestation of the physical and material. And he found support for this in Paul, too. In his repudiation of the Creator-God, he was confident that he was simply carrying Paul's thought to its logical conclusion. Paul was the ideal apostle, a contrast to the

Judaizing James and the compromising Peter. And Paul had received his gospel direct from heaven without any of the corruptions that crept into the Palestinian apostles' reports.

This is the language of a man who thinks in sharp contrasts, as reformers are apt to do. So what could be more natural than that Marcion named the theology which he wrote for his church "The Antitheses," The Contrasts? In addition to a discursive, polemical Biblical theology, this work contained a very large number of short formal contrasts that show clearly the tremendous vigor of Marcion's message and go far toward explaining its appeal.<sup>21</sup>

Imagine yourself listening to a proclamation of these by a Marcionite evangelist:

The Creator was known to Adam and his offspring; but the Father of Christ is unknown, for Christ himself has said of him, "No one has known the Father except the Son."

The Creator-God instructed Moses at the exodus from Egypt: "Be prepared, with your loins girded up, shoes on your feet, staves in the hands, sacks on the shoulders, and carry with you from there gold and silver and everything that belongs to the Egyptians"; but our Lord, the Good God, said to his disciples as he sent them into the world, "Have no shoes on your feet, no sack, no change of clothing, no cash in your belt."

Joshua conquered the country with force and cruelty; but Christ forbids all force and preaches kindness and peace.

The prophet of the Creator-God climbs to the peak of a mountain while his people are engaged in battle, and stretches out his hands to God so that he might kill as many as possible in the battle; but our God, the Good God, stretches out his hands (on the cross) not to kill men but to redeem them.

In the Law it says, "Eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth"; but the Lord, the Good Lord, says in the Gospel, "When

anyone strikes you on the cheek, turn the other to him, also."

The Creator of the world sent the plague of fire at the demand of Elijah; but Christ forbids his disciples to request fire from heaven.

The prophet of the Creator-God ordered the bears to break out of the thicket and to devour the children whom he encountered; but the Good Lord says, "Let the children come to me, and don't turn them away, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven."

The prophet of the Creator of the world says, "My bow is bent, and my arrows are pointed against you"; but the Apostle says, "Put on the armor of God so that you may quench the fiery darts of the wicked."

The World Maker says, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on the Wood"; but Christ endured the death of the cross.

The Jewish Christ was specifically destined to lead the Jewish people back from the Dispersion; but our Christ was entrusted by the Good God with the deliverance of all mankind.

The Jewish Christ predicted by Isaiah will be called Emmanuel, and takes the riches of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria against the King of Assyria; but our Lord was not born under such a name, nor ever engaged in any warlike enterprise.<sup>22</sup>

The World Maker ordered one to give to brothers; but Christ, simply to all who ask.

In the Law of the righteous, happiness is given to the rich and unhappiness to the poor; in the Gospel this is reversed.

In the Law the Creator-God speaks: "You shall love him who loves you and hate your enemy"; but our Lord, the Good Lord, says, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."

The Creator of the World has commanded the Sabbath; but Christ annulled it.

Moses permits divorce; Christ forbids it.

The Christ of the Old Bible promises the Jews the restoration of their former condition through the giving back of their country; and after death, in the underworld, a haven in Abraham's bosom. Our Christ will establish the Kingdom of God, an eternal and heavenly possession.

This is strictly Biblical theology based positively on one book (The Gospel and Paul), and negatively on another (our Old Testament) whose factual nature is accepted. In it there are two gods: (1) an inferior god who made the world and man, the Old God, who has his own Messiah; (2) the Good God, who lives in the third heaven, whom Jesus made known for the very first time, the New God. This Unknown God sent Jesus in the likeness of man (but not, of course, in real flesh) and through his crucifixion redeemed the world and mankind from the Creator.

If this theology had been thrown at you in a series of thirty or forty contrasts like the samples above, would it not have shaken you? It shook up Christendom in the second century. Out of this shake-up came the major structures of the catholic Christian church.<sup>23</sup>

I've discussed Marcion's Christian Bible, apostolic authority, and authoritative theology as major parts of his reformation. The organization of his churches as a single connec-tional church, intensely self-conscious, may be only partly cause—since it may be in part result of the other three. That it existed, his enemies clearly testify. Moreover, they admit that one of the practices of this church was not to avoid martyrdom.

What did Christians in the second century do about this reformation? We've already seen that many of them joined

in its efforts to purify the Christian churches. But most did not. How did this majority react?

They reacted to his Christian Bible and to apostolic sanction in a positive way. They did more than say yes. They grabbed his ideas and ran with them, as the relay runner in the Olympics snatches the baton from the lead-off man and tears off down the track. In the words of a popular song, they said to Marcion, "Anything you can do, we can do better."

He had one Gospel in his canon. They made it four, including his. He had one apostle in his canon. They added "The Acts of All the Apostles"<sup>24</sup> and letters from Peter, James, John, and Jude—and included Marcion's Paul, plus four more letters.

In the specifically Christian canon, two things come unexpectedly out of the blue. The first is that there should be such a canon at all in a church that already had a canonical book. The second is the presence of four Gospels in that canon. Both of these developments I believe are due to Marcion; the first, directly; the second, indirectly.

What blinds our eyes to the unnaturalness of four Gospels in a Bible? Nothing but the presentation of four Gospels to each Christian as he becomes a Christian aided by the accumulation through the centuries of proofs that their differences are unreal. But in the beginning it was not so. Then a new member of a Christian church found it using one Gospel. Certain Gospels became The Gospel of a particular area: in Rome, Mark; in Greece, Luke; in Ephesus, John; in Syria, Matthew. This is the only reasonable explanation of Marcion's choice of Luke. Luke was the first Gospel he knew, the Gospel of his home church. No other pattern of development can explain the presence of Mark as one of the four. Matthew is a second and greatly improved edition of Mark, including almost every line of Mark. That Mark was in-

cluded in the canon is convincing evidence that it was The Gospel of some very influential center of the Christian movement. Thus when the leaders of the big churches negotiated the content of The Gospel that was to overwhelm Marcion's Gospel, Mark was included even though it was duplicated by Matthew, and John was included even though it disagreed with the others on every page. This pooling of sameness and difference was a defensive alliance against the threat that originated with Marcion. Four Gospels against one, twelve apostles against one—it was an effective defense.

But while the majority generously accepted much that was new, it stubbornly held on to the old. It successfully resisted Marcion's attack on the Old Bible, and made a twofold canon: Old Testament and New Testament.

Part of this defense of the Old Bible was effective because the second century was the second century and the defense was "relevant." The Old Bible was very old, and in that century all men believed "the older, the better." Allegorical and typological interpretation was the reputable method of interpretation for almost everybody but Marcion. Thus it could be used against him effectively, and it was. But Marcion's opponents had other arguments that retain their force today. They quoted Jesus and Paul against him in support of God the Creator and the God of the prophets as being one with the God and Father of Jesus. They quoted the Old Bible to show that its God preferred mercy to sacrifice and was slow to anger. They reduced his fleshless Jesus to a meaningless phantom. They attacked "grace without justice." They indicated the unworkableness of a Messiah who was sent to the Jewish people to reveal a "Strange God" about whom absolutely nothing was known prior to the coming of Jesus. Marcion's own Biblicism caused him trouble. He believed the Old Bible and the Gospel, and yet his message was the

revelation of a hitherto unknown god. Without a Scripture he might have achieved consistency.

The Big Church was persuaded by Marcion of the value of a connectional system, subject to discipline. By the end of the second century, episcopal government was general.

This same majority was persuaded also of the value of an authoritative theology, and by the end of the second century the "Roman Symbol," the forerunner of the so-called Apostles' Creed, was widely used. Notice how much of it answers Marcion: "Maker of heaven and earth," "Jesus, the son of the Creator," "born," "suffered," "he shall come to judge," "the holy catholic church," "the resurrection of the body." After Marcion, the churches were not the same.

Is there any lesson for us in this part of our tradition? Our times have some analogies to the second century. Change is rapid. Diversity characterizes the church, as well as its culture. Strife between many forces, including old and new, is carried on viciously both inside and outside the church. Many false messiahs polarize this strife around the old and the new.

From the story of Marcion's attempt at reformation and what came of it, we could learn not to panic in the face of diversities vigorously championed, not to meet the new with total rejection, and still to be generous in the acceptance of the old.

## II

### THE PAST IGNORED:

### THE GOSPEL OF TRUTH

TOWARD the end of the first century, Christian evangelists found a new audience, an audience that came from higher social strata. What was this new audience like?

What was it higher than? It was higher than the lowest social strata: slaves, fishermen, women, etc. But the first audience of Christianity came out of these lowest strata. Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians of this:

For consider, what happened when God called you. Not many of you were what men call wise, not many of you were influential, not many were of high birth. But it was what the world calls foolish that God chose to put the wise to shame with, and it was what the world calls weak that God chose to shame its strength with, and it was what the world calls low and insignificant and unreal that God chose to nullify its realities, so that in his presence no human being might have anything to boast of. (I Cor. 1:26-29.)

And the first three canonical Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) make their appeal to the "low and insignificant." In Luke (ch. 6:20), the first Beatitude blesses the "poor," and has a matching curse (ch. 6:24), "Woe to you rich people!" And even though Matthew (ch. 5:3) softens this by adding "in spirit" to "the poor," and softens Luke's blessing of the hungry (ch. 6:21) by making them hungry for righteousness (ch. 5:6)—yet his "mourners," "meek," "per-

secuted” blessees are clearly from the lowest classes. In these three Gospels only God’s superhuman power could make the salvation of a rich man possible.

After the story of the rich young man who came to Jesus and then left him (Matt. 19:23–26; Mark 10:23–27; Luke 18:24–27), Jesus says plainly, and says it twice, that it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom; in fact, he says, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God. When the disciples exclaimed in dismay, “Then who *can* be saved?” Jesus calmed them with the assurance that God can do anything; he can even save a rich man!

The reaction of second-century respectable upper-class people to this glorification of the poor and repudiation of the rich can be measured by our own modern refusal to accept these sayings. We winnow the scholars’ dustbins searching for some escape from these words. An archaeologist finds a narrow gate in the wall of Jerusalem called the camel’s-eye gate, and we are to assume that an average-sized camel could with a little difficulty get through the gate. A linguist notices the similarity in ancient Aramaic between the consonants of the word for “camel” and the word for “rope,” and we are to assume that it is only a small rope and could with a little difficulty get through a needle’s eye. But Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that the disciples didn’t know about the gate or the rope. The disciples’ response shows that they thought it was impossible, and Jesus’ own comment acknowledges that it is impossible for men but not for the God who can do anything—even impossible things. Our refusal to accept the plain meaning of the Gospel text is due to our respect for people who have possessions. The major part of the society of the second century respected them too. And they found Matthew, Mark, and Luke shocking.

In these three Gospels, Jesus' followers were fishermen, beggars, tax collectors, maniacs, epileptics, sinners of all kinds—including well-known prostitutes, hungry mobs, and women. Jesus came to call sinners, not the righteous (Matt. 9:13; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32). In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus tells his followers that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinful person who repents than over ninety-nine upright people who do not need repentance (ch. 15:7; cf. Matt. 18:13). The poor and the outcast heard this good news gladly.

But the middle- and upper-class pagans were shocked by these Gospel accounts. One of them, a man named Celsus, expresses this sense of shock forcibly:

Let's hear what kind of persons these [Christians] invite. Everyone, they say, who is a sinner, who is devoid of understanding, who is a child, and to speak generally, whoever is unfortunate, him will the kingdom of God receive. Do you not call him a sinner, then, who is unjust, and a thief, and a burglar, and a poisoner, and a robber of temples, and of the dead? What others would a man invite if he were issuing a proclamation for an assembly of gangsters?<sup>25</sup>

This is strong language, but Celsus could legitimately get this impression from the first three Gospels.

This new audience was a respectable audience. It disliked wonder-workers and magicians. It had some pride of place in society; it recognized the value of its social standing. In his correspondence with Trajan, Pliny again and again solicits the social upgrading of friends. And the second century shows many a Christian defender of the faith striving manfully to overcome the handicap of low origin, an origin that Paul earlier, had been able to turn into a triumphant boast.

This new audience was "scientific" in its culture. This statement must not mislead you into assuming that for it the word "scientific" meant what it does to us today. For them, it meant a respect for Knowledge—spelled with a capital K.

It was interested in knowing, not in learning, which results from serious and prolonged study. To this extent, and only to this extent (like the massive middle-class in America today), it was intellectual, cultured.

It was interested in knowing universal truths, truths that applied to all individuals everywhere. It discussed ideas, abstractions; not specific events nor the peculiarities of an individual.

These people were Gentiles. Their interest in universals made them suspicious of any national or racial gods. The particularism of the Jewish faith alienated them and reinforced the anti-Semitic feeling that was strong in various parts of the empire. They were 100 percent Greeks. Like all 100 percenters they were hostile to minorities.

Their devotion to Knowledge defined in abstract terms alienated them from cultus and ritual. Their pride in their social status reinforced their dislike of secret rites, of sacraments that had been smeared with blood in their ancient origins. This Knowledge was pure, clean, antiseptic.

This Knowledge developed a faith in two antithetical worlds, this world being significantly bad. The contrasts between the two worlds were sharply and dramatically stated: Good versus Bad, Upper versus Lower, Complete versus Incomplete, Truth versus Error or Deceit, Light versus Darkness, Spirit versus Flesh.

In the circles where this concept of Knowledge was popular, there was no interest in anything that we would call history. History was ignored. Narrative was the least popular form of literary composition. Where myths or legends or sacred histories existed, they were made relevant to this world view through the use of allegory, symbol, and typology. New mythologies were developed out of the old.

I have been describing this new audience without any

qualification, but the sophisticated skeptic will ask, "Where do we find such an audience in the first two Christian centuries?"

Under this attack, I immediately begin to hedge. Those centuries were vigorously mixed societies, certainly not a single stereotype. In the preceding chapter, I described the Marcionite communities as one distinguishable group within Christendom. So also in this alleged middle-class group, no one—including me—would assert that we have a solid, complete pattern everywhere.

In some places, the passion for respectability might be the single or the dominant characteristic of the middle-class group. In others, intellectual respectability coupled with an abhorrence of superstition might dominate. In still others, the passionate desire for universal truth, unhampered by particulars, was the main interest. But sometimes all these existed together. If this picture seems unreal, look at the varied passions of America's enormous middle class today, especially at the surging upper groups that have swollen its numbers. In them you'll find thousands of worshipers of Knowledge with a capital *K*; in America, the Christian minister stumbles over modern Gnostics on every suburban street corner.

This new audience was critical of Christianity. Its criticisms stung Christian leaders to vigorous defensive replies. We know these critics only from the defenders. But we know them well, for in these defenses we see a mirror image of the attackers. That image is sharply outlined and clearly detailed. And that outline and those details correspond with the description which I have given of this new audience for the gospel.

Skim through half a dozen of the earliest Christian apologists looking for the ideals and interests of the critics of Christianity, and what do you find?

1. They were not interested in a Jewish religious cult. Celsus ridicules Christians by referring to the comic poet's statement that Jupiter had sent Mercury on a mission to certain Greek states, and then asking "Do you not think that you have made the Son of God more ridiculous by sending him to the Jews?"<sup>26</sup>

2. They found a human Savior, subject to human limitations, incredible. Critics of Christianity leaped to attack the evidences of Jesus' human weakness—notably, the prayer in Gethsemane. "Why," asks Celsus, "does he mourn, and lament, and pray to escape the fear of death, expressing himself in terms like these—'O Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me'?"<sup>27</sup>

3. They were shocked by Christianity's appeal to the lowest classes. In this audience, the possession of money brought prestige; being poor did not. Manual labor was degrading. The shocking nature of Christianity's appeal to the masses has been illustrated above. Moreover, their world was a man's world. Women had a place in it only through relationship to men—as daughter, wife, or slave. The most pitiful member of that society was a widow. The inferiority of women was obvious and natural. Nor was there any sentimental worship of "the little darlings"; the most extreme thing that can be said about the attitude toward children is that they were of less importance than women.

Celsus climaxes his indictment of the Christian invitation to ignorant, unintelligent, uninstructed, or foolish persons with a reference to women and children. "By these words," he says, ". . . they plainly show that they [the Christians] desire and are able to gain over only the silly, and the mean, and the stupid, with women and children."<sup>28</sup>

4. This audience was composed of law-abiding people, champions of law and order, supporters of the *status quo*. People who turned the world upside down were not popular

with them. The idea of an executed criminal as a divine being brought forth sarcastic comment from these champions of respectability. Their respectability was concerned with good citizenship, which involved the state religion.

The charge of sedition, so frequently made against the Christians, rested not only on the ascription of the title "Lord" to Jesus but also on the refusal to apply this title or any other divine title to the emperor or to anyone else. This looked like atheism and treason to the responsible citizen. The early martyrdoms reveal the ground for this suspicion, and the apologists spend an enormous amount of time answering it.

