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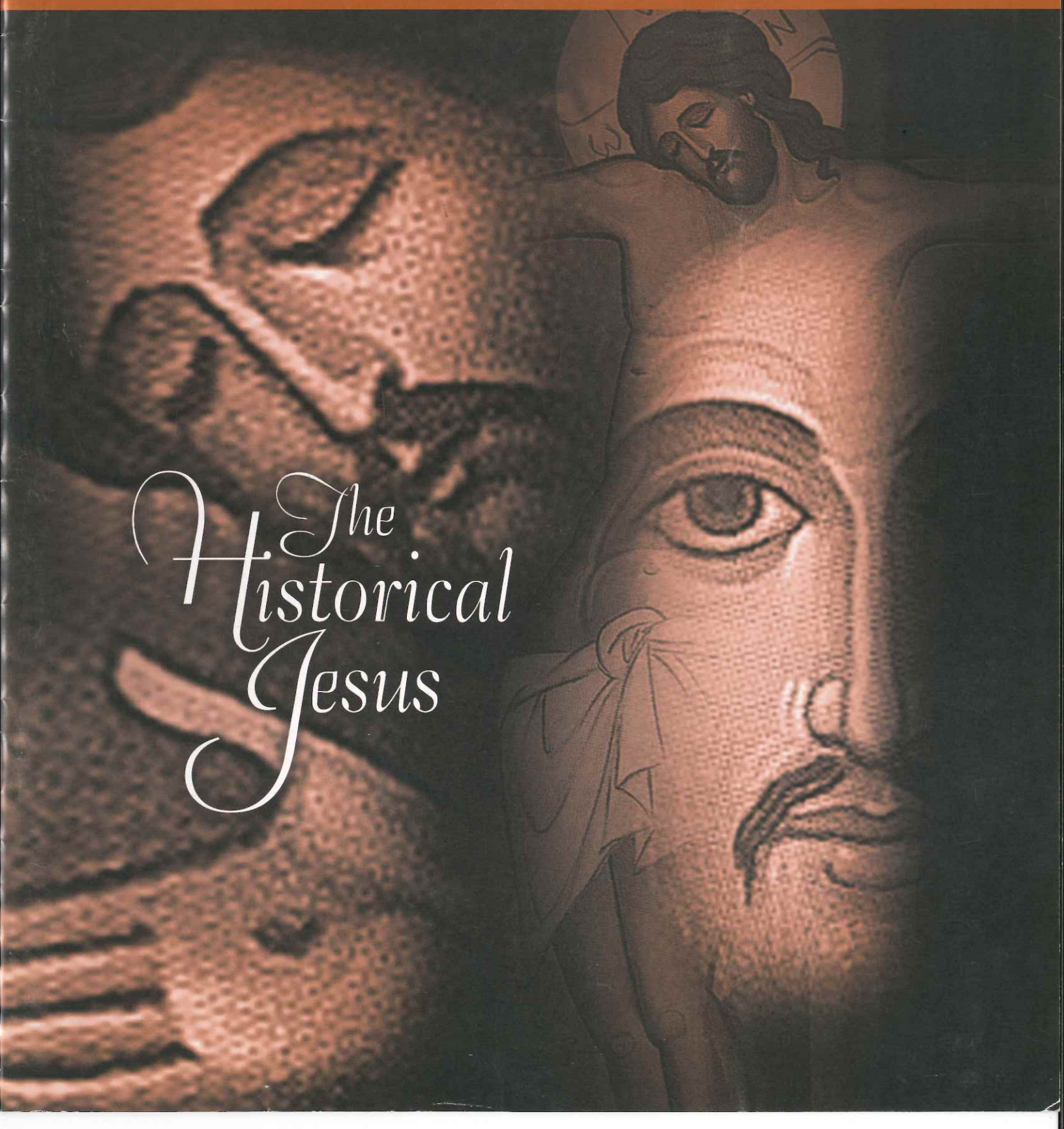
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THEOLOGY, NEWS AND NOTES

FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

JUNE 1999



*The
Historical
Jesus*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The Historical Jesus