The reluctant Roman magistrates who sentenced the first martyrs identified their faith as superstition, and superstition was anathema to this audience. These people identified superstition by its undue appeal to fear as motivation (the threat of punishment), by its novelty and extravagance, and by its teaching atheism and unworthy things about the gods. They identified superstition also as a belief in sorcery, in exorcisms, in magic of all kinds, in astrology.

The Establishment's close association of atheism, magic, new gods, and sedition is revealed in a speech of Maecenas, Augustus' favorite: "Reverence the divinity in everything and in every place, conforming to the practices of the nation, and compel others to honor the gods. Hate and punish those who distort our religion with foreign rites . . . above all because those who introduce new gods increase by so doing the taste for foreign customs. This leads to conspiracies, uprisings, and plots—things in no way suitable to a monarchy. Permit no one to be an atheist or a sorcerer. Soothsaying, indeed is necessary . . . but there should be no workers in magic at all."<sup>29</sup>

As Christianity approached people with these prejudices and devotions, what did it gain by ignoring its past? It freed

itself of a long list of handicaps—among them: (1) Jewish origin, (2) proletarian origin, (3) an executed criminal as a leader, (4) the embarrassing prominence of women in the story, (5) a Savior subject to human limitations, (6) a non-Roman Kingdom, (7) a fearful judgment, (8) exorcisms, and (9) the flavor of magic.

Granted that, on these grounds, these more cultured people were against many of the elements of the Christian faith, what were they for? In religion, for example, what attracted them?

The vogue of the mystery religions, the salvation cults with their secret sacraments of initiation, has been known for a long time. But that the effectiveness of their appeal was primarily to the masses has been equally well known. The new audience did not supply many converts to the popular mystery cults.

These people reacted positively to what might be called philosophical religion, religion developed out of the great Greek philosophies. Various developments of Platonic thought had an appeal that was essentially religious. Another influential philosophical cult was that of Stoicism. From the beginning and end of the period of our concern, two witnesses give lengthy expositions of this faith; and it is significant that the later of these two was an emperor. But even the street preacher, Epictetus, in spite of his common language, gives a philosophical tone to what is essentially a religious faith. The Stoic faith was attractive because of its intellectual element, because of its rigorous universalism, because of its abolition of fear, because of its openness, its noncultic character. Thus this new audience might choose Stoicism or some other philosophical religion.

This new audience also reacted positively to "scientific" religion. But the science that it yearned for was Knowledge, Gnosis, a kind of religious knowledge. This Knowledge cult,

these Gnostic faiths, as we find them in the second century, seek knowledge as a means of gaining immortality. By knowing one's true place in the cosmos, by knowing how man's predicament arose, knowing man's true nature, finding out one's true identity, one entered into life. These scientific religions were not interested in sin, nor in salvation from it. Repentance for sins, forgiveness of sins, punishment for sins, redemption, salvation—these are all strange words, seldom used. The Knowledge cults offered revelation, not salvation. The revelation told man what he needed to know. The revelation of a hitherto secret Knowledge reminded man of his true nature, and admitted him to the world of light.

This implied, of course, the existence of two antithetical worlds, this world being evil, the contrast to the world to which man essentially belonged. Thus this cult solved the problem of evil by claiming an unfortunate descent of man, through deceit and ignorance, from his primeval citizenship in the world of spirit and truth. The passport for return, for reunion, was the acceptance of the Knowledge brought by the Revealer.

Through recent decades the debate over the ultimate origin of Gnosticism, as this faith is called, has continued with unabated vigor. Some scholars see its development as a deviation from Christianity; others see it as non-Christian in origin but strongly influencing early Christianity.

Whatever its origin, that it had a tremendous vogue in Christian circles in the second century is beyond question. This would be clear if we had no other evidence than the extent and intensity of Christian attacks on it. In the company of orthodox critics of Gnosticism, none is better known than Irenaeus. The date of his work *Against Heresies* is itself significant. Written about A.D. 180, it attacks disciples of a disciple of Valentinus, one of the leading exponents of what came to be called a heresy. Thus Irenaeus testifies to at least three

generations of Gnostics by the year 180. He claims that the Gnostic faiths are as numerous as mushrooms, and his list of these is a long one. He begins his attack with an exposition of their "vain genealogies," usually consisting of groups of eight, ten, and twelve divine beings or hypostases, that bridge the gap between the incomprehensible ultimate being and the present world. If Irenaeus is accurate in his explanation of these Gnostic beings, he was wise to begin his attack there, for confusion has seldom been worse confounded, where triple names for one and identical names for two are not unusual.

Look, for instance, at the following outline by Irenaeus of the genealogy of these Gnostic beings in the system of Valentinus.<sup>30</sup> In ch. I of his work *Against Heresies*, he catalogs the Aeons that compose the spiritual Fullness (Pleroma) and both separate and unify the ultimate Being and human beings. They total thirty—an ogdoad, a decad, and a dodecad. The first pair beget the second; the second beget the third; and the third, the fourth. This is the ogdoad. Then the third pair beget five more pairs (the decad), and the fourth pair beget six more pairs (the dodecad).

The Ogdoad: (1) Profundity (also "Pre-Beginning" and "Pre-Father") and Idea (also "Grace" and "Silence"); (2) Intelligence (also "Unique" and "Beginning" and "Father") and Truth; (3) Word and Life; (4) Man and Church.

The Decad: (5) Deep and Mingling; (6) Non-Decaying and Union; (7) Self-Existent and Pleasure; (8) Immovable and Blending; (9) Unique and Happiness.

The Dodecad: (10) Advocate and Faith; (11) Ancestral and Hope; (12) Metrical and Love; (13) Praise and Understanding; (14) Ecclesiastical and Felicity; (15) Desired and Wisdom.

Sometimes the first pair were not counted, and Christ and the Holy Spirit were added at the bottom of the list to keep

the mystical number at thirty. Irenaeus says the Gnostics found the spiritual meaning of the number in the fact that Jesus lived thirty years before he began his ministry; as also in the hours of the laborers in the vineyard who went into the fields at the first, third, sixth, ninth, and eleventh hours (total, thirty).

But that Irenaeus was often describing his contemporaries, rather than the earlier forms of Gnosticism is demonstrated by the recent (1945) discovery of a "Gospel" which comes in all probability from the pen of Valentinus himself before the year 150. This "Gospel of Truth" is so named from its opening words: "The gospel of truth is joy to those who have received from the Father of truth the gift of knowing him by the power of the Logos, who has come from the pleroma and who is in the thought and the mind of the Father."

The Gospel of Truth is one of a number of early Christian books found in Egypt near Nag Hammadi. This Gnostic library takes its place alongside the Dead Sea Scrolls as a major contribution to our knowledge of our past. Its importance for the study of early Christian history cannot be overestimated. These documents supply information in an area of great ignorance. Sources for Christian history in Egypt before Clement of Alexandria have been scarcer than hens' teeth. These documents were copied no later than the fourth century A.D., and their sources go back into the second century—some of them (including the Gospel of Truth) long before Clement. The library is a large one, containing fifty-two or fifty-three works in thirteen volumes. Moreover, these works are exceedingly varied in nature. Some of the titles themselves stimulate interest; e.g., the Apocalypse of Adam, the Paraphrase of Shem, the Book of Thomas the Contender, the Dialogue of the Savior, the Letter of Peter to Philip, the Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles, the Teachings of Silvanus, the Interpretation of "Gnosis," and

the Gospels of Philip, Thomas, and Truth. Some of them seem to be non-Christian and/or non-Gnostic in origin but slightly adapted to the central tenets of the community. The library has further value for us because it was the library of a Christian Gnostic community. For the first time, we have access directly to Gnostic works rather than to the rebuttals of their critics. Publication has been slow. Very little is available in English.<sup>31</sup> Prof. James M. Robinson heads a company of scholars that is preparing an English translation of all these texts. Professor Robinson has recently published an overall review of the present state of study of these documents,<sup>32</sup> which provides an adequate base for the understanding of this new find.

Valentinus, who wrote the Gospel of Truth, moved from Alexandria to Rome. In Rome, he evidently became a leader of the Christian community, since he was a candidate for the episcopacy and was *twice* expelled from the church. Anybody can be expelled once, but to be expelled twice you have to be good enough to get back in. Valentinus was that good. He was enough of a leader to share with Marcion the label of "Most Dangerous Heretic."

His Gospel of Truth offered one of the major options in religion to the new audience that has been described in this chapter. What did he offer? Before interpreting his offer, let's listen to his Gospel.

The first selection (ch. 24:9 ff.) explains the revelation:

The Father opens his bosom, but his bosom is the Holy Spirit. He reveals his hidden self [his hidden self is his son], so that through the compassion of the Father the Aeons may know him, end their wearying search for the Father [and] rest themselves in him, knowing that this is rest: after he had filled what was incomplete, he did away with form. The form of it [i.e., what was incomplete] is the world, that which it served. For where there is envy and strife, there is an incompleteness. But where there is

unity, there is completeness. Since this incompleteness came about because they did not know the Father, so when they know the Father, incompleteness, from that moment on, will cease to exist. As one's ignorance disappears when he gains knowledge, [and] as darkness disappears when light appears, so also incompleteness is eliminated by completeness.

The following selection from the Gospel of Truth (ch. 18:11 f.) introduces an evil character, *Plane*, Error.

That is the gospel of him whom they seek, which he has revealed to the perfect through the mercies of the Father [as] the hidden mystery, Jesus the Christ. Through him he enlightened those who were in darkness because of forgetfulness. He enlightened them [and] gave [them] a path. And that path is the truth which he taught them. For this reason error was angry with him, [so] it persecuted him. It was distressed by him, [so] it made him powerless. He was nailed to a cross. He became a fruit of the knowledge of the Father. He did not, however, destroy them because they ate of it. He rather caused those who ate of it to be joyful because of this discovery.<sup>33</sup>

These passages are enough to establish the nature of this Gospel, even though they have been chosen because of their specific reference to Jesus. This Gospel lacks the elaborate genealogies that Irenaeus quoted. It not only has no elaborate mythology; it is doubtful whether it has any other beings than the Father, Jesus, and Man. Error itself may be no more than a human potency. This Gospel has no narrative. It never names any country, or city, or town; never any date. It never quotes directly any words of Jesus. It never tells a story about Jesus. It mentions him three times, and alludes to his crucifixion and some of his sayings. Basically it is the Gospel taken out of history and presented in terms of its meaning.

That meaning is a new meaning. Man's present situation is bad. He lives in partial ignorance, in deceit, in incomplete-

ness, in forgetfulness, involved in a cosmos of matter. Why is this? Because he has been deceived into forgetting his true nature, which is his kinship with the Father-God. The cure for this is Knowledge. The Father-God sends the Knowledge that has been lost, completes the incompleteness. The coming of the Knowledge removes the ignorance, breaks the power of Deceit, achieves the reunion, gives life for death.

Many members of this new audience welcomed this Gospel. It avoided all their prejudices. It was not Jewish nor proletarian. Its Revealer floats in a sea of abstractions with no implication of human limitation. Here there is no talk of another Kingdom than the Roman. It is an intellectual Gospel, not lowbrow in any sense. Knowledge and ideas are its focus, not cult or sacrament. Women and children aren't even mentioned. There is no appeal to fear of punishment, present or future. For these varied reasons, this new audience welcomed this Gospel.

Don't let the strange vocabulary mislead you as to the appeal of such a Gospel. It provided an escape from history, from moralism, from particularism. It promised to solve the problem of a person's identity, and it did it all in the name of science, of Knowledge. A blueprint of the ideas and attitudes of the Gospel of Truth resembles ideas and attitudes of "cultured" Americans today. The pastor who must struggle with psychological subjectivism or with some variety of existentialism may gain strength from understanding the church's rejection of the Gospel of Truth.

For the Gospel of Truth was a Christian Gospel, and its ultimate fate was determined within Christendom. Some of those who welcomed this Gospel may have been Christians initially and Gnostics later, as Valentinus was. Or they may have been converted to this type of Christianity directly from paganism. But the major current of Christianity washed this new Gospel up onto the shore and swept past it. The expe-

rience of Valentinus himself with the Roman Church is typical of the Gnostic movement within Christianity in the second century. Almost, but not quite, it took over the formulation of the Christian faith.

The reasons for its failure are complex. The very elaborateness of the later Gnostic mythologies helped to defeat it. But more basically, this Gospel failed because it ignored the past; it abandoned God in history, Jesus involved in human events. If the church were to hold on to Matthew and/or Mark and/or Luke and/or the Old Testament, it had God entrenched in human affairs. Paradoxically the bridge between those older Scriptures and this new audience was built by a radically new Gospel that won acceptance where the Gospel of Truth failed. That new Gospel which reformed the Christian past is the Gospel of John—which, if it had not been named for John, could have been called the Gospel of Truth.

### III

## THE PAST REFORMED:

## THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

IN CHAPTER II, I suggested that the fourfold Gospel canon was put together about A.D. 150, and gave Marcion credit for stimulating this through the churches' violent reaction to his New Testament with its one Gospel. But the presence of *four* Gospels in the New Testament is so strange, so unexpected, so troublesome, that the need of other motivation than just anti-Marconitism is obvious. That helper in the creation of the catholic Gospel canon was the Gospel of John, whose aid in our understanding of the origin of that four-Gospel canon is badly needed. John was so new that it was acceptable only when read with Matthew or Luke, except to the Gnostics, who welcomed it with open arms and produced the first commentary upon it. Thus, as the church took Luke and Paul from Marcion, so it took John away from the Gnostics by accretion.

In the first half of the second century the Christians had a large number of Gospels. The following list is not complete, but it is extensive. By A.D. 150, the following Gospels had been written: Mark, Matthew, Luke, John, Thomas, Truth, Philip, The Egyptians, Peter, Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 840, Papyrus Egerton 2, The Nazarenes, The Hebrews, The Ebionites, Judas, The Apocryphon of John, etc.<sup>34</sup> With such a large library of Gospels to choose from, surely the church could have found one satisfactory Gospel! The incredible

fact is that it found four. Even more incredible is the diversity of these four.

The basic reason for this confusion in the Christian Bible is that there was no such entity as "The Church" to make the selection. The selecting was done separately in metropolitan centers such as Rome and Antioch. In each of four such strongholds of Christianity, one Gospel was either produced or adopted. It became *the* Gospel of that area, and the only one. The organization of the church gained strength initially in areas that were autonomous. The theological and ecclesiastical desirability of having only one Gospel is obvious. When the local churches were struggling toward unity in doctrine and tradition, the appeal to the one Gospel would have been invaluable. Marcion found it so. And so did the local churches. They appealed to *the* Gospel that was authoritative in their area. Thus Roman Christians appealed to Mark; Antiochene Christians to Matthew; Ephesian Christians to John; and Corinthian Christians to Luke.

That this was the process which led eventually to our familiar four-Gospel canon can be demonstrated by two overwhelming negative arguments:

1. Nothing else can explain the presence of the Gospel of Mark in a collection that included the Gospel of Matthew. Professor Goodspeed claimed that "it is not difficult to find fifteen-sixteenths of Mark reproduced in Matthew."<sup>35</sup> Who that had Matthew would want Mark? Mark's inclusion must have been due to very strong support. If Mark was Rome's Gospel, we can understand how it got into the canon.

2. Nothing else can explain the inclusion of four books that differ so much from each other in content and in theology and Christology. But the struggle toward ecumenicity could produce this kind of inclusiveness, provided that this movement is understood as the unification of strong autonomous centers. Romans fought for their Gospel. The citizens

of Antioch fought for theirs. The result was a triumph for a coalition of four strong centers, each of which got its Gospel accepted, provided it was willing to accept the others.

That this is the normal process of ecumenism was made clear to me by the recent union of my own church with another. In the new united church, we accepted *both* creedal statements from the two uniting bodies, accepted them complete with their differences. Christians in the second century were not so overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit as to be remarkably different from us. They accepted four very different Gospels as part of an authoritative Scripture.

Our eyes are blind to the differences of these Gospels. Through centuries of defensive emphasis upon agreement, through the nature of our theological education, we have lost the ability to see the individual Gospel as it is. In our schools, the very textbook that catalogs their differences is called "A Harmony of the Gospels." Emphasis upon the agreements that are there has pushed the disagreements out of our view.

And, in addition to this, we have put on blinders. In our several denominations the major stress has been upon a distinctive creedal heritage. With this in front of us, we turn to the Gospels and we find them agreeing with our founding fathers. Agreement is what we look for, and agreement is what we find. Our minds are not open to the perception of difference in authoritative Christian documents.

Share my surprise at the sharpness of the contrasts as each Evangelist describes the beginning of Jesus' public ministry.

Matthew (chs. 5 to 7) sets the scene in ways that remind us of Moses receiving the law on Mt. Sinai. Jesus goes up into a mountain, gathers his disciples around him, and begins a long sermon with a set of Blessings reminiscent of the Ten Words. At the end of the sermon (ch. 7:28-29), Matthew copies Mark 1:22: "They were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the

scribes." Here, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, this refers directly to Jesus' sayings; such sayings as, "You have heard that it was said to the oldtimers, but I say unto you . . ." For Matthew, Jesus is the Great Teacher whose words have authority. His Gospel contains five great sermons from the lips of Jesus, just as the ancient Scripture contained five books of Moses.