STEPHEN T. DAVIS

3

Why the Historical Jesus Matters

STEPHEN T. DAVIS

4

Why We Worship the Historical Jesus

CAREY CHARLES NEWMAN

8

Jesus and Judaism

CRAIG A. EVANS

12

The Jesus Seminar

MARIANNE MEYE THOMPSON

16

Learning Jesus in Liturgy

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

20

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

The Historical Jesus

BY STEPHEN T. DAVIS

Scholars are writing book after book about the historical Jesus, many of them controversial, and little scholarly consensus has emerged. The issues are difficult. Doubtless there can be disagreement even among Christians who have a robust doctrine of Scripture and a sense of the Spirit's guidance of the Church. Do we then have any true information about Jesus? If so, can it form the foundation of Christian faith and practice? In other words, what does the historical Jesus have to do with Christian worship, belief, ministry, spirituality, and witness? That is what this issue of *Theology, News and Notes* is about.

Carey Newman argues convincingly that the crucial connection between the earthly Jesus and the worshiped Lord of the church is the resurrection. Craig Evans explores a seminal issue in Jesus studies: While some contemporary writers severely deemphasize Jesus' Jewishness, Evans clearly shows that he was through and through Jewish.

The most notorious group of Jesus scholars today is the Jesus Seminar. Since their views are so radical and so public, it seemed important to include an explanation and critique of their work. This is provided, wisely and sensibly, by Marianne Meye Thompson. Luke Timothy

Johnson writes movingly and with spiritual depth about encountering Jesus, not through historical reconstruction but in Christian liturgy, especially the Eucharist. Finally, my own essay briefly discusses the "search for the historical Jesus" of the past two

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centuries, Jesus' own self-understanding, and evidence for the resurrection of Jesus.

Because of the pandemic biblical illiteracy of our culture, and even of the church, it is more important than ever for Christian leaders to preach and teach about Jesus. Indeed, as an ordained minister who is not the pastor of a church, I occasionally "supply preach" at churches in my denomination. I almost always talk about the life and person of Jesus, and on many occasions people have expressed their appreciation and hunger for more. We must tell people who Jesus is, what he did, what he

said, and how it relates to us today.

Paul anchors Christian belief and practice in past events—not in myth, philosophy, poetry, or ideology, but in the actual life and teachings of Jesus. Note his careful distinction between his own teachings and Jesus' teachings (1 Cor. 7:10-12). Note the institution of the Eucharist, with its remembrance of the Last Supper (1 Cor. 11:23-26). Note the phrase "as of first importance," followed by a list of people who saw the risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:3-8). Paul believed that our salvation depends upon certain claims about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus being true claims.

So do we. ■

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Why the Historical Jesus Matters

BY STEPHEN T. DAVIS

Suppose one day an astronaut from some far-off galaxy entered my office. Suppose our space traveler was interested in the cultures and religions of the earth, and asked me: "What is this thing called Christianity? Could you tell me please what it is?" I don't know what all I would say in response, but I know what my opening line would be: "Let me tell you about a person whose name is Jesus."

This thought experiment has theological implications. Christian faith begins with Jesus, with stories about who he was and what he did. This is the same impulse that caused the early church, some 30 to 40 years after its founding, to write the Gospels. Christian thinking, worship, and practice must be rightly related to Jesus. If our beliefs and practices are out of touch with the Jesus who actually lived in Palestine centuries ago, Christian faith is in serious trouble. It has no plausible foundation.

Of course the object of Christian faith is not "the historical Jesus," if that means what later theology would call the humanity of Jesus. The object of our faith is the triune God, who is revealed in human history, and especially in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments. The Second Person of the Trinity, the *Logos*, is not the man Jesus but was incarnate in human history as "the historical Jesus."

Nevertheless, questions about who Jesus was and what he said and did are crucial for Christians. Our faith is not a dropped-from-the-sky code of behavior or a set of timeless teachings from a guru. Ours is a religion of history, a faith whose

vital essence consists of great revelatory actions of God in human history, preeminently the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of the Son of God (Heb. 1:1).