But Mark 1:22 means something very different in Mark from what it means in Matthew. Mark sets the scene in a synagogue, and introduces it with v. 22, which is explained by the immediately following account of the exorcism of an unclean spirit. In Mark, Jesus' first sermon is a mighty act, and Mark emphasizes this in the response of the people in the synagogue. Verse 27: "And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying 'What is this? A new teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.'" For Mark, Jesus is the Great Doer, whose actions have authority. Miracles are thicker in Mark than anywhere else.

In Luke (ch. 4:16-22), Jesus' first sermon is in a synagogue at Nazareth, where he reads Isaiah's definition of *his* ministry as one of compassion and then says that that Scripture is fulfilled that day. And Luke emphasizes this element in his report of the people's response: "And all spoke well of him, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." For Luke, Jesus is the seeking Savior, who announces the acceptable year of the Lord.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus' ministry begins when he goes to a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. There, when the regular supply of wine is exhausted, he changes an enormous amount of water into wine (ch. 2:1-11). The Evangelist's comment on this is significant: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and

his disciples believed in him." In John, all that Jesus does and says makes his glory plain.

The Sermon on the Mount, an exorcism in a synagogue, a gracious sermon based on Isaiah, the transformation of gallons and gallons of water into wine—could more different inaugurations be imagined? More strikingly different are the Evangelists' interpretations of the meaning. For Matthew, the words of Jesus have power. For Mark, the deeds show his power. For Luke, his words are words of grace. For John, the action manifests his glory. Each Evangelist selected and edited to produce a Gospel whose emphasis would be relevant to his place and time. Instead of being shocked by this, we should rejoice that the canon itself exemplifies Christians making the gospel relevant.

Ideally I ought to give a comprehensive account of the diverse interests of each Evangelist. But this would require the recital of scores of facts from Matthew, scores of facts from Mark, scores of facts from Luke, and scores of facts from John. So I temper the wind to the tonsured lamb, and select one Gospel as an example, and John is the best example. John is the best example for two reasons. First, Matthew, Mark, and Luke have so much more in common with each other than with John that they have long been called the Synoptic Gospels. Second, John is the latest of the four and used at least two of the others: Mark and Luke. The manner of his use is as informative as the fact itself. Moreover, John's relative lateness faces him with a new challenge—the challenge of reaching a new and difficult audience. That challenge he accepted, and in its acceptance he reformed the gospel.

In the preceding chapter, the new audience was shown to be both "respectable" and "philosophically" or "scientifically" religious. That the respectables might choose one of a

list of intellectually respectable religions was made clear.

Gnosticism, the cult of knowing, was presented as one of these intellectual options in religion, and the Gospel of Truth was used as an illustration of a Christian attempt to reach this audience. In that effort, Valentinus and his Gospel were cast out of the mainstream of Christian history.

This chapter looks at another Gospel, which aimed at the same target and hit it, without losing the majority of Christians. That Gospel is the Gospel of John.

The indictments hurled at Christianity by its pagan critics correspond to an unbelievable degree with the silences of the Gospel of John. The Christian apologists, the defenders of the faith, do not defend the Fourth Gospel. They are continually busy defending Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul—and the Christian Old Testament. But not John!

Anyone who will read through the early Christian apologists and make a catalog of attacks and answers will see at once that the Gospel of John is almost invulnerable to these attacks. But the way that invulnerability is achieved in John is quite different from the way the Gospel of Truth became invulnerable. The Gospel of Truth withdrew from the arena. It abandoned the realm of history and moved into a world of philosophical abstraction. John, on the contrary, stays in the world of time and place and happening. In John, Jesus lives in Palestine among the Jewish people. In the Gospel of Truth, he lives in a philosophy of religion, in abstractions. John wins his invulnerability by a careful selection of material, as well as by its interpretation. His omissions, his silences, put him beyond attack. Consider this summary list:

First, we have already noted that Christianity was attacked as being a Jewish cult. But in John—

No genealogy connects Jesus with the Jewish people.  
No prediction of Jesus' birth in the Jewish Scriptures.

No tribute to John the Baptist by anyone.

No actual baptism of Jesus is recorded.

No scribes, no Sadducees, no Herods.

No use of "Gentile" as a synonym for "heathen."

Jesus is sent *not* to the Jewish people, but to the world.

Jesus' disciples are *not* sent to Jews alone, but to the world.

No parables.

No Jewish legalism in this Gospel:

Jesus calls the Jewish law "your law" (chs. 7:19 f.; 8:17; 10:34; 15:25); but contrast Nicodemus, who calls it "our law" (ch. 7:51).

No observance of Jewish ceremonial law by Jesus' parents.

No exhortation to obey the law completely, nor to do what the scribes command.

No quotation of the "Great Commandment" from the Old Testament.

No genetic relationship of Jesus to the law; rather, an antithesis: "The law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came into being through Jesus Christ" (ch. 1:17).

Moses never saw God, but Jesus came from his bosom (ch. 1:18).

No commandments in John, except Jesus' commandment that his disciples should love one another, and we are told emphatically that this is a *new* command.

Jesus did *not* entrust himself to the Jewish believers, since he knew that they would *not* abide in their faith (ch. 2:23-25).

"The Jews" are a solid and hostile block, denying the divinity of Jesus.

Jesus identified the Jews as children of the devil (ch. 8:31-44).

The festivals are identified objectively as "Jewish" (chs. 2:6, 13; 5:1; 6:4; 7:2; 11:55; 19:42).

Jesus separates himself from both Jews and Samaritans and identifies himself with the Christians who *now* worship the Father in spirit and in truth and not in either temple (ch. 4:1-42).<sup>36</sup>

The word "Savior" is used only in the climax of the visit to Samaria (ch. 4:42), where Jesus is identified as the Savior *of the world* (cosmos). This cosmic orientation of Jesus in John is new. The word "cosmos" occurs seventy-six times in John, nine in Matthew, two in Mark, three in Luke. In John, Jesus is a cosmic Savior. He was sent not to a race, nor to a nation, but to the World, to *this* world, and to all of it. How, then, could anyone think he was a Jew?

Basically, Jesus is not a Jew in the Fourth Gospel because he is a divine being, essentially above the classification of nationality. To ask this Evangelist if Jesus was a Jew is comparable to asking a Presbyterian minister today whether God is a white, male American.

The anti-Jewish nature of the Fourth Gospel has been recognized recently in a strange publication: Dagobert D. Runes's *The Gospel According to Saint John* (Philosophical Library, Inc., 1967). The sole purpose of this work is to remove from the text of this Gospel the anti-Jewish element due to sayings which the author is sure "are either erroneous or false."

Runes deals with these sayings in two ways: by omission and by substitution. He omits at least thirteen passages totaling sixty-three verses (chs. 5:15-18; 7:1b, 32-36, 45-52; 8:37-59; 11:52-57; 12:10; 18:12b-14, 19-24, 35-36; 19:4-8, 21b, 31-38). But he uses a dull ax in his mutilation of John. He fails to omit some of the strongest anti-Jewish passages; e.g., ch. 10:8: "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers." He changes the wording of at least thirty passages. Those who are hostile to Jesus are changed from "the Jews" to "the people," "the crowds," "the faithful," and—

most incredibly—to “the Romans” (chs. 7:13, 25; 18:3; 19:38; 20:19). In reverse, he changes “the crowds” to “the Jews” when they are recorded as believing on Jesus (chs. 7:31; 12:12, 19; etc.). His high point here is ch. 12:20, where “the Greeks” who would see Jesus are changed to “Jews.” The Romans are against Jesus throughout the Gospel; so Pilate’s “I find no fault in him” (ch. 18:38) becomes “I find grave fault in him.” And in ch. 19:14, Pilate says “with great laughter” unto the Jews, “Behold your King!”

The Gospel according to Runes is based on simple logic. The historical probability is that the Romans were responsible for Jesus’ death; John’s original Gospel must have been historically accurate; therefore excision and change are needed so that the message of Jesus can be “offered here without adulteration by hate and revulsion against the people of the Savior.” But “hate and revulsion” can be expressed by silence and omission. The black students’ revolt has accurately indicted the university’s curriculum with prejudice by omission. Mr. Runes would need to write a supplement to the Gospel of John to reach his goal. His addition of “with great laughter” (ch. 19:14) shows that he realized the need for addition once. But he is not a perceptive man, and he was blind to that need throughout the Gospel.

A second attack of the cultured pagans was directed to Jesus as subject to human limitations—

a. Because “He prayed in agony in Gethsemane.” But *not* in John! That scene is relocated before the Passover meal (ch. 12:27–33). Jesus echoes it as a question: “What can I say—Father, save me from this trial?” And he answers his own question negatively: “And yet it was for this very purpose that I have come to this trial.” So he substitutes the request “Father, honor your own name.” Then he explains the voice from heaven and the whole incident as occurring for the sake of the bystanders.

b. Because "He was betrayed by one of his own men, was seized, and arrested." *Not* in John. In John, Jesus literally knocks the arresting group flat with a word (ch. 18:5-6). He then directs them to let his disciples go while he submits to arrest because the divinely ordained and foreknown hour has come (chs. 6:64; 13:21 f.; 18:8 f.). John has no room for thirty pieces of silver and a kiss by Judas. The so-called betrayal was divinely ordained and controlled, and Jesus identifies himself. In fact, Jesus had previously told Judas when to arrange his arrest (ch. 13:27-30).<sup>37</sup>

c. Again, Tacitus, the Roman historian, said, "Christ, the founder of the sect, was put to death as a criminal by the procurator Pontius Pilate."<sup>38</sup> But *not* in John. Here the Roman official, Pilate, three times declared to the Jews that he found Jesus innocent (chs. 18:38; 19:4, 6); and he tried to find ways to let him go (ch. 19:1-12). Here Pilate has to execute Jesus because Jesus had predicted his own death and its manner (ch. 18:32). The power exercised by Pilate was bestowed upon him from above for this very purpose (ch. 19:11).

The crucifixion was a liability to the Christian evangel. From Paul on, through almost all Christian literature and art down to the fifth century, the defenders of the faith struggle with it. Paul explains it as the fitting climax of Jesus' voluntary humiliation, and welds it to the resurrection, which was glorious. The Synoptists report it as a fearsome, tragic thing. But in John, the cross is gilded by the divine glory that Jesus had already manifested in his earthly life. The Johannine word for crucifixion is "exaltation," a lifting up. It is the first rung on the ladder that Jesus climbs to return to his Father.

He prepares his disciples for his approaching departure by announcing that he will send them a Comforter, the Spirit of Truth. So dignified has his death become that it can be spoken of as a departure, a return to the Father. The promise of the

Spirit is given to console the disciples for Jesus' absence. And every incident is interpreted as part of the divine plan. Almost every event of the passion happens to fulfill Scripture, while there are not more than six or seven allusions to the Old Testament elsewhere in John. If John's quotations of Scripture are numerous only in the passion story, it is because that part of the career of Jesus was hardest to glorify.<sup>39</sup>

The taunting and jeering at the crucified find no place in John's account. The theme of the taunts reported by the earlier Evangelists was that Jesus claimed to be a Savior of others but could not even save himself. Such a charge presupposes that Jesus didn't want to be crucified. John has so clearly shown that Jesus came to earth for the purpose of being crucified that he is consistent when he omits this charge from the story of the death.

The superscription in three languages was undoubtedly intended to suggest the function of Jesus as world Savior. The protest of the Jews against the content of the superscription reminds the reader once more that it was the Jews, not the Romans, who were Jesus' enemies.

John removes the passion story altogether from the category of tragedy. As he interprets the death of Jesus, it was triumph and exaltation for Jesus. The concomitants of misery and tragedy are, therefore, absent from his narrative. He shows us a Jesus who, having already conquered the cosmos, now completes his mission and begins his exaltation by being crucified. He has no despairing, forsaken cry from Jesus, reproaching the Father for having abandoned him. In the earlier accounts, the result of this cry was that a bystander ran to get Jesus a drink. John knows that Jesus was not forsaken and that he could not have cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Why, then, did the bystander offer Jesus a drink? Because Jesus had called out, "I am thirsty." Not that he just happened to be thirsty—but, rather,

because Jesus, aware that the last detail of the plan was finished, said this that the Scripture might be fulfilled. Nor was there any loud cry from Jesus at the moment of his death, as Matthew and Mark report. On the contrary, Jesus, in the leading role in the drama of redemption, closes the scene with the pronouncement, "It is finished."

The interpretation of the crucifixion as triumph rather than tragedy leads John to omit such miracles as the Synoptics report to have accompanied the death of Jesus. There is in John's story no eclipse of the sun, no supernatural tearing of the temple veil, no earthquake or resurrection of the dead when Jesus dies. Such portents are signs of gloom and dread disaster; nature mourns in sympathy with the suffering and death of Jesus. In the Fourth Gospel there is no excuse for mourning; Jesus experiences crucifixion as a triumph.

A third and very serious attack charged that Christianity was seditious because it preached another Kingdom than the Roman and was loyal to another King. But in John—

a. The most amazing of all silences is the silence about the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. This phrase, which occurs 121 times in the other Gospels (Matthew, 56; Mark, 20; Luke, 45), appears only twice in John, both times in the dialogue with Nicodemus (ch. 3:3, 5.) There the message is plain. Man must be born again from above of the Spirit to enter this Kingdom of the Spirit.

b. The examination of Jesus by Pilate (ch. 18:33 ff.) clears Jesus of any charge of sedition. Jesus states plainly that his Kingdom is not a kingdom of this world.<sup>40</sup> His followers do not fight to protect him from the Jews, as the followers of a rebel would have done. He is indeed a King, but his Kingdom is the truth. Nowhere in this Gospel does he claim any other kingdom, and it is significant that Pilate refuses the demand of the Jewish high priests that the placard on the

cross should read, "He said, 'I am king of the Jews.'" Not in this Gospel has Jesus said that.

A fourth attack pointed out that Christianity appeals to the lowest classes. But not in John. Listen to these silences:

No "poor" people (only ch. 12:5-8, which is not poor).

No wicked rich.

No publican.

No sinner.

No widow.

No child.

No women fellow travelers.

No unclean demoniacs.

No repentance or forgiveness of sins, and no glorification of these actions.

No shepherds.

No fishermen.

No preaching of repentance for sins by the Baptist.

No healing of a leper.

No prostitutes.

No "good news" (gospel)

No "preaching" (*kerussein*), although it occurs thirty times in the Synoptics.

No parable.

No "hope."

No "other criminals" crucified with Jesus.

No pity.

No compassion.

This list needs little comment to make the case. But look more closely at the women in this Gospel. They either wear robes of stainless white or are stage props that carry the action to some other focus. Jesus' mother tries to direct his

actions (ch. 2:1-11). But Jesus rebukes her with the curt common phrase from which most translators shy away: "Woman, what do you have to do with me?" In ch. 2:12, Jesus does travel with a woman, but it is his mother, and his brothers are along. In the Lazarus story (ch. 11), Mary and Martha are minor characters, stupidly misunderstanding Jesus and thus advancing the dialogue and the action to its climax in the resurrection of Lazarus. But they don't travel with Jesus; they are at home, and entertain him there with their brother Lazarus as the host at the table. At the cross (ch. 19:25), the mother of Jesus and her sister Mary stand nearby with Mary of Magdala, whose demonized background is silently passed over. The natural implication of the incident in John is that she was a close friend of Jesus' mother. Mary of Magdala in the resurrection stories is subordinated to the male disciples.

But the most striking instance of the translation of an event from the moral (or immoral) context to the Christological is the woman of Samaria. Here, if anywhere in John, we expect a confession of sins and their forgiveness. But when Jesus tells the woman that she is an adulteress, she is not "convicted of sin"—she is convinced first that he is a prophet, and then, because of his superhuman knowledge, that he may be the Messiah. She reports her experience to the men in town, who ask Jesus to stay with them two days, which he does. Then the men achieve a truly Christian faith from their direct contact with Jesus, and downgrade the woman's role by saying: "It is no longer because of *your* statement that we believe, for we have heard him ourselves, and we know that he is really the Savior of the world" (ch. 4:42). But here there is no reaction to the woman's sins; they are not even identified as sins. The reaction that counts here (as everywhere in John) is the reaction to Jesus' revela-

tion of what he is. In this emphasis, in John's Gospel, even the woman of Samaria loses her scarlet letter.

Actually, sin has only one meaning in John, and that meaning has nothing to do with morality. Look carefully at the following quotations from this Gospel. They include all the references to sin: the verb "to sin," the noun "sin," the noun "sinner."