So we need to know about Jesus: Who was he? How did he view himself and his mission? What did he do and say? Why was he crucified? Was he really raised from the dead? What was it about Jesus that brought the

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Christian church into existence? For most of Christian history, these questions were answered by simply accepting uncritically what the four canonical Gospels said about Jesus. No major differences were expected or detected between the Jesus of the Gospels and the Jesus who actually lived—or, indeed, between the historian's "Jesus of history" and the church's "Christ of faith."

But a German scholar named H. S. Reimarus (1694-1768), often considered the founder of "the search for the historical Jesus," brought this long era to a close. Reimarus wanted to discover who Jesus was by entirely rational means, i.e., by historical research unfettered by dogmatic considerations or ecclesiastical control. Other notables in what has come to be called the "Old

Quest" were David Friedrich Strauss, author of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835), and Ernest Renan, who wrote *Life of Jesus* (1863). The culmination of the Old Quest was Albert Schweitzer's famous *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1909). Schweitzer's own proposals about Jesus no longer command assent, but his lasting contribution was his critique of his predecessors. He showed conclusively that their "Jesus" was largely a fantasy made in their own image.

The next period in the "quest" is sometimes called "No Quest," largely because of the influence of Rudolf Bultmann. In *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (1921), *Jesus and the Word* (1926), and other influential works, he argued that it is impossible for scholars to come to know much about Jesus. Accordingly, the main object of study for Bultmann and his disciples was not so much Jesus as the early church. Indeed, Bultmann stressed the importance for his own day of the preached *kerygma* of the early church, although many believe that the way he interpreted that message had more to do with existential philosophy than it did with Christianity.

Then in the 1950s a much heralded "New Quest" for the historical Jesus began, under the influence of such scholars as Ernst Kasemann, Gunther Bornkamm, my own Claremont colleague James M. Robinson, and (a few years later) Edward Schillebeeckx. The contemporary continuers of the tradition of the *New Quest* are such figures as Marcus Borg, John Dominic Crossan, Burton Mack, and the members of the Jesus Seminar. What seems to unite the contemporary scholars just noted is: (1) the fact that their "Jesus"—not always for the same reasons—

largely seems to float above his own Jewish background; (2) their insistence that Jesus was not an apocalyptic or eschatological teacher; and (3) their eager willingness to entertain almost any ideas about Jesus, however bizarre, except orthodox ones.

But another group of contemporary scholars, sometimes called the "Third Quest," is also at work: people like Martin Hengel, John Meier, E. P. Sanders, Ben Witherington, and N. T. Wright. They emphasize the Jewishness of Jesus, and consider him an apocalyptic prophet who announced the coming of the Kingdom of God. These folk have no unified theological agenda—they include Catholics and Protestants, liberals and evangelicals—but they all emphasize the importance of the death of Jesus. They ask: What was it about Jesus that caused him to be crucified?

Jesus is a now "hot topic." Many Jesus books have been written in the past 15 years, including at least one by a journalist who is in effect reporting on the current state of Jesus studies. This may be partly due to the media-savvy work of the Jesus Seminar. Indeed, one of the reasons I agreed to serve as integrator of this issue of *Theology, News and Notes* is a conversation I had three years ago with a retired Presbyterian schoolteacher. She had seen Robert Funk, cochair of the Jesus Seminar, on television. She was deeply worried by what he said and in effect was asking me whether it was still intellectually possible to be a believer in Jesus. It certainly is. I hope our essays can show, at least in part, why it is.

One way of approaching the question of the reliability of the picture of Jesus painted in the four Gospels is to ask: What did Jesus think of himself? The traditional way of answering this question, especially in the period

before Reimarus, was simply to quote the Christological statements in John's Gospel, e.g., "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30), or "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). But many biblical scholars deny that these words constitute the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus. These statements, and the many other high Christological statements made about Jesus throughout the Gospels (they say) tell us more

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about the faith of the early church at the time the Gospels were written than they do about the actual teachings of Jesus.