*hamartia, "sin"*

- 1:29 John the Baptist's identification of Jesus: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."
- 8:21 Jesus says to the Jews: "I go away, and you will seek me and die in your sin."
- 8:24 Jesus says to the Jews: "I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he."
- 8:34 Jesus says to the Jews: "Amen, Amen, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin."
- 8:46 Jesus says to the Jews: "Which of you convicts me of sin?"
- 9:34 The Jews say to the blind man: "You were born in utter sin."
- 9:41 Jesus says to the Pharisees: "If you were blind, you would be guilty of no sin, but as it is, you say 'We can see'; so your sin continues."
- 15:22 Jesus says about the Jews: "If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have sin; but now they have no excuse for their sin."
- 15:24 Jesus says about the Jews: "If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin."
- 16:8 Jesus says to his disciples. "And when he [the Counselor] comes, he will convict the world of sin."

- 16:9 “. . . of sin, because they do not believe in me.”  
 19:11 Jesus says to Pilate: “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore he who delivered me to you has the greater sin.”  
 20:22–23 Jesus says to the disciples: “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

*hamartema*, “sin,” does not occur.

*hamartano*, “to sin”

- 5:14 Jesus says to the paralytic: “Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you.”  
 9:2 The disciples ask about the blind man: “Who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?”  
 9:3 Jesus answered: “Neither this man sinned, nor his parents.”

*hamartolos*, “sinner”

- 9:16 Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?”  
 9:24 The Pharisees say to the blind man: “We know that this man [Jesus] is a sinner.”  
 9:25 He answered, “Whether he is a sinner, I do not know.”  
 9:31 The blind man says: “We know that God does not listen to sinners.”

The first thing that strikes the eye here is the clustering of “sin” in the eighth and ninth chapters. Of the twenty occurrences, twelve appear in these two chapters of bitter disputes with the Jews. Even more striking is the definition of sin and the identification of the sinners. Sin, according to John, is refusal to believe in Jesus; and the chief sinners are the Jews. Six times Jesus identifies the Jews as sinners (chs. 8:21, 24, 34; 9:41; 15:22, 24), because they do not believe

in him. The Counselor will convict the world of sin because of its unbelief.

Only four of the twenty passages (chs. 1:29; 5:14; 19:11; 20:22–23) fall outside the Johannine doctrine of sin as unbelief in Jesus. Two of them are uncaught survivals: (ch. 5:14, contradicted by ch. 9:2–3, and ch. 19:11; see Matt, 27:4, contradicted by the voluntary nature of Jesus' death in John). How could the Lamb of God take away the Johannine sin (ch. 1:29)? Equally alien to this Gospel is the apostolic forgiveness of sins in ch. 20:22–23. In John there is only one sin—not to believe in Jesus.

Whereas the sinners in the earlier Gospels are prostitutes, tax collectors, breakers of God's laws, and immoral people, in John that word "sinner" is applied only to Jesus (ch. 9:16, 24, 25, 31)—applied falsely, of course, by the Jews, who are always wrong.

And, finally, we have noted among the cultured attacks on Christianity the claim that Christianity is a new superstition, mixed with magic, and using threats of punishment to create fear. But *not* in John.

a. In John, Christianity is not "new." (1) Moses, a very ancient figure, wrote about Jesus. (2) Jesus himself existed before Abraham was (ch. 8:58). (3) In the beginning, Jesus was God's Word, and his agent in creation. Thus here, as elsewhere, John avoids an indictment through the nature of his Christology.

b. Again, in John, the very suspicion of magic has evaporated. You listen in vain for an exorcism. Here there are no unclean demoniacs; in fact, no demons at all. The devil has faded out of the picture almost completely. Jesus is not tempted by the devil. Satan plays a role in the betrayal—he enters into Judas, but Judas waits for Jesus' word before he acts. The vital force of evil in this Gospel is the Archon (Ruler) of This World. After the voice from heaven, Jesus

says: "Now is the judgment of this world; now the Archon of This World will be cast out" (ch. 12:31). Again Jesus says: "I shall not talk much more with you, for the Archon of the World is coming. He has no power over me; but he is coming so that the World may know that I love the Father and am doing what he has commanded me to do." (Ch. 14:30-31.) In ch. 16, Jesus explains that he has to return to the Father so that the Comforter may come, who will rebuke the world, finally, about judgment "because the Archon of This World has been condemned." Thus, the evil Ruler of This World has been judged through the career of Jesus, and the Spirit will make this known. But this is cosmic drama, not in any sense magic.

Naturally, there are no astrologers in this Gospel—no magi from the East.

In John there is no emphasis on miracles, on mighty works as such. The contrast with Mark is striking, both in the density of miracles and the function they serve in the Gospel story.

The few miracles in John are symbolic signs of the meaning of Jesus: (1) The 120 to 180 gallons of wine, produced late in the feast, signify the giving of the Spirit without measure. (2) The healing of the royal official's son paradoxically exalts the faith of those who believe without signs and marvels. (3) Healing the paralytic on the Sabbath shows that the Father works continuously, as the Son also does. (4) The miraculous feeding means that Jesus is the Bread that has come down from heaven, and that it is the Spirit that gives life; flesh is of no use at all (ch. 6:63). (5) The healing of the blind man shows that "I [Jesus] am the Light of the World." (6) The resurrection of Lazarus shows that "I myself [Jesus] am the Resurrection and the Life." (7) The garrison knocked over backward indicates that Jesus laid down his life voluntarily. Moreover, these signs are submerged in long dis-

courses, which indicates their proportionate place in the revelation. These signs of divinity can hardly be suspected of being magician's tricks.

c. The more cultured the pagan, the more he disliked superstitious appeals to fear. But in John the future is happy, because judgment is now. Granted that there are vestiges of the earlier Christian belief in future judgment, they are very limited in number (only chs. 5:28-29; 12:48) and in each case follow a strong statement of the present tense of judgment. The one who believes in Jesus will not be judged; the one who disbelieves has already been judged (ch. 3:18 ff.). The judgment is that men turned away from the Light that came into the world. The hour of judgment that was coming, now is—"Amen, Amen, I say to you that the one who hears my word and believes in the one who sent me has eternal life and will not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life" (ch. 5:24). Statements of this kind, added to the exposition of the Lazarus story, make a future resurrection unnecessary, for eternal life is given now. The one who believes in Jesus will never die (ch. 11:23-26); the one who keeps his word will never see death at all (ch. 8:51). John's own belief was undoubtedly immortality rather than resurrection, and the cultured pagan would find no superstition here.<sup>41</sup> In this Gospel, the Second Coming is promise, not threat—the Comforter will come. In fact, he does come in a placid scene at the end of the story (ch. 20:22-23).

The correspondence between the pagan indictments of Christianity and the silences of John are too numerous to be accidental. We have seen that two explanations are possible. Either John wrote in awareness of these criticisms so as to defend the gospel, or John writes out of attitudes shared with these respectable pagans. The second of these alternatives is made more plausible when one looks at John's additions to

the first three Gospels. In events, there is little that is new; in the exposition of the meaning of Jesus and the gospel, a great deal—even on the lips of Jesus himself.

The new additions to the narrative are quite brief: additional visits to Jerusalem, Jesus' success in Samaria, the wedding feast at Cana, the sick man *at Bethesda*, the man *born* blind, Lazarus, the foot washing, and Jesus' demonstration of power at the arrest. This is all, except for details in the passion narrative.

But in the definition of the meaning of Jesus and of the gospel, new concepts and doctrines pervade the entire Gospel. Here there is no moralism, no collection of sayings of the Lord comparable to the Sermon on the Mount. A new Christian code could not be constructed from this book. Nor is there any trace of a sacramental salvation, such as we find in Paul and to some degree in the first three Gospels. If Christians possessed only this Gospel, they would not know that they were supposed to die with Jesus in baptism, nor that Jesus had himself instituted the sacred meal of the church. They would know that Jesus himself baptized no one and commanded no baptism. To be born of the Spirit gave life, and the only ritual established by Jesus was the foot washing.

These absences spring from the possession of Christological concepts that are very close to those of the group called Gnostics. If ritual is played down in this Gospel—as it is—it is because “knowing” is played up. The verb “to know” occurs 133 times in this Gospel, and eternal life is defined as knowing God and Jesus, whom God sent. “Believing” is a strong second to “knowing”; it occurs 95 times in John. But when you ask, Believe what? the answer is that you should believe what you know: that God sent Jesus to manifest his glory.

Thus the basic meaning of Jesus is that he is a revealer of God. This revelation is taken very seriously, for he reveals a previously unknown God (chs. 1:17-18; 7:28; 8:19, 55; 10:8). In this, John stands close to Marcion, and close to many Gnostics.

The revelation in Jesus is stated in Gnostic terms of contrast made familiar to us by the Gospel of Truth and by the Christian attackers of Gnosticism. Jesus is Light versus Darkness. He embodies the contrast between From Above and From Below. John the Baptist was From Below; so were the Jews. He contrasts Knowing and Ignorance. He sets Eternal Life over against Death; and Spiritual Worship against ceremonies in temples. His kingdom is the kingdom of Truth versus *Plane* (Error), for which John uses Lie. The hostile Jews are the children of a devil who has nothing to do with the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he tells a lie he speaks in his true character, for he is a liar and the father of them (ch. 8:44). Add the constant references to the cosmic mission of Jesus, and you have a large part of the Gnostic vocabulary present here.

One paragraph from the Gospel of Truth (ch. 30:32 ff.) is enough to illustrate this similarity.<sup>42</sup> I present its sentences with obvious parallels drawn from the Gospel of John.

THE GOSPEL OF TRUTH

THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

He appeared, informing them of the Father, the illimitable one.

1:18 No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

He inspired them with that which is in the mind, while doing his will.

6:38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me.

Many received the light and turned towards him. But material men were alien to him and did not discern his appearance nor recognize him.

For he came in the likeness of flesh and nothing blocked his way because it was incorruptible and unrestrainable.

Moreover, while saying new things, speaking about what is in the heart of the Father, he proclaimed the faultless word.

Light spoke through his mouth, and his voice brought forth life.

He gave them thought and understanding and mercy and salvation and the Spirit of strength derived from the limitlessness of the Father and sweetness.

3:19-21 And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does what is true come to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.

1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.  
19:11 Jesus answered [Pilate], "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above."

13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

9:5 I am the light of the world.

11:25 "I am the resurrection and the life."

14:16-17 And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of truth.

He caused punishments and scourgings to cease, for it was they which caused many in need of mercy to stray from him in error and in chains—and he mightily destroyed them and derided them with knowledge.

He became a path for those who went astray and knowledge for those who were ignorant, a discovery for those who sought, and a support for those who tremble, a purity for those who were defiled.

He is the shepherd who left behind the ninety-nine sheep which had not strayed and went in search of that one which was lost.

The number of parallels in vocabulary and theological idea which can be found for less than a page of the Gospel of Truth is impressive.

John's pro-Gnostic omissions include this world of physical nature. A study of Christian art in the catacombs reveals a positive appropriation of physical nature by Christians. Pictures of seasons, winds, ocean, sun, moon, etc., adorn these walls. In this, the artists follow the literary tradition of the first three Gospels, and of I Clement, Aristides, and others.

“But John has nothing that resembles either this argument from the cosmos to the creator or the intuition of the Synoptic Jesus that God who clothed the lilies in beauty cares for

3:17 For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

14:4-6 “And you know the way where I am going.” Thomas said to him, “Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

10:14 I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me.

man. There are in the Fourth Gospel no flowers, no birds, no animals, except the beast of burden that carries Jesus to Jerusalem for the triumphal entry. Fields of wheat appear as a figure of rhetoric, and a seed is chosen (as with Paul) as a sign of the necessity of sacrificial death; but appreciative treatment of nature is absent. There is a vine in John, but it, too, is so much more than a vine that it brings no breath from the vineyard to the pages of the Gospel. Its symbolism is as unnatural and rigorous as that of the tree of the cross in the Middle Ages. It carries a somewhat different message from the eschatology of the vine in Clement and the catacombs."<sup>43</sup>

For John, this world is a lower world of darkness opposed to the upper world of light. This world rejected Jesus; its ruler was hostile to Jesus. Thus the world was bound to hate the Christians, who are not of this world, as Jesus was not (chs. 15:18 f.; 17:14 ff.).

It is no wonder that the Gnostics in the second century welcomed John with open arms. The first commentary on this Gospel was written by a Gnostic. On the other hand, most Christian churches were slow to accept John. Irenaeus certainly felt that he had to put up a stiff argument for the Fourth Gospel. It may well be that one of the motives for the creation of a four-Gospel canon was to make John acceptable to the churches.

Whatever its intention was, the publication and canonization of The Gospel in four books—According to Matthew, According to Mark, According to Luke, and According to John—saved the Gospel of John for the church. Reading the four together blurs and blots the distinctive elements of John. Most Christian ministers read the other Gospels between John's lines and are unaware of how relevant his Gospel was to the social group for which it was written.

That group was self-consciously cultured, composed of loyal citizens of the Roman Empire with an anti-Semitic bias.

They were religious people, interested in redemption from this world and the attainment of immortality. They rejected crude myths and rites and extravagant ecstasy, and turned their eyes toward Knowledge, Life, Light, and Truth. By contemplating a divine revelation, they were redeemed. They stood between cult and philosophy, but closer to the chapel than to the classroom—more interested in spiritual baptism than in wearing the philosopher's beard.

John wrote his Gospel primarily for this group, and in doing it he combined old and new. He conserved the familiar framework and outline of the Gospel narrative and repeats much that is familiar to us from the first three Gospels. Thus—

An account of John the Baptist begins the Gospel.

The first ministry is in Galilee.

Jesus goes up to Jerusalem at Passover.

Jesus cleanses the Temple.

The imprisonment of the Baptist is mentioned.

Jesus heals the son of the official at Capernaum.

Jesus breaks the Sabbath by healing.

Jesus feeds the five thousand.

Jesus walks on the sea.

Joseph and Mary are referred to as Jesus' parents.

Jesus teaches in synagogues.

Galilee is his home.

He is not fifty years old.

He heals a blind man.

The Old Testament has divine authority, as foretelling Jesus.

The triumphal entry on Palm Sunday.

He gives his disciples an example of humility.

The great commandment is Love.

Judas betrays him in the Garden.

Jesus is known as "Jesus of Nazareth."

He is sent to Caiaphas and then to Pilate for trial.

Pilate has him beaten.

The crown of thorns, and purple robe, and mockery.

The superscription on the cross.

The women at the cross.

The "vinegar" offered.

The tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

Mary Magdalene and the stone rolled away.

Jesus appears to Mary.

Jesus appears to the disciples and shows his wounds.

The miraculous catch of fish.

This is an extensive use of old, traditional material; and it may well be that even in the briefer list of "new" material, John may be using equally old stuff.

But he allegorized the meaning of everything he touched into a new pattern—a pattern that was vital and significant to the members of his own group. No one has ever rewritten the gospel more boldly or more efficiently. He laid a strong hand upon the church's stories about its Lord and reshaped them closer to the needs of his own group.

But this is what Marcion tried to do. That is what Valentinus attempted in the Gospel of Truth. How is John different? Why did the church reject them and accept him?

John consciously repudiates Gnosticism's basic theology. Although he uses the verb "to know" 133 times, he never uses the noun "knowledge" (*gnosis*). Although he uses the verb "to believe" 95 times, he never uses the noun "belief" or "faith" (*pistis*). This cannot be the result of chance. It must be the result of conscious avoidance of the key words of Gnosticism as they existed in John's milieu.

Moreover, what is to be "known" in John is quite different. In Gnosticism, the revealed knowledge looked inward—the individual found his identity; he recognized *his* essential nature. But in John, the revealed knowledge is external—it

is knowledge of Jesus and of the Father who sent him. This Jesus became flesh and dwelt among us; he existed in time and place, and John presents him as a revelation of God inside human history. John's Gospel is a narrative with teaching; it is not a meditation.

John not only accepted this cosmos; his Lord was used by God in its creation. In John, there is no revulsion against the flesh, against the physical world. When he contrasts flesh and spirit, he does it to illuminate a higher from a lower meaning—not to set the ground for a rigid asceticism, as Marcion did. Nor on this ground could he agree with the Gospel of Truth that there were three orders of men: the physical (*hylikoi*), who were doomed; the natural (*psychikoi*), who could be saved; and the spiritual (*pneumatikoi*), who were foreordained for salvation.

John was a much more radical rewrite man than Marcion was, but he held on to Biblical doctrines that Marcion abandoned. His major difference from Valentinus was that he wrote a narrative about Jesus in history. He was convinced that it was of the greatest importance to the church to know the story and word and meaning from the preresurrection career of Jesus. Therefore he adopted Mark's major outline as the skeleton of his creation. The features may look different, but the essential Biblical concept of revelation is there—God makes himself known through events within human history. Thus John's Gospel is both old and new.

## IV

### THE PAST DIVIDED:

### THREE PRIMITIVE GOSPELS

**I**N THIS CHAPTER we move back once more in time to the period before any one of our four canonical Gospels existed as a document. This first generation of Christians after the cross reaches from A.D. 30-35 all the way up to A.D. 70-75.

In this period all Christians were aware of their newness—however much it might differ in degree. Even in Palestine and Syria, where Jewish-Christian communities existed—even when “Jewish” was the ruling adjective—the members of those Jewish sects knew that they were a *new* Jewish sect.

Outside, in the Gentile world, Christians accepted Judaism as preface or prediction, but those who said, “Jesus is Lord,” were vividly aware of uniqueness. Echoes of this are scattered through our Scriptures. The concept of a “new covenant,” a “new testament,” appears in Paul (I Cor. 11:25; II Cor. 3:6), as does the concept of a new creature; i.e., the Christian (II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15). The Epistle to the Hebrews draws the logical inference from a “new” covenant: “Now when he [God], speaking through Jer. 31:31, speaks of a new covenant, he is treating the first one as obsolete” (Heb. 8:13). So also, the “new man” of Ephesians (chs. 2:15; 4:24) witnesses to the general awareness of newness.

The major problem for that generation of Christians lay

in the definition of the newness—or, rather, in the choice to be made among various definitions. Today a large company of scholars, among them Professor Koester, insist that early Christianity is a “religious movement which is syncretistic in appearance and conspicuously marked by diversification from the very beginning.”<sup>44</sup> This diversification is not an adjustment to external forces, or a matter of decay at the periphery of the movement. It is inside the movement in the first generation after the cross. Well down into the second century, the term “heresy” lacks its contemporary meaning. Heresy at the beginning was division, and the divisions are obvious as soon as one looks at the sources.

But a generation ago when we looked at the sources, Paul dominated our view of the origins of Christianity. The textbook introductions to New Testament literature pointed out that Paul’s letters were earlier than our canonical Gospels. They were even earlier than Mark, the earliest of the Gospels in our canon. Historical study of the New Testament, while it increased skepticism as to the dependability of the Gospel accounts, paradoxically increased confidence in Paul as *the* witness for the beginnings of the Christian faith.

A potential rival to Paul in the claim for primitive witness was the hypothetical document usually referred to as Q. This Sayings Collection used by both Matthew and Luke was generally believed to be earlier than Mark, or even Paul. But it had a shadowy character. It was not a Gospel like Mark or Matthew. It did not proclaim a faith, as Paul did. To most of us who studied the New Testament then, it took a seat in the back row as an interesting scholarly hypothesis. When we looked for evidence of Christian beginnings, we did not look at Q; we looked at Paul.

Paul’s dominance of our thinking in this area was supported by his importance in Reformation theology—of which

we were children. The trends in theology thirty years ago further supported Paul's importance. He loomed so large—he was such a massive figure—that we could not see past him or over him to any other witness to the beginning of what might be called Christianity.

Thus the study of Paul's Gospel of the Resurrection led naturally to the affirmation that Christianity began with the resurrection faith. The most skeptical of historians affirmed the reality of the "resurrection experiences" of the disciples. Moreover, the affirmation was common that exactly these experiences were the essential element in the origin and early spread of Christianity.

But Paul's Gospel was neither the first, nor the only, nor the dominant Gospel in the first generation after the cross. Before him and around him there were other definitions of the Gospel. If we had nothing but his own letters, we could demonstrate this. His compulsion to argue his equality with those who were apostles before him; his struggles with "Judaizers" inside the Christian movement, even in his own churches; his tacit acceptance of the followers of Judaizing James, whom he does *not* attack for not eating with Gentiles, although it was the pressure of James's followers that made Peter withdraw from the Gentile table; and finally, the four-fold factions at Corinth—followers identified as "of Paul, of Apollos, of Cephas, of Christ."

Thus Paul himself testifies to the diverse influence of pre-Paul apostles. He clearly exempts Judaizing Christians in Palestine (and Syria?) from the obligation to join the Pauline Christians in the rejection of the law. Peter, James, and John agree, says Paul, that it is all right for him to be an apostle to the Gentiles as they are to the Jews. But these Jewish Christians should not insist that Gentile Christians have to obey the law.

The implications are clear. In Palestine, at the beginning,

all Christians were Jews. They regarded themselves as existing inside Judaism.<sup>45</sup>

Thus, today we can see over and around Paul not only a "Judaizing" gospel, but also a large and varied number of "Gospels" that deserve the adjective "primitive" in the sense that they are earlier than our four canonical Gospels. We are confronted today with a diversity of such Gospels, a diversity that sets the question of Christian origins into a different context.

Walter Bauer's study of orthodoxy and heresy (1934) began a new epoch in church history. It did more than establish "heretical" forms of Christianity as relatively early competitors with orthodoxy.<sup>46</sup> It established some of these forms as the earliest Christianity known in specific areas of the ancient world. Bauer's organization of his material was basically geographical. He looked at Palestine, Egypt, Macedonia and Crete, Asia Minor, Edessa, and Rome. This same geographical organization has been followed recently in Helmut Koester's review and development of Bauer's work.<sup>47</sup>

From the diverse primitive Gospels, I have selected three, including Paul's: (1) the Gospel of the Resurrection, (2) the Gospel of Mighty Deeds, and (3) a Sayings Gospel.

1. Today when we look at Paul himself, we still find, of course, his own Gospel. This was a preached gospel—not a book—and it identified the newness of the Christian faith in the resurrection of Jesus as "the beginning, the first-born from the dead" (Col. 1:18). In an expedient shorthand, Paul's Gospel can be called the Gospel of the Resurrection. In it, crucifixion and resurrection are one inseparable event, whose religious significance is shown by the resurrection. "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according

to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom. 1:1-4.)

This Gospel had a tremendous vogue in that first generation. Its concentration upon the risen Christ dazzled the eyes of the believer so that he could hardly see the earthly life of his Lord's humiliation. Paul did not agree with the Gnostics or Marcion on the unreality of the earthly life of Jesus. The happiest phrase to describe his attitude toward it is to say that the career of the risen Jesus was rooted in his earthly career. Roots grow underground; they are not visible unless special efforts are made to dig them up. Paul made no such special efforts.

Moreover, it is well known that the vitality and dynamism of Paul's Gospel made it a prolific source of Christian sects in the second century. We have noted Marcion's adoption of Paul as *the* apostle, but we have passed over others equally radical, including some of the Gnostics and Montanus, the leader of an enthusiastic, spiritistic Christian sect.

2. Another Gospel that was popular in this period was the Gospel of Mighty Deeds. It existed before Mark in some form, either oral or—more probably—written, and became one of his two main literary sources—the other being the Passion Narrative. In this Gospel, emphasis was put upon the charismatic powers exercised by Jesus in his earthly career. These powers were a divine gift, and Jesus acted as a divine man.

Note the density of miracles in Mark. If we compare the four Gospels in their content up to the approach to Jerusalem that inaugurates the Holy Week, we find that Mark has 23 miracles on 18 pages,<sup>48</sup> almost one and a half per page. Matthew, who swallowed Mark, has 33 on 31 pages. Luke's average is lower, with 32 on 38 pages, a little less than one a page. John has 11 on 22 pages (using a most inclusive

definition of miracle), or only half a miracle per page. Thus, Mark and John stand at the opposite ends on this scale.

That the first verse of the first chapter of Mark speaks against alternative definitions of the gospel is unmistakable. Those who claimed that the Christian gospel began with the resurrection are here forcibly contradicted. Mark's source brings the gospel down out of the clouds and ties it to earth, to human history. "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ" was John the Baptist's appearance in the desert.

Listen to Mark's account of the first day of Jesus' public ministry and note the emphases: "And they went into Capernaum; and immediately on the sabbath he entered the synagogue and taught. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes. For example, there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' And the unclean spirit, convulsing him and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. And they were all amazed, so that they questioned among themselves, saying, 'What is this? A *new* teaching! With authority he commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.'" (Mark 1:21-27.)

In Matthew also (ch. 7:28-29), we are told "the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes." But this is the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and in it, in Matthew, the authority inheres in the nature of the sayings. But in Mark, the authority is illustrated in the exorcism, in the Mighty Deed.

In Mark's formulation of the Gospel, the earthly Jesus is not empty of divine attributes, as he was in the Pauline Gospel. Here he possesses a divine *exousia*, which is authority,

but authority under the aspect of power. Thus the Gospel of the Divine Man is that he has divine authority, a gift from the Divine Being. He uses these special powers in a variety of ways. He exorcises demons, demonstrating his authority over them. He forgives sins, clearly showing a divine authority. He has authority over the law, and even over the Sabbath Day. He is a man of power, and the good news is that God anointed him with this power in his earthly life for the blessing of God's own people.<sup>49</sup>

It has been said that Mark is the Gospel of Power, as John is the Gospel of Glory. But more significantly for our study, Mark interprets Jesus in terms of the old and John in terms of the new. This Gospel of the Divine Man comes out of the conflict of two traditions. The first is Judaism with its Scripture, religious customs, religious leaders, and messianic hope—both Davidic and apocalyptic. The second is the Christian traditions about Jesus as the Divine Man—given the Spirit of God, a carpenter, teacher, doer of mighty deeds, maker of disciples from the “poor,” from sinners, from women and children, arrested, condemned, and executed; yet this same Jesus was the Messiah who came with power and announced that the Kingdom of God would be established soon, with power.

This messianic faith dominates the composition, though Judaism sets the framework and the Divine Man tradition supplies the data. But the more the power of Jesus is emphasized in this Gospel, the more important it is to explain his rejection. Mark's explanation of the rejection is conservative in this sense—he obviously felt that Jesus' divergence from Scripture and tradition had to be recognized and dealt with and that Jesus' stature as religious leader in Judaism was important. In other words, his explanation of Jesus had to be dealt with within Judaism. He places Jesus on a Jewish stage, and except for Pilate, all the actors are Jews, the stage

settings are Jewish, the furniture is Jewish, but the plot of the play is Christian.

A study of the sayings of Jesus in Mark suggests that Mark's source is defending Christian faith in the earthly career of Jesus against the attacks of Jews, or of Christians who accepted the Jewish Bible and were still in contact with the living scribal interpretation of the Scripture in contemporary application. This Gospel's rejection of the claim made by Paul that only the resurrection demonstrated that Jesus was God's Messiah forced a serious treatment of the details of Jesus' relationships with his own people.

If this observation is sound, Mark is defending the gospel's right flank as John defends its left flank. Mark defends Jesus with reference to a Biblical and Jewish tradition. John defends him with reference to important currents in contemporary Gentile culture. A rapid summary of the sayings that accompany the deeds in Mark supports this generalization.

a. None of the sayings of Jesus describes God.

b. All of them explain Jesus' career, which is superficially anti-Biblical-Messiah, either by specific defense or by a new definition of his Messiahship as insignificant in appearance, limited in appeal to the poor masses.

c. Defenses of specifics of Jesus' career:

2:17 Defense of eating habits

2:19-22 Defense of not fasting

2:25-28 Defense of Sabbath-breaking, with an appeal to a specific Scripture passage, I Sam. 21:1-6

3:23-29 Defense of exorcisms

3:32-35 Defense of leaving family's control

6:4 Defense of rejection in his own region

7:6-23 Defense of eating with defiled hands, introduced by attack on scribal traditions

9:37; 10:15 Defense of receiving childlike persons (non-theologians) as disciples

10:17-31 Defense of rejection by rich and acceptance by poor

12:35-37 Defense of non-Davidic messiahship

12:38-40 Beware of scribes

12:41-44 The poor give more than the rich

d. Defense of Jesus' Messiahship as one limited in appeal:

4:1-34 Parable of sower

Parable of lamp

Parable of measure

Parable of seed growing of itself

Parable of mustard seed

8:27-38 Who am I? Tell no one! Passion predicted.

Discipleship of self-denial

9:30-32 Passion predicted

9:35 First will be last, etc.

9:43-50 Discipleship of self-denial, hand, foot, eye. Salt

10:32-34 Passion predicted

10:35-45 Discipleship of self-denial—James and John

12:1-11 Parable of the vineyard; rejection of Jesus

e. Jesus was better than the best leaders of the various Jewish parties. He defeated them on their own ground:

11:27-33 Chief priests, scribes, and elders—By what authority?

12:12-17 Pharisees and Herodians—Pay tribute?

12:18-27 Sadducees—the seven-times widow in the resurrection

12:28-34 Scribes—First commandment?

f. Chapter 13 changes the Jewish apocalyptic pattern by inserting the trials of disciples, promising rewards to *them*, and insisting that no one knows the exact day and hour. Yet the end comes soon, in this generation. Thus the messiahship of rejection and discipleship of suffering will be justified.

In all these sayings, as in the Mighty Deeds, the old traditions of Judaism are mixed with the new that was the Divine

Man, Jesus. The result is a gospel quite distinct from the Pauline gospel of the resurrection.

3. A third "gospel" that was popular in this generation was the words of Jesus. The traditional solutions of the Synoptic problem, which identified a sayings source (Q) as a second literary source common to Matthew and Luke, never quite clinched the case for a Christian document composed only of the sayings of Jesus. But the existence in the period before our canonical Gospels of such a source is confirmed by the discovery of the Gospel of Thomas near Nag Hammadi, from the library that contained the Gospel of Truth and many other documents.

This copy was written in Coptic about the fourth century A.D., but the document itself, in a form close to its present content, goes back to a Greek source in the first half of the second century. But most important for us is the scholarly judgment that almost all its content is derived from an early stage of the sayings tradition that was independent of our Gospels and of Q.<sup>50</sup>

That a collection of sayings could be a Gospel was demonstrated for me by Professor Koester's brilliant discussion of the theology of the Gospel of Thomas. He argues that although the sayings are in many cases sayings of the earthly Jesus, they are presented here as sayings of Jesus "the Living One." Thus, a transition is made from earthly to risen Lord. Moreover, the authority of the sayings resides in their own potency—not in the fact that Jesus said them. They are not set in any context; they are not applied to any specific historical situation.

Koester finds five types of sayings in Thomas: (a) Kingdom or apocalyptic sayings (b) parables, (c) "I am" or "I" sayings, (d) proverbial or wisdom sayings, and (e) rules for the community.

a. Koester's first type, *Kingdom or apocalyptic sayings*,

carries the revelation of a Kingdom. But it is not a future Kingdom. On the contrary, it is distinct in every way from "the Little Apocalypse" in Mark, ch. 13, and also from the future coming of the Son of Man as it appears in Luke. The Kingdom in the Gospel of Thomas is present and hidden—a transformation from a primitive, eschatological Kingdom to a Kingdom congenial to Gnostic thinking.

The nature of the teaching of the Gospel of Thomas about the Kingdom can be shown through its answers to three questions: (1) When will the Kingdom come? (2) Where is the Kingdom? and (3) Who will find it?

(1) When will the Kingdom come? Out of seventeen Kingdom sayings only two raise this question: 57 and 113. And they raise it to rule it out.

"113. His disciples said to him: On what day does the Kingdom come? [Jesus said:] It does not come when one expects (it). They will not say, Lo, here! or Lo, there! But the kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it."<sup>51</sup>

Note that the Kingdom is present and hidden.

Saying 57 is the parable of the tares, a parable whose reference to the harvest is part of the authentic tradition which was tolerated here because of the practical application of the parable to a world of mixed good and evil—a doctrine congenial to Gnostics.

(2) Where is the Kingdom? The Kingdom is present and hidden, unperceived. Eight of the seventeen Kingdom sayings stress these aspects.

"3. Jesus said: If those who lead you say to you, Lo, the kingdom is in heaven, then the birds of heaven will precede you; if they say to you, It is in the sea, then the fish will precede you. But the kingdom is within you and outside you. When you know yourselves, then you will be known; and you will know that you are the sons of the living Father.

But if you do not know yourselves, then you are in poverty, and you are poverty.”

“82. Jesus said: He who is near me is near the fire, and he who is far from me is far from the kingdom.”

The other six sayings that stress the hiddenness of the Kingdom are parables: 20, the mustard seed; 76, the pearl; 96, the leaven; 97, the woman carrying the jar; 107, the lost sheep; 109, the buried treasure. The very titles of these parables make the answer clear. Several of them are quoted in the discussion of parables.

(3) Who will find the Kingdom? This question is stated in the language of Thomas, a language that emphasizes the present, hidden nature of the Kingdom. Of the seventeen Kingdom sayings, seven answer this question.

“22. Jesus saw children that were being suckled. He said to his disciples: These children being suckled are like those who enter the kingdom. They said to him, If we are children, shall we enter the kingdom? Jesus said to them: When you make the two one, and make the inside like the outside, and the outside like the inside, and the upper side like the under side, and when you make the male and the female into a single one, so that the male will not be male and the female will [not] be female; when you make eyes in place of an eye, and a hand in place of a hand, and a foot in place of a foot, an image in place of an image, then you shall enter [the kingdom].”

The growth of the tradition is evident here. It began with an authentic saying of Jesus. See Matt. 18:3: “Amen, I say to you, unless you turn and become as little children, you shall not enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.” The Gnostic accretion is obvious, and is paralleled elsewhere in Thomas.

27 admits those who fast to the kingdom.

46 changes the end of the saying about the greatness of the Baptist (see Matt. 11:11) to read: “I have said that who-

ever among you will become a little one will know the kingdom and will be greater than John.”

49 says the solitary and the elect shall find the Kingdom.

54 repeats the Beatitude on the poor.

99 repudiates mother and brothers in favor of those who do the will “of my Father.”