Is that true? Well, it is true that the Gospels are statements of faith rather than "facts-only" biographies of Jesus. (The writer of John even admits as much; see John 20:31.) It is also true that John's Gospel was the last canonical Gospel written, and thus was the furthest removed from the events it describes. As even the early church recognized, it is a more overtly theological interpretation of Jesus than were the synoptics. Moreover, if Jesus spoke and taught in Aramaic, then since the New Testament was written in Greek, almost none of the sayings

attributed to Jesus in the Gospels constitute his *ipsissima verba*.

But a convincing case can be made that much of the material in the Gospels that implies a high Christology can in some form be traced back to Jesus, and that he implicitly claimed the high status that the church attributed to him. Here is one telling fact about the earliest Christians: They practiced *worship* of Jesus. Early Christian prayers were addressed to Jesus, one preserved even in Aramaic ("*Maranatha*"), which attests to its earliness (1 Cor. 16:22; see also 2 Cor. 12:8; 1 Thess. 3:11-13; 2 Thess. 2:16-17; 3:5; 16; Acts 1:24; 7:59-60). There were also doxologies addressed to Christ, or to Christ and the Father together (Rom. 16:27; cf. 2 Cor. 1:20; 2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Peter 3:18; Rev. 1:5-6, 13; cf. 7:10), and hymns of praise to Christ (Phil. 2:6-11; 1 Tim. 3:16; cf. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). In Matthew's Gospel, after the resurrection, Jesus is worshiped (*proskynesis*) by Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (28:9) and by the 11 disciples on the mountain (28:17).

Richard Bauckham argues that the transition from prayers and thanksgiving to Jesus to actual *worship* of Jesus (cf. Acts 13:2) was a smooth and perhaps not even conscious process; there is no evidence of anybody in the earliest Christian community contesting it. He says: "The role which Jesus played in the Christian religion from the beginning was such as to cause him to be treated as God in worship."¹

If Bauckham is correct, why is it so? Perhaps the early Christians worshiped Jesus soon after the resurrection in part because Jesus himself was conscious—at least in some sense—of his divine status and implicitly communicated that fact, by his words and deeds, to his followers. (This is not to say that Jesus thought of himself in terms of the credal

definitions that came centuries later.) This claim can be supported by attending to sayings of Jesus that even radical critics like Bultmann, Norman Perrin, and the members of the Jesus Seminar consider authentic.

For example, consider this statement:

But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you (Luke 11:20; par. Matt. 12:28).

Bultmann enthusiastically accepted the authenticity of this text. While it does not claim divinity, it amounts to a claim by Jesus to be exorcising demons as the agent through which the reign of God enters history. Note the parallel to Exodus 8:19, in which the Egyptian magicians confess their inability to duplicate the plague of gnats, and declare: "This is the finger of God."

Notice also how Jesus took upon himself the authority to relativize, deemphasize, and even in places rewrite Old Testament Law:

Listen to me, all of you, and understand; there is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile (Mark 7:14-15).

The sabbath was made for humankind, and not humankind for the sabbath; so the Son of Man is Lord even of the sabbath (Mark 2:27-28).

Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead (Matt. 8:22).

All three of these texts are accepted as authentic by the critics, and all three amount to radical revisions of Old Testament Law. In the first, Jesus is relativizing the Jewish dietary laws. In the second, Jesus is taking upon

himself the authority to reinterpret the Sabbath laws. And in the third, Jesus is opposing and correcting Mosaic Law. Proper burial of one's relatives was one of the most sacred duties in Palestinian Judaism (see Gen. 50:5-6; Lev. 21:2-3; Tobit 4:3). Jesus was saying that following him took precedence even over that duty.

Other points could be made,² but the conclusion is that Jesus must have considered himself and his own teachings to have divine authority. He believed that salvation had arrived in his

Once it is established that Christians rationally presuppose a worldview called supernaturalism . . . a strong case can be made for the resurrection.

own person and ministry. Notice also (here we are relaxing a bit the methodology of using only texts considered authentic by radical critics) that Jesus took upon himself the divine prerogative to forgive sins (see Mark 2:5, 10; Luke 7:48); spoke to God with apparently unheard of and puzzling intimacy with the Aramaic term *Abba* (perhaps "Papa"³); claimed to be the "Son of Man" who would judge all things and determine our final status before God; and claimed at the trial scene to be "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Mark 14:61-62).