98 is one of the previously unknown parables, one that answers the question, Who? therefore I quote it here:

“98. Jesus said: The kingdom of the Father is like a man who wanted to kill a powerful man. He drew the sword within his house (and) ran it through the wall, so that he might know whether his hand would be strong (enough). Then he killed the powerful (man).”

b. The Gospel of Thomas contains a large number of *parables*, most of which have direct parallels in the Synoptic Gospels, although a few are new. It is probable that all of them go back to original parables of Jesus. But the striking fact is that these parables—like the Kingdom sayings—are not eschatological; they don’t present man’s situation in view of the coming Kingdom, but rather are exhortations to *find* the Kingdom in Jesus’ words and in one’s own self. For example, in the Gospel of Thomas—

“8. [Jesus said:] Man is like a wise fisherman who cast his net into the sea; he drew it out of the sea when it was full of little fishes. Among them the wise fisherman found a large good fish. The wise fisherman cast all the little fishes down into the sea and chose the large fish without difficulty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

“76. Jesus said: The kingdom of the Father is like a merchant who had merchandise and who found a pearl. This merchant was prudent. He sold the merchandise and bought the one pearl for himself. You also must seek for the treasure which does not perish, which abides where no moth comes near to eat and where no worm destroys.”

“96. Jesus said: The kingdom of the Father is like a woman; she took a little leaven, hid it in dough, and made it into large loaves. He who has ears, let him hear.”

“97. Jesus said: The kingdom of the [Father] is like a woman who was carrying a jar full of meal. While she was walking [a] long way, the handle of the jar broke [and] the meal spilled out behind her on the road. She did not know [it]; she did not perceive the accident. After she came into her house, she put the jar down [and] found it empty.”

“107. Jesus said: The kingdom is like a shepherd who had a hundred sheep. One of them went astray; it was the largest. He left the ninety-nine [and] sought for the one until he found it. After he had exerted himself, he said to the sheep, I love you more than the ninety-nine.”

“109. Jesus said: The kingdom is like a man who had a treasure ((hidden)) in this field, without knowing it. And ((after)) he died, he left it to his ((son. The)) son knew nothing [about it]. He accepted that field [and] sold ((it)). And he who bought it came, [and] while he was ploughing ((he found)) the treasure. He began to lend money at interest to ((whomever)) he wished.”

c. Thomas has a larger number of “*I*” sayings than the Synoptics do. But in Thomas, Jesus speaks of himself as a divine Revealer who brings his followers to a knowledge of their true nature, and thus frees them into an existence independent of the historical circumstances of their life. No one of these sayings predicts the passion and/or the resurrection. Koester points out that only four out of seventeen “*I*” sayings have Synoptic parallels (10, 16, 55, and 90); and his conclusion is that they have little basis in the historical teaching of Jesus. For example, in the Gospel of Thomas—

“10. Jesus said: I have cast fire upon the world, and behold, I guard it until it is ablaze.”

“17. Jesus said: I shall give you what no eye has seen

and no ear has heard and no hand has touched and [what] has not entered the heart of man.”

“55. Jesus said: He who does not hate his father and his mother will not be able to be my disciple; and [he who does not] hate his brothers and his sisters and [does not] bear his cross as I have, will not be worthy of me.”

“77. Jesus said: I am the light which is over everything. I am the ALL; the ALL came forth from me and the ALL has reached to me. Split the wood; I am there. Lift up the stone, and you will find me there.”

d. The general statements of truths, *wisdom sayings and proverbs*, usually have no specific context or application. Most of them have close parallels in the first three Gospels. Some seem earlier than the form of the saying in our Gospels. Others (e.g., those which refer to finding) have an added Gnostic flavor that turns the tradition of wisdom sayings into Gnostic theology. For example, in the Gospel of Thomas—

“31. Jesus said: No prophet is acceptable in his village; no physician works cures on those who know him.”

This saying is an example of a proverbial saying that may be earlier in this form than in the form in which it appears in our canonical Gospels. Mark 6:4 (see Matt. 13:57; Luke 4:24): “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and among his kinfolk and in his own household.” Matthew omits the kinfolk, and Luke has nothing after “in his own country.” But the nicely balanced parallelism in Thomas seems authentic. And note that in Luke this saying is preceded by a reference to a physician (ch. 4:23, “And Jesus said to them: ‘perhaps you will say this parable to me: Physician, heal yourself! Those great things which we have heard happened in Kapharnaoum, do here also, in your own country.’”

“34. Jesus said: If a blind man leads a blind man, both of them fall into a pit.”

This is practically identical with Matt. 15:14 and its parallel in Luke 6:39.

“47a. Jesus said: It is impossible for a man to ride two horses [and] to stretch two bows, and it is impossible for a servant to serve two masters; either he will honor the one and despise the other . . .”

Here the parallels in Matt. 6:24 and Luke 16:13 seem the more primitive. The addition of the two horses and the two bows looks secondary, especially as honoring the one and despising the other is appropriate to the two masters but not to the horses or the bows.

“67. Jesus said: He who knows the ALL but fails to know himself has missed everything.”

To the Gnostic, knowing oneself meant knowing how one came to be spirit imprisoned in flesh; and this involved knowing the path of descent from the Father and how to climb back up. The current American cult of amateur psychologizing has brought this Gnostic saying back with all the vigor of rock and roll. But the American has no such cosmic reality as “The Father” in mind. He is thinking of himself.

“102. Jesus said: Woe to the Pharisees! For they are like a dog lying in the manger of oxen; for he neither eats nor lets the oxen eat.”

Here this old, old proverb of the dog in the manger is found in a Christian gospel. It appears also in some of the collections of fables attributed to Aesop. It is quite possible that Jesus knew it and used it.

e. Koester’s fifth category of sayings is that of rules for the community. Several of these from the Synoptic tradition have parallels in Thomas. In our canonical Gospels and epistles (as well as in other early Christian literature), these rules intend to enable Christians to live *in* this world. But in Thomas, these rules, whether based upon original words of

Jesus or not, ask the disciple to divorce himself from the traditional religious behavior of Judaism and to separate himself from any involvement in this world. For example, in the Gospel of Thomas—

“6. His disciples asked him (and) said to him: Do you wish us to fast? And in what way shall we pray (and) give alms? And what observances shall we keep with respect to eating? Jesus said: Do not speak a lie and do not do what you hate, because everything is manifest before Heaven. For there is nothing hidden which shall not be made manifest, and there is nothing covered that shall remain without being revealed.”

“14. Jesus said to them: If you fast, you will beget sin for yourselves, and if you pray, you will be condemned, and if you give alms, you will do evil to your spirits. And if you go into any land and travel in the regions, if they receive you, eat what they set before you. Heal the sick who are among them. For what will go into your mouth will not defile you, but what comes out of your mouth, that is what will defile you.”

The four questions asked in Saying 6 are answered in Saying 14. This fact and the presence in Saying 6 of the wrong answer (“Jesus said: Do not speak a lie . . . without being revealed”), plus the intrusion of “Heal the sick who are among them” in Saying 14 show the extent of edited confusion that characterizes the present form of the Gospel of Thomas. The exact agreement in order (which is not Matthew’s order)—fast, pray, give alms—in 6 and 14, plus the fact that 14 also answers the question about eating, demonstrates the original unity of these two sayings.

As a characteristic aspect of Gnostic life, I quote Saying 42: “42. Jesus said: Become those who pass by.”

This exhortation to indifferentism is close to the center of

Christianity's quarrel with Gnosticism, for Jesus urged his followers not to pass by (Luke 10:29-37).

A little reflection on these sayings will confirm Koester's statement that the conviction that eternal wisdom about man's true self is disclosed in Jesus' words is the catalyst that has caused the crystallization of these sayings into a gospel. Equally clear is the Gnostic proclivity of this concept, and the process of development into Gnostic theology.

The process of gnosticizing sayings of Jesus evidently did not proceed at the same rate in each of Koester's five categories: Kingdom sayings, parables, "I am" or "I" sayings, proverbial sayings, and rules for the community. The third and fifth classes—the "I" sayings and the rules for the community—are the most completely Gnostic.<sup>52</sup>

That the "I" sayings are largely secondary creations is not surprising to the student of our first three canonical Gospels. In them, Jesus does not talk about himself. He does not define his role, but speaks constantly about the Kingdom of God and our obligations as sons of God. Students of the Fourth Gospels long ago decided on the secondary nature of the theme and style of Jesus' sayings found there.

The three (actually two) examples quoted above from the rules for the community show clearly two methods used to gnosticize the message of Jesus: first, the adaptation to a Gnostic purpose of material Christian in origin; and second, the use of material that originated within Gnosticism.

We have taken a quick look at three of the numerous diverse Gospels that existed in the Christian movement in that first long generation after the Cross. The final decision of the church was against all three: that decision was anti-Paul, anti-Thomas, anti-Mighty Deeds. But it was also pro-Paul, pro-Thomas, pro-Mighty Deeds. The church refused to choose a Gospel with a specific, consistent Christology.

It chose all three. Just as it refused to take John instead of Matthew or Mark; so it refused to take a Gospel of Resurrection, or of Mighty Deeds, or of Sayings.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke include all three. They contain sayings of Jesus, his mighty deeds, and his resurrection. That Mark was the least inclusive of the three may explain why Mark's Gospel was the most unpopular Gospel in the first six centuries of the church's life. Most Christians voted for inclusiveness. It took time for the ballots to be cast and counted, but inclusiveness won out over a consistently limited Christology.

Why did they vote that way? The identity affirmed in the book of The Acts of "this same Jesus" ultimately dominated. In other words, these Christians insisted that the Jesus who lived in Nazareth and taught in Capernaum was the same Jesus whom God exalted by the resurrection of the dead. They worked both ways from this conviction of his sameness. They read the glory of the risen Jesus into his earthly life, and they read the remembered words and deeds into their understanding of his power and glory. Therefore, What was he like before he was crucified? was a question they felt compelled to answer.

## V

### THE GOSPEL

### BEFORE THE CRUCIFIXION

TO STATE the title of this chapter is to assume that something can be known about the historical Jesus and that this something has religious significance.<sup>53</sup> I make these assumptions against the most extreme historical skepticism and against theologies that cannot see religious meaning in happenings—note the plural number: happenings, not a happening.

One of my instructors in the study of history was the distinguished professor of American church history, Sidney E. Mead. I quote him with respect and delight. "History is the study of the meaning of the past. The historian thinks of meaning in terms of events and the unfolding consequences thereof. . . . The central event of church history is the life, work, and death of Jesus, and historically we understand its meaning in terms of the unfolding consequences."<sup>54</sup>

The historian, says Professor Mead, gives three types of answers to the question, "How did this present come out of that past?" First answer: When and where people did what—e.g., Columbus sailed the ocean blue in fourteen hundred and ninety-two; and, Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate in Judea. These are the so-called bare facts. Second answer: The reasons, stated or implicit, for people's actions. This is the realm of meaning contemporary to the facts. Third answer: The unquestioned presuppositions, what seemed ob-

vious to everyone and was therefore never stated nor even directly implied.

Professor Mead insists that the interpretation of what the events meant or mean depends upon selection of facts, upon some concept of the end of the story, and some faith in, or allegiance to, a present trend. Theologians accuse historians of the lack of that certainty which they assume results from laboratory experiments. They emphasize the discontinuity in histories, and discard history as being unserviceable to faith. Reasonable historians admit that their results are stated in terms of probabilities, but some results—especially at level one—have such a high degree of probability that the historian may be pardoned who refers to them as certainties. What scholarly historian has ever questioned that Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate in Judea?<sup>55</sup>

To prevent misunderstanding, I hasten to say that the historian does not *start* with bare facts. He *ends* with them. The historian meets no such thing as an uninterpreted fact. He finds fact and meaning boiled up together in a vegetable stew. Without the identification of meaning, he cannot establish a fact. He must understand the contemporary meaning of specific data and also the relevant though unspoken presuppositions before he can confirm a particular datum as fact. Therefore, when I turn to the presentation of Professor Mead's first level, I am presenting the third chapter in a history.

In 1960, Günther Bornkamm published a study of Jesus of Nazareth that has subsequently won wide acceptance by scholars. In it he lists twenty-five items as belonging "to the data of his life which cannot be doubted."<sup>56</sup> My own list of these first-level bare facts is slightly longer, for I have included some generalizations about his message that Bornkamm treats elsewhere.

His name was Jesus.

He was a Palestinian Jew.

He was a Galilean, from Nazareth.

He attended synagogue services.

He attended the great temple festivals in Jerusalem;  
e.g., Passover.

His native tongue was Aramaic.

He understood Hebrew.

He started his work in Galilee.

He was active in the smaller towns and villages: Bethsaida, Chorazin, Capernaum—in the hill country and around the Sea of Galilee.

He preached in the fields and along the seashore.

His parents were Joseph, a carpenter, and Mary.

He had four brothers: James, Joseph, Judas, Simon.

He had sisters.

His family opposed his ministry.

He was baptized by John the Baptist.

He never opposed John.

He related his own vocation to the Baptist's ministry.

He did not become a disciple of the Baptist.

He had a high opinion of the Baptist.

The Baptist questioned the nature of Jesus' vocation.

Jesus baptized no one.

The form of his teaching was parables, paradoxes and hyperboles, and proverbs.

He was not rich, nor a member of any Establishment.

He had disciples who followed him as he preached (or taught) traveling about the country.

Women were accepted into his company.

He was called a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

He ate with them.

He heralded the coming Kingdom of God.

He healed the sick and exorcised demons.

He did not fast, nor teach his disciples prayers—except under pressure.

He believed God created the world.

He believed his people, the Jews, were God's special people.

He accepted the Jewish Scriptures as a revelation of God. But he took liberties with particular Biblical commandments.

He urged complete devotion to God's will.

One of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, betrayed him.

He was crucified under Pontius Pilate (A.D. 26–36).

He was crucified about A.D. 30.

After his death, his followers had experiences which they identified as meetings with the risen Jesus.

The theme of this book is "New or Old?" How much of Jesus' work and message was old? Aside from the strictly personal items in the above list, all can be located within the Judaism of his period, although some of them would put Jesus in a definite minority group. Serious and competent Jewish scholars have found Jewish parallels to 90 percent of Jesus' teaching and actions. He himself admitted that contemporary Jews exorcised evil spirits, and if the search is made far and wide, some Jewish parallel to the vast majority of the words of Jesus can be found. No serious student of the Gospels today can deny that there was a tremendous amount of the old, of the tradition and customs of his people, in Jesus.

There were many categories within Judaism available for his identification. He could be called Rabbi, Teacher. Rabbis had disciples. He could be called Prophet, although this term would put him closer to apocalyptic thought than to the mes-

sages of the great literary prophets. He could be identified as some sort of Anointed One, though certainly not as the military Messiah. He could be identified as one whom God had given special gifts, a charismatic person. It is hard to imagine him as a priest or liturgist, but not so hard to see him as a Pharisee, a reforming Pharisee. He could be identified after the resurrection experiences as a future Messiah, the coming Son of Man. With the help of Isaiah, but with little help from contemporary Judaism, he could be identified as a suffering servant Messiah.

The variety of identifications of Jesus is staggering in amount. This is true within the New Testament, and it is true in the work of modern historians. Even a casual reader of the New Testament must be bewildered by the large number of different titles applied to Jesus—especially since some of them are mutually exclusive. In the New Testament we find Jesus called Rabbi, Teacher, Lord, Master, Messiah, Lamb of God, Servant, Life, Light, Truth, Way, Vine, Son of God, Son of Man, the Second Adam, Prophet, etc.

In modern times, such identifications as Rabbi, Prophet, Moral Teacher, have been applied to Jesus by numbers of students, generation after generation. In periods of social crisis, the interpretations of Jesus tend to make him a revolutionary or a social reformer. This was true in England at the onset of the industrial revolution. So in this country, in the Depression in the '30s, he was presented to radical youth as a Communist revolutionary in a poem that ended with the line "Comrade Jesus has his red card."

This kind of identification has been congenial to the moralism and humanitarianism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Before leaving this catalog of identifications, I call your attention to two that were *not* congenial. Several scholars have emphasized Jesus' kinship to the Pharisees.

Professor D. W. Riddle explored this relationship affirmatively in *Jesus and the Pharisees*, published by The University of Chicago Press in the '30s.

But the epoch-making identification that shocked New Testament study was made by Albert Schweitzer at the beginning of this century. He argued with great vigor and effectiveness that Jesus preached a future Kingdom to be established by God at the end of the world. Therefore, he said, "consistent eschatology" was the clue to the understanding of Jesus. The ensuing debate over what kind of an eschatologist Jesus was has lasted almost to the present (although existentialism and the new hermeneutic have taken the front of the stage).

But even though modern historians have identified Jesus variously as Rabbi, Pharisee, Social Reformer, Moral Teacher, Consistent Eschatologist, etc., they seem to have reached a consensus on this negative conclusion: *Jesus cannot be completely contained in any of the descriptions and categories that were prevalent in Judaism at his time.* When he is measured against those contemporary patterns, he sticks out all around the edges.<sup>57</sup>

Two inferences can be drawn from these facts: first, that Jesus never defined himself clearly; second, that he *was* more than any category. The study of the early traditions makes clear that Jesus did not talk much about himself. The church soon began to supply that deficiency, as can be seen in the Gospel of John and in the Gospel of Thomas. In each of these, the amount of first-person discourse from the lips of Jesus swamps the small amount that can be found in the Synoptics. There, instead of talking about himself, he talked about God and his kingdom. The most authentic saying in the Gospels is the one in which Jesus repudiates the title "Good Teacher." "Why do you call me good?" he retorts, and throws the questioner's attention to God, who alone is

good. This is why we have so little from Jesus about Jesus. He lost himself in devotion to God. Long before his execution on the cross, he lost his life. Thus he became—to our bafflement—an incarnation of the saying “He who would save his life, must lose it.”

He talked about our obligation to love God, not about God’s love for us. The First Commandment is the central focus of his teaching. And because he had integrity, he talked about that and the second, derivative commandment and not about himself. Love of God came first; love of neighbor followed.

Because of the consistency of this priority in his message, it is difficult to cast his mantle over the current exhortation to find yourself first. The pagan Greeks had a word for it (*Gnothi seauton*), but the good news of Jesus Christ does not. The Gnostics rejoiced in finding themselves, but the majority of Christians would have none of it as the prime quest. For them, as for their Lord, the primal quest was to find God.

If 90 percent of the words and deeds of Jesus were demonstrably Jewish, what were the other 10 percent? (I suggest to you, in passing, that 10 percent is not an unimportant difference. Anatomically, the male body differs from the female by about 10 percent, but the differences are striking and important.)

What was the other 10 percent? It was Jesus, an individual—not a culture or a cult. We know that every person is unique to some degree. Jesus was to an unusual degree. In this sense, he was an ambiguous person—a person who was more than “a normative Jew,” more than a typical Galilean. He was one of that very small group of people who have burst the boundaries of the definition of a class or a culture.

Two distinguished Jewish scholars, Klausner and Montefiore, in placing Jesus within Judaism explain his uniqueness

as an extremism. That is to say, Jesus laid hold on certain elements in Judaism and developed them to such an extreme that the result was hardly identifiable as Jewish. Klausner speaks of the teaching of Jesus as consisting only of belief in God and the practice of extreme and one-sided ethics. He goes on to say that Jesus' teaching meant the ruin of national culture, national state, and national life. And Professor Montefiore sees something distinctive and novel in Jesus' emphasis upon the benevolence of God. A God who seeks the sinner, says Professor Montefiore, is a new teaching in Judaism.

Walter Bauer in 1927<sup>58</sup> identified Jesus as a Galilean. Bauer substitutes Galilean characteristics for Judean traits. Thus, Galilee as a social matrix for Jesus explains his anti-legalism, his being an antimilitary, antinationalistic Messiah, his opposition to liturgy, his anti-Pharisaic attitudes. All these things were Jerusalemite and Judean, but Jesus was a Galilean, and hence different. This simply substitutes one social yardstick for another, and leaves unanswered the question Why weren't all Galileans Jesus? This road will not lead to the identification of Jesus as an individual.

Nor will the popular road of form criticism's *Sitz im Leben*, or sociological history. In the year in which Bauer identified Jesus as a Galilean (1927), Shirley Jackson Case published a study of the historical Jesus: *Jesus, A New Biography* (The University of Chicago Press). In this study, "while literary criticism has not been ignored, more attention has been given to social orientation." It sought "a more complete integration of Jesus within the distinctively Jewish setting where he had actually lived." Case had pioneered in sociological history applied to early Christianity, with the publication in 1914 of *The Evolution of Early Christianity*, a book that antedated the form criticism school's emphasis

upon *Sitz im Leben*. Case evaluated the data for our knowledge of the historical Jesus by the use of two criteria. First, "That which is peculiarly apposite to a situation realized first in the social experience of the disciples after Jesus' death can hardly be taken to represent a well-established fact of his own career." Second, "Gospel traditions that dovetail normally into his experience within a Palestinian environment need not be called in question." "The fundamental test," he says, is "social experience as revealed in the content of the narrative."

This test is a reductionist process. The individual is measured against precrucifixion Palestinian social experience, and whatever sticks out around the edges is lopped off. The result is a Jesus who is undoubtedly a Palestinian Jew, but one who is not an individual. Neither sociological history nor the *Sitz im Leben* emphasis leaves room for the creative individual who anticipates the future and bursts the bonds of his immediate environment. How could these techniques explain even William Rainey Harper—a man who in the 1890's in Chicago initiated a score of developments in American higher education, which found a *Sitz im Leben* only after 1920 or after 1930?

John Knox finds the individuality of Jesus by following Montefiore in pointing the finger at Jesus' teaching about love toward God and its consequences. "The distinction of Jesus' teaching," he says, "about the requirement of love toward God lies not in its formal or conceptual character but *in the intensity and exclusiveness* [italics added] with which he emphasized it, and in the concrete quality of the love itself as his life and words set it forth. . . .

"Jesus' great originality as a teacher," Knox continues, "consists, not in the newness of his ideas taken severally and in the abstract, but in the characteristic emphases of his

teaching, in the particular way in which he felt the concrete meaning, the force, of certain traditional ideas, and in the beauty and power of his speech. Others have spoken of God as Father; but no one spoke so constantly of God in this way; no one (so far as we can know) ever realized the concrete meaning of God's fatherliness in just the way Jesus realized it, and certainly no one has ever expressed that meaning so completely and so movingly. There is no true parallel to the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). . . .

"Others had warned against overweening anxiety, but Jesus' words about the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field are his very own. There is a radical character about many of the teachings of Jesus and a bold imaginative quality which place them altogether in a class apart. . . . The words of Jesus are, in a sense entirely unique, *living words*. They can hardly be distinguished from his actions."<sup>59</sup>

Note that Knox refers to the radical, concrete character of Jesus' words as being a part of the definition of his distinctive quality. The current enthusiasm for what scholars call the new hermeneutic recognizes the inseparability of words and message.<sup>60</sup> In a recent article, "Jesus' Parables as God Happening," James M. Robinson illuminates this new concern. "The understanding of language," he says, "as that which presents the possibilities from which reality is actualized identifies in Jesus' language itself the locus of God's reign—not in the present as a reality, nor as an apocalyptic reality near or far, but as the structuring of reality that reveals it as immediate to God, God's 'creation.' . . . It is in his [Jesus'] language that God's reign is inescapable, as invitation and challenge, grace and judgment. Between the presumption of the Establishment that identifies reality with God and the fanaticism of otherworldliness that separates reality from God—the Scylla and Charybdis between which the chronological debates about the nearness of the Kingdom oscillated

—lies the event of Jesus' language in which God's reign happens as reality's true possibility."<sup>61</sup>

A generation ago, I commented to Case that his picture of Jesus was incomplete because he did not quote any of Jesus' sayings. He smiled tolerantly, and said: "I've put what I know about Jesus in *my* books. You write that book." I did write an approach to it,<sup>62</sup> and it began like this:

"The words of Jesus have the rugged fibre of the cypress tree and the jagged edge of the crosscut saw. Nothing but an excessive familiarity with his words or an insulated ignorance can keep up from perceiving this rigorous element. His language is extreme—extravagant. Hyperbole, antithesis, and paradox mark his style. His figures of speech are crammed with energy. Explosive as hand grenades, they are tossed into the crowds that listen. A tremendous vigor, an exuberant vitality, surges through his words.

"In Jesus' words a man with a log in his eye tries to pick a cinder out of his brother's eye. In his words a man who has been forgiven a debt of ten million dollars refuses to forgive a debt of twenty dollars. In the words of Jesus a giant hand hangs a millstone around the neck of one who exploits a little child, and hurls the sinner into the midst of the sea. If you visualize that scene, you can catch the truly extreme quality of his utterance. What giant hand would seize the millstone, hang it around the neck of the offender, and hurl both out into the middle of the ocean?

"In the words of Jesus one asks for bread and is given a stone; he asks for a fish and is given a snake. In the words of Jesus men strain out the little gnats and gulp down the camels.

"Many interpreters of Jesus' words have spoken appreciatively of the humor of his teaching. They stop the rapid action of the parable or the pointed expression and are amused at the ludicrous contrasts which result. . . . But the

words of Jesus carry none of the humor of a static picture; this is made clear by their context. The saying about the gnat and the camel is in a cluster of bitter sayings directed against the religious leaders, the ordained ministers, of Jesus' day. The tone of all these remarks is one of rigorous indictment. The epithets which he hurls at these people are: 'You hypocrites!' 'You blind guides!' 'You blind Pharisees!' 'You brood of snakes!' 'You serpents!' 'You murderers!' There is no more humor in this than in the atomic bomb. Jesus uses these rigorous expressions to make his sayings powerful—not to make them funny. . . .

"Thus it is that in his words a camel crawls through a needle's eye. A mountain gathers its limbs under it, summons up all its strength, and leaps into the sea. The corpses bury one another. The man who would save his life must lose it. The first is last, and the last first. . . .

"The basic difficulty for the student of Jesus' words is how to explain the rigorous, the extreme, the gigantesque. All attempts to remove the rigorous element from Jesus' language fail because this rigorousness is neither rhetoric nor ornament; it is not a veneer upon the surface of his message but the natural grain of the wood. It takes its nature from the content of his words. It was not designed to attract an audience, but to convey his message."

We have been following a trail of diversities in Christianity, back from the year A.D. 150 to the times of Jesus' life. These diversities, I am persuaded, are rooted in those times. Why should we suppose that the response to Jesus would be uniform? Why should we assume that the identification of what was important in him would be one single identification? Does not the continuity of history as we see it elsewhere argue for diverse evaluations of Jesus in his lifetime?<sup>63</sup> Whether you put the responsibility upon him or upon God,

he must have been a powerful, creative figure to become identified later as the Lord of the church's faith. Such figures do not yield to simple and single identifications. Nor did Jesus.

"We know from the history of Early Christianity that the name of Jesus of Nazareth does not indicate something unambiguous and clear, but that various Christian groups claimed this name for quite different, even contradictory theological positions."<sup>64</sup>

Thus, I affirm that there was a diversity of identifications of Jesus before the crucifixion. Some of these came straight out of current Jewish categories; some, conceivably, out of Galilean deviations; and some out of a Hellenistic culture that existed inside as well as outside of Palestine. But the point that our emphasis upon environment causes us to miss is that some of these explanations of Jesus' role came from individuals—out of the diverse hopes and fears and prejudices of the individuals who were impressed by him. They were impressed, I suggest, some in one way, some in another.

Someone found Jesus' significance in his words and before his death began the collection that became the Sayings Gospel, the ancestor of Thomas or of Q. Some desperate souls surely wished themselves into the conviction that he was the One to come to deliver Israel. Someone else was impressed by his exorcisms and healings, and collected these stories—some of which turn up in the Gospel of Mighty Deeds or the Signs Source.

I have discussed the Gospel of Thomas as a Sayings Gospel in an earlier chapter, and there are countless books and articles on the identification of Jesus as Messiah. But I call your attention to another Christology, which lies behind and organizes what I have called the Gospel of Mighty Deeds. This Christology of the Divine Man was discussed in a recent

publication by Hans Dieter Betz, and I summarize his position in what follows.<sup>65</sup>

Professor Betz outlines a concept of New Testament Christology “which could, in fact, justify itself by references to the phenomenon of Jesus of Nazareth”<sup>66</sup>—even though it was rejected by some New Testament writers and modified by others. This concept is that of the “Divine Man Christology.”

A Hellenistic-Jewish variation of the Divine Man concept influenced primitive Christianity and was modified in various ways. These Christian formulations “presuppose his [Jesus’] full humanity,” but see “his significance . . . in his ability to surmount what is the normal human condition.”<sup>67</sup>

This Christology appears first in pre-Synoptic miracle narratives, also in “controversy dialogues” and in some details of the passion narrative. In these Divine Man pericopes, faith is “the personal-emotional relationship of *trust* of the believer in Jesus,” . . . “not yet connected with the kerygma of the death and resurrection of Jesus.”<sup>68</sup>

Mark greatly modifies the Divine Man Christology he found in his sources; he did not reject it (like Paul and Q) but reinterpreted it. So, each in his own way, did Matthew, Luke, and John.

What about the relationship of these various formulations of the Divine Man concept to the historical Jesus? Jesus certainly did not conceive of himself as Divine Man in the Hellenistic sense, but “certain aspects of his appearance show a great similarity to the Hellenistic type of Divine Man.”<sup>69</sup>

(1) Jesus conceived of himself as eschatological messenger and representative of God. (2) Jesus understood himself as inspired by the Spirit of God (Mark 3:27; Luke 11:20). He performed exorcisms and healings, and was not an ascetic. He accepted no honorific title. And such traits “if ‘translated’ into Hellenistic concepts would come out as traits character-

istic of the Hellenistic Divine Man." But Jesus' suffering and crucifixion do not fit into the picture.

Five New Testament authors answer the question as to the relationship of the passion to the Divine Man. All of them can in fact claim to have a basis in Jesus himself, but there is a controversy among them as to just what that basis is; i.e., whether it is Jesus' activities as Divine Man or the passion that is most essential.

When we get back to the times of Jesus, therefore, we do *not* find *the* dependable source. There may have been as many as ten or twelve estimates of his meaning (primitive Christologies), and every one of these may have some legitimate reference to Jesus as he was.

But in this chorus of diverse voices, how can we know anything? What are the evidences of legitimacy? Are they as hard to establish here as in the case of human offspring?

I have suggested at the beginning of this chapter that there is historical certainty about a long list of bare facts. Moreover, there is general agreement that Jesus' teaching was radical teaching. Knox, in the work I have referred to, struggles valiantly to find a bridge between the extreme demands of Jesus and the life of man in this world. I believe that most scholars would agree that this radical demand is rooted in the proclamation of the nature of God and the consequent obligations of those who would be his children. The strongest of the exhortations, "Be ye, therefore, perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect," follows the description of God's unlimited benevolence in respect to sunshine and rain and urges upon us an incredible love of enemies (Matt. 5:43-48).

Unmistakably distinctive also is the degree of concreteness in the sayings of Jesus. No theologian has equaled Alfred North Whitehead's description of Jesus' words.

"The reported sayings of Christ are not formularized thought. They are descriptions of direct insight. The ideas

are in his mind as immediate pictures, and not as analyzed in terms of abstract concepts. He sees intuitively the relations between good men and bad men; his expressions are not cast into the form of an analysis of the goodness and badness of man. His sayings are actions and not adjustments of concepts. He speaks in the lowest abstractions that language is capable of, if it is to be language at all and not the fact itself."<sup>70</sup>

To demonstrate the accuracy of Whitehead's words, all that is needed is a rapid survey of Jesus' words in the first three Gospels. In such a survey, I found references to salt, a lamp and a bushel basket, a shirt, wild birds, wild flowers, grapes and thorns, figs and thistles, the foundations of a house, sick people and a doctor, patches, wineskins, children playing on a street corner, the farmer sowing a crop, weeds, mustard, yeast, buried money, a pearl, a fishnet, the dogs eating under the table, a vineyard, the mint and dill growing in the garden, whitewashed tombs, a hen and her chicks, a fig tree in the spring, bridesmaids, sheep and goats, a robber in a strong man's house, the farmer and his crop, a cup of water, a mountain, a coin, a poor but devout widow, a coat left in the house, a bridegroom, fox holes, a plow, lambs and wolves, three loaves of bread, an egg and a scorpion, bigger and better barns, the crows, the rain clouds before the storm, a lost sheep, a lost coin, a prodigal son, a dishonest manager, a sick beggar, a servant waiting on table, an unjust judge, and vultures around a dead body.

Finally I suggest that in the future, as scholars deal more extensively with the primitive diversity in Christianity, the evidence of agreement in inclusion will substantiate more and more of the central elements in the actual words and deeds of Jesus. The cross, for example, is obvious and inescapable. Even the Gospel of Truth alludes to the cross.

Why didn't that author leave it out? It had no theological value for him. He put it in because it was one of the must-be-included pieces.

I call your attention to another strange agreement among such theologically diverse works as the Gospel of John, the letters of Paul, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Mighty Deeds, and our first three Gospels. In the Gospel of John, Jesus is a glorious figure. In his earthly career he manifests his glory. He is not really a member of the lower classes; he is a divine visitor who stalks majestically through situations and events in Palestine untroubled and uncontrolled—uninfluenced even—by any human power. His is the power and the glory. Yet he institutes a liturgy to be followed by his disciples, and the service is a foot washing! In setting it up, Jesus consciously condescends. He reminds his disciples that he is their teacher and Lord, and they are not to forget it. Thus, the punch of the ceremony comes from the fact that the exalted leader does this menial task. The entire incident (even with its emphasis upon Jesus' importance) is out of place in John. Humility, even in role-playing, does not fit the Christology of this Gospel. Why did John put this story in when he left out so much that showed Jesus as a humble person?