The question of the status or person of Jesus pushes us inevitably toward the resurrection. Although I cannot argue the point here, theologically orthodox

scholars have made a powerful case in recent years for the reality of Jesus' resurrection from the dead—indeed, his bodily resurrection. Once it is established that Christians rationally presuppose a worldview called supernaturalism—God exists, created the world, and has the power and interest occasionally to intervene in human history—a strong case can be made for the resurrection. (Supernaturalism is as opposed to the naturalism or Deism that many critics of the resurrection presuppose.)

It is important to note that the earliest Christians unanimously and passionately believed that Jesus was alive. It was this belief that caused the Jesus movement to survive and thrive (unlike, say, that of John the Baptist or even bar-Kochba a century later). This conviction allowed Christians to overcome both the discouragement of their leader's death, and later persecution. For another, the criticisms of the empty tomb tradition and of the appearance stories that are typically given by critics can, in my view, be answered. Finally, opponents of the resurrection face one huge embarrassment: No one has ever produced a plausible naturalistic explanation of what happened after the crucifixion that accounts for all the accepted facts (e.g., Jesus was crucified and died; early Christians believed in the resurrection). None of the explanations that have been suggested—wrong tomb, swoon, hallucination, mistaken identity, myth—have any compelling evidence in their favor, and many are so weak as to collapse of their own weight once spelled out.

So the claim that Jesus really was raised from the dead by God looks to be, for supernaturalists, by far the best explanation of

the evidence. (I am not claiming that the resurrection by itself proves authentic all Jesus' words and deeds in the Gospels; this is a separate issue.)

Now I have discussed only two out of many important issues relevant to the historical Jesus, and them only briefly. But my point is that the study of Jesus, carefully done, can provide (what radical New Testament criticism cannot do and does not want to do) a plausible basis for Christian teaching and worship. And it is crucial that it do so, since one's views about Jesus Christ are at the heart of the Christianity that one holds. They influence what one will say about virtually every other theological topic—the Trinity, creation, providence, sin, redemption, ethics, ecclesiology, and the sacraments.

Although theologically orthodox Christians must keep their critical faculties alive, they also approach Scripture with a hermeneutic of trust. This is irritating to nonbelievers and radical critics, who see no reason to treat the Bible any differently than any other book. But (as Thomas Oden argues) if God decides to offer salvation to human beings through Jesus Christ; and if Jesus Christ is primarily mediated to people of later generations via written texts; then it follows that God will not allow the testimony of those texts to be massively misleading or false. Obviously, this argument raises issues that cry out for discussion but, for lack of space, I cannot explore them here. Suffice it to say that in my opinion there needs to be, and in fact is, a strong link between the Jesus whom we find in the Gospels and the Christ whom we Christians worship.

"Let me tell you about a person whose name is Jesus." This, again, is what I would say to our hypothetical space traveler who wants to know about Christianity.

I would begin by telling stories about Jesus, the same stories that the apostles and their followers told and wrote down and that have come down to us today. To tell anyone what Christianity is, we must begin with Jesus—with the Jesus who lived in our midst, with "the historical Jesus." ■

To tell anyone what Christianity is, we must begin with Jesus—with the Jesus who lived in our midst, with "the historical Jesus."

ENDNOTES

¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1951), 11. This despite the fact that Bultmann said a great deal about Jesus in *Jesus*.

² N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), xiv.

³ Charlotte Allen, *The Human Christ: The Search for the Historical Jesus* (New York: Free Press, 1998).

⁴ Richard Bauckham, "Jesus, Worship of," *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 815.

⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 162.

⁶ The first is accepted by Norman Perrin and rated pink ("Jesus probably said something like this") by the Jesus Seminar. See Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 149-150, and Robert Funk et al., *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (San Francisco:

HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 36. The second is also colored pink by the Jesus Seminar. The third is colored pink by the Jesus Seminar and accepted as authentic by Perrin.

⁷ See Royce Gruenler, *New Approaches to Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 19-108.