In the Gospel of Thomas, humility is not an inculcated virtue; it never would make the top ten on the Gnostics' most-wanted list. But in Thomas, Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor"; and he told the stories of the mustard seed and the leaven—the parables of insignificant beginnings. Why did Thomas include these?

In the Gospel of Mighty Deeds, the cast of characters is loaded with people from the lower classes. Jesus' works are carried out in tone and setting that suggest an unimpressive, humble person—except for his charismatic gifts.

In Paul's letters it is perfectly clear that the earthly life of Jesus was a humble one. Paul contrasts it in the sharpest way with the glorious position of the risen Jesus. "Have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth." (Phil. 2:5-10.)

The agreement of these diverse sources in including humility supports the claim that humility was the leading virtue in Jesus' words and deeds. The opening Beatitudes, the brutal rebuke of James and John for their ambitions, the saying about being one who waited on tables rather than one who was served, and the priceless saying about a man who had the end of a log stuck in his own eye and was trying to get a cinder out of his neighbor's eye—these and scores of others are more securely established in the center of Jesus' message by the fact that diverse gospels couldn't drop the tradition of humility no matter how unwelcome it was.

At the end of his work, the historian states the meaning that he has found. Knox has a great sentence in which he says the significance of Jesus is not that he talked about the love of God, but that he brought the love of God near. Christian faith affirms that Jesus makes God available, believable. The meaning that I have found is a confession of faith. Since I find it easier to confess in poetry than in subscription to a creed, my confession is made in these lines:

THE DAY-SPRING FROM ON HIGH

How does the day dawn?  
Not with bugles blowing,  
Not with any "Now!"  
In surprised silence  
The darkness dies,

And the day grows  
As trees grow—  
Not with watching;  
As the flower opens,  
Slower than eye can see,  
Color blooms from the black.

So that day dawned,  
And God's Son shone.  
Jesus came to Jordan  
And the water burned.  
He was a light  
That the blind saw.  
Where he walked,  
The lame leaped.

Slowly his time came.  
The unspeakable Word  
Hung silent on the tree,  
And light won the world.

But the Day-Spring shone just once, in one place—in Palestine, in Judea, nineteen hundred years ago. This is the indictment of history! It does not have the repetitive potential of the scientific experiment. But Biblical religion sees God in happenings; and particularly, for Christians, in this one. Can any *one*, even this one, make God available? I tried to answer this question in an experiential way in some verses I wrote several years ago. In them, Adam is speaking in the Garden of Eden. He has just been created.

## ADAM AND THE SUN

I saw Him first at high noon.  
New-made man, I stood in Eden.  
    Cedars I saw, the blossoming bush  
    And the banyan tree,  
    The prickly pear, and  
    Lilacs and lilies,  
        and lions, and leopards, and lambs.

I looked up, and I saw Him!  
    Light that stopped my looking,  
    Warmth that clothed my skin.  
And I bowed and danced before Him.

I ran through the wood!  
    I named every bush, every tree!  
    I called the beasts' names  
    And they answered!  
But when I looked up,  
He had moved—lower and slipping  
He threw a black shape behind me  
That grew as he dropped down and down  
Toward the dull rim of the garden  
Until it was done—He was gone!

Darkness was all. The shape  
Had swallowed the garden.  
A black fear shivered me;  
My glory had departed!  
The aloneness was the lostness.  
Fickle and treacherous,  
He had abandoned me.

I ran through the wood,  
I stumbled on roots,  
I fell into pools,  
I was stabbed by the prickly pear.

But these little wounds  
Were lost in the great gash—  
He had cut Himself loose from me!

Dazed, defeated, dulled,  
I breathed in that blackness  
Till to dimmed eyes, came light!  
To gooseflesh, warmth!  
He had come back to me!  
There was evening, and  
There was morning—Day One!  
And I said—

“Though He should leave me  
Yet will I trust Him.  
For there was evening  
And there was morning,  
—A First Day!”

The sun only needed to rise *once* for Adam to believe.

We have looked at the first hundred and twenty-five years of Christian history. At each stop we have seen that the old was always present, as it always is today in our present. But at each stop we have seen that as that old was reexperienced, something new was always added—the experience was never a carbon copy of the old. This, too, is true today of our appropriation of our past. Is it too much to ask of the leaders of the churches today that they identify the new in this amalgam as that work of the Holy Spirit, which in our heritage is supposed to carry revelation farther than the Scriptures did? Were not those early Christians wise in refusing a rigorous consistency and in accepting a comprehensive faith that included God in nature *and* God in history and could tolerate a diversity of gospels?



## NOTES

1. Biblical quotations throughout are from various versions, and some are my own translation.

2. I must admit that I once lived in a city that had "The Second Baptist Church," and in another that had "The Fourth Presbyterian Church."

3. These two documents were published in Edgar J. Goodspeed and Ernest C. Colwell (eds.), *A Greek Papyrus Reader* (The University of Chicago Press, 1935).

4. Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *The Pastor and Drug Dependency* (Pamphlet; National Council of Churches).

5. Harris Purks, "How High Is Higher Education?" *The Emory Magazine*, March, 1959, p. 12. Used by permission.

6. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* (ANF), IV. 4, 5.

7. *Pliny Letters*, Vol. II, tr. by William Melmoth, rev. by W. M. L. Hutchinson (The Macmillan Company, 1915), Bk. X, xcvi, pp. 403-404.

8. Massey H. Shepherd, Jr., *The Worship of the Church* (The Seabury Press, Inc., 1952), pp. 72 ff. Even his description of the mid-century liturgy (p. 73) will sound strange to the modern preacher.

9. See A. E. Barnett, *Paul Becomes a Literary Influence* (The University of Chicago Press, 1941); John Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament* (The University of Chicago Press, 1942). The one appeal to the role of the apostles as founders appears in I Clement, a letter from the Roman church; see Hans Lietzmann, *The Beginnings of the Christian Church*, tr. by Bertram L. Woolf

(Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937), pp. 256 ff. Yet the evidence of I Clement for apostolic authority is slight indeed. Apostles are referred to twice in sixty-five chapters. In ch. V, Peter and Paul are given as examples of those who were destroyed by jealousy. In ch. XLII, we have a clear-cut statement that the apostles were evangelized by Jesus, Jesus by God, and that the apostles appointed their first converts to be bishops and deacons. But like the other sixty-four chapters, this one ratifies authority by appeal to Scripture. I Clement demonstrates clearly the primary authority of Scripture and the very limited value of appeal to apostles in this period.

Tertullian, a hundred years later, reverses this position. "Heretics are not to be admitted to discussion of the Scriptures because they don't belong to them. . . . The Apostles sanctioned this exclusion; . . . [moreover] a controversy over the Scriptures can, clearly, produce no other effect than help to upset either the stomach or the brain. . . . The appeal against heresy is not to Scripture but to the rule of faith—to whom was it given? . . . Christ delivered the faith to the Apostles who founded churches which founded churches." (*The Prescription Against Heretics* [ANF], Vol. III, chs. XV, XVI, XIX, XX.)

10. B. H. Streeter, *The Primitive Church* (The Macmillan Company, 1929).

11. "In the Fathers, 'tradition'—or rather the various words and phrases which we translate by that word—means two very different things. There is the tradition of sound doctrine, of which the Bishops of the great sees were regarded as in a special sense the custodians; and there are stories current about historical personages or events. It is only where the tradition of sound doctrine is in question—more especially as regards the Unity of God and the reality of Christ's Manhood as against the Gnostic challenge—that the early Fathers are serious about the appeal to history." (Streeter, *The Primitive Church*, pp. 17-18.)

12. Kenneth L. Carroll, "Toward a Commonly Received New Testament," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, Vol. XLIV, No. 2 (March, 1962), pp. 327-349.

13. Frank M. Cross, Jr., "The Contribution of the Qumran Discoveries to the Study of the Biblical Text," *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. XVI, No. 2 (1966).

14. Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1934), and the host of derivative writings.

15. Campbell Bonner (ed.), *The Homily on the Passion by Melito, Bishop of Sardis, and Some Fragments of the Apocryphal Ezekiel* (Studies and Documents XII) (London: Christophers, Ltd.; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1940). Used by permission.

16. See my review of Bonner's book in *Classical Philology*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 4 (October, 1942), pp. 458-459.

17. For the literature on Nag Hammadi, see Chapter II.

18. For this and all other aspects of Marcion's life and work, the basic source is Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott* (Berlin: Hinrich's-Verlag, 1960). This is a photographic reprint of the 2d ed. of 1924 plus *Neue Studien zu Marcion*, which adds corrections and supplementary material published by Harnack in 1923.

19. Bad as its own record is in this regard, Christianity did not invent anti-Semitism. Claudius' Epistle to the Alexandrians (A.D. 41) with its attempt to curb the anti-Jewish riots that had begun in A.D. 38 is proof of this. See H. Idris Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt* (London: The British Museum, 1924), p. 11: "As elsewhere in the ancient world, so also in Alexandria, the Jews were exposed to the hostility of their neighbors. This hostility was due to various causes. Economic factors were not without influence; for the Jews, besides being dangerous rivals in commerce, were not infrequently tax-farmers or farmers of the royal domains, and many of them were persons of great wealth. Even more powerful, however, were political and religious prejudice. Precluded by their religion from sharing in many of the activities of their fellow-townsmen, to whom the [city] was above all things a religious community united by the common service of the ancestral gods, and yet enjoying special privileges of their

own and favoured, not by the Ptolemies only but by many of the Hellenistic monarchs, as later by the Romans, the Jews were naturally objects of suspicion and dislike." Used by permission.

20. Harnack, *Marcion*, has reconstructed Marcion's "Gospel" from all available sources.

21. All but one of the following examples are taken from Harnack, *Marcion*, pp. 89 ff.

22. See Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, III. 12.

23. The role of Gnosticism (and to a lesser degree Montanism) in this process is referred to in Chapter II.

24. This is the title given the book of The Acts in the Muratorian list.

25. Origen, *Celsus*, iii. 59.

26. *Ibid.*, vi. 78.

27. *Ibid.*, ii. 24; see also vii. 55.

28. *Ibid.*, iii. 44.

29. Dion Cassius, *Roman History*, lii. 36.

30. The discovery of the Gnostic work called the Gospel of Philip at Nag Hammadi substantiates Irenaeus' report. See R. McL. Wilson (ed. and tr.), *The Gospel of Philip: Translated from the Coptic Text with an Introduction and a Commentary* (London: A. R. Mowbray & Company, Ltd., 1962), p. 3.

31. Kendrick Grobel, *The Gospel of Truth: A Valentinian Meditation on the Gospel* (Abingdon Press, 1960); "The Gospel of Truth," tr. by W. W. Isenberg, in Robert M. Grant (ed.), *Gnosticism: An Anthology* (Harper & Brothers, 1961), pp. 146-161; *The Gospel According to Thomas*, tr. by A. Guillaumont, H. -Ch. Puech, G. Quispel, W. Till, and Yassah 'Abd Masih (Leiden: Brill; London: William Collins Sons & Company, Ltd.; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959); *The Gospel of Philip*, tr. by R. McL. Wilson. Publication plans are under way for a number of other individual tractates to be published in English within the next five years.

32. James M. Robinson, "The Coptic Gnostic Library Today," *New Testament Studies*, Vol. XII (1967-1968), pp. 356-401.

33. The translation given here is that of W. W. Isenberg, "The Gospel of Truth," in Robert M. Grant (ed.), *Gnosticism*.

34. For a comprehensive introduction to the noncanonical gospels, see Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume One: Gospels and Related Writings*, ed. by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, English translation ed. by R. McL. Wilson (The Westminster Press, 1963).

35. Edgar J. Goodspeed, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (The University of Chicago Press, 1937), p. 170.

36. For a detailed exposition of this passage, see Ernest C. Colwell, *John Defends the Gospel* (Willett, Clark and Co., 1936), pp. 47-49.

37. Yet cf. John 19:11 on betrayal!

38. Tacitus, *Annals*, xv. 44.

39. This paragraph is taken from Colwell, *John Defends the Gospel*, pp. 86-87; and the following four paragraphs are from the same book, pp. 88-89.

40. Three times in John 18:36, Jesus affirms that his Kingdom is not of this world. Nowhere else does he use the word.

41. For a list of the vestigial survivals of the older faith, see Colwell, *John Defends the Gospel*, p. 101.

42. Translated by W. W. Isenberg, in Robert M. Grant (ed.), *Gnosticism*, p. 154.

43. Ernest C. Colwell, "The Fourth Gospel and Early Christian Art," *Journal of Religion*, Vol. XV (1935), p. 201. Used by permission.

44. Helmut Koester, "Gnomai Diaphoroi: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. LVIII (1965), p. 281. Copyright by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

45. The Stephen incident (Acts 6:1 to 8:5) shows that only the Greek-speaking Jews from outside Palestine were persecuted and chased out of Jerusalem.

46. Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*. For bibliographical data on consequent publications, see the references to Koester's work in notes 44 and 47.

47. Koester, "Gnomai Diaphoroi," pp. 279-318. In this chapter I am indebted to two of Koester's articles: "Gnomai Diaphoroi," and "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels," *Harvard Theologi-*

*cal Review*, Vol. LXI (1968), pp. 203-247. With no dissent from Koester or Bauer as to the reality of geographical differentiation in the formulation of a gospel of the Christian faith, I feel that the possibility of more than one "gospel" per place needs to be kept in mind.

48. I counted in Edgar J. Goodspeed, *The New Testament: An American Translation* (The University of Chicago Press, 1948).

49. Cf. the summary given by Hans Dieter Betz of the Christology behind this "gospel," pp. 170 ff.

50. While there is still division on this point, I am persuaded by Professor Robinson's solid reconstruction of the development of this type (*Gattung*) of tradition from Judaism through primitive Christianity, and by Professor Koester's recent exposition of every aspect of this Gospel, that the position taken in the text is sound. See James M. Robinson, "Logoi Sophon," in *Zeit und Geschichte; Dankesgabe an Rudolf Bultmann zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. by Erich Dinkler (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1964), pp. 77-96; and Koester, "Gnomai Diaphoroi," and his "One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels."

51. The English translation used in this chapter is that of Bruce M. Metzger in Kurt Aland (ed.), *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1967), pp. 517-530. Used by permission.

52. For a thoughtful discussion of the origin and development of the sayings in Thomas, see R. McL. Wilson, *Studies in the Gospel of Thomas* (London: A. R. Mowbray & Company, Ltd., 1960); and Robert M. Grant with David Noel Freedman, *The Secret Sayings of Jesus* (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960), with commentary.

53. "It is beyond dispute that the historical origin of Christianity lies in Jesus of Nazareth, his life, preaching and fate. Consequently, the quest for the individuality and singularity of Christianity is inevitably bound up with the problem of the historical Jesus." Koester, "Gnomai Diaphoroi," p. 282.

54. Sidney E. Mead, in a thoughtful paper, "Church History Explained," *Church History*, Vol. XXXII (March, 1963), p. 10.

55. For a discussion of the difference between levels one and two by another distinguished historian, see F. M. Powicke, *History, Freedom, and Religion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1938), pp. 14 ff.; and his *Three Lectures Given in the Hall of Balliol College, Oxford* (London: Oxford University Press, 1947), pp. 81-88.

56. Günther Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, tr. by Irene and Fraser McLuskey with James M. Robinson (Harper & Brothers, 1960), pp. 49, 51 ff.

57. See Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth*, pp. 56 ff. Hans Dieter Betz, reviewing Martin Hengel's *Nachfolge und Charisma* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1968), in *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. LXXXVIII (1969), p. 116, approves the statement that "careful religiohistorical comparison demonstrates that Jesus cannot simply be classified among any of the possible Jewish categories of the time (messianic aspirant, prophet, apocalyptic visionary)."

58. Walter Bauer, *Jesus der Galiläer* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1927).

59. John Knox, *The Ethic of Jesus in the Teaching of the Church* (Abingdon Press, 1961), pp. 20, 25-26. Used by permission.

60. For a dialogue on this creative new departure in Christian thought, which unites Biblical interpretation with contemporary theology, see James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (eds.), *The New Hermeneutic*, Vol. II of *New Frontiers in Theology* (Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1964).

61. James M. Robinson, "Jesus' Parables as God Happening," in F. Thomas Trotter (ed.), *Jesus and the Historian* (The Westminster Press, 1968), p. 145.

62. Ernest C. Colwell, *An Approach to the Teaching of Jesus*, The Quillian Lectures, 1946 (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1947). Used by permission.

63. This seems to me to be clearly implied by Koester's characterization of early Christianity: "We have to do here with a religious movement which is syncretistic in appearance and conspicuously marked by diversification *from the beginning*" (italics added). Koester, "*Gnomai Diaphoroi*," p. 281.

64. Hans Dieter Betz, "The Origin and Nature of Christian Faith According to the Emmaus Legend," *Interpretation*, Vol. XXIII (1969), pp. 32-46. Used by permission.

65. Hans Dieter Betz, "Jesus as Divine Man," in Trotter (ed.), *Jesus and the Historian*, pp. 114-133.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

67. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

70. Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (The Macmillan Company, 1926), pp. 56-57.

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