⁸ This point has been disputed by James Barr. See "Abba Isn't 'Daddy,'" *JTS* 39 (1988) and "Abba, Father," *Theology*, 91, no. 741 (1988). For a response to Barr, see Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 408-412. My own claim is that we have lots of Jewish prayers from the first century, and none of them address God as *Abba*, except those of Jesus.

⁹ In an official publication of Fuller Seminary, I gladly mention George E. Ladd's classic, *I Believe in the Resurrection of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W. B. Eerdmans, 1975). See also Gerald O'Collins, S. J., *Jesus Risen* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), William L. Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), and Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1993).

¹⁰ Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life; Systematic Theology*, Vol. II (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), 212.

Why We Worship the Historical Jesus

BY CAREY CHARLES NEWMAN

My life as an interim pastor, supply preacher, and conference leader has, over the last 15 years, taken me to many churches of varying denominational stripes and theological flavors. While it goes without saying that no two congregations are alike (and no single congregation is even alike on any two given Sundays), I have, in the course of my travels, observed some discernible and equally legitimate patterns, especially when it comes to worship. I have found, for example, what I would call a "God devotion." For some congregations the greatness of God serves as the focus and anchor of worship. The liturgy ritualizes God's power, stability, and predictability. By directing their gaze upward, believers are reassured of God's control of the world and, simultaneously, become aware of the absolute "otherness" of God.

I have also found what I would term a "Lord devotion." While in many ways this kind of worship simply remaps the worship of God onto the heavenly Jesus (i.e., the language normally reserved for God is redeployed to image the risen Lord), there is a noticeable shift. While the congregation exults in the present state of affairs brought about by the resurrection, *Lord devotion* is decisively forward looking. Worship becomes the community's way of celebrating now what will be experienced in full then—the victory over the powers of Sin and Death.

A third kind of worship experience features the Holy

Spirit. "Spirit devotion" is intensely inward looking. *Spirit devotion* asks that we worship not only with our minds, but also with the full range of our emotions. It employs the language of immediacy to celebrate personal transformation and the presence of God in times of struggle. Whereas *God devotion* underscores God's distance, *Spirit devotion* stresses God's closeness.

The fourth kind of worship centers upon the earthly Jesus. "Jesus devotion" looks backward upon the life of Jesus. The words

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and deeds of the earthly Jesus are held up as a model for personal and community action. Taking its cue from the words spoken over the Eucharist, the preaching and liturgy of *Jesus devotion* seeks to "remember."

These admittedly informal observations point up what I think is a curious feature of Christianity. While we publicly venerate God, the risen Lord, and the Spirit, we don't worship the historical Jesus in quite the same

way. We remember rather than worship; we commemorate rather than venerate. Why so? Why do we exercise such liturgical restraint with regard to the earthly Jesus and become so willfully extravagant when addressing the risen Lord?

In some ways this question poses a false dichotomy: Allegiance to the Jesus of the Gospels is devotion to the risen Lord. However, given the way in which scholarship has consistently drawn a sharp distinction between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith," this question is a fair one.

Let it be said up front that the theological stakes here are very high. The confessions we recite, the hymns we sing, and the prayers we offer, not to mention the Scripture we cherish, all explicitly proclaim (or implicitly imply) that Jesus—that is, the historical Jesus—was a divine figure. One may fairly argue that the divinity of Jesus is *a*, if not *the*, centerpiece of Christian theology. Without this doctrine there would not be a Trinity, and without the Trinity there would not be Christianity. Simply put, Christianity would cease to be Christianity if it did not engage in the worship of Jesus.

Despite its importance, we often look right past this doctrine's profound and far-reaching communal implications. The divinity of Jesus is so central, so assumed, and so undebated in the praxis of the church that for us to preach, sing, or confess equality among the persons of the Godhead hardly raises an eyebrow. However, this was simply not the case for the earliest Christians.

The earliest Christians not only went out of their way to make an explicit connection

between the earthly Jesus and the risen Lord, but saw this connection as a defining feature of Christianity. The earliest Christian confession "Jesus is Lord" (and thus the title "Lord Jesus") is essentially a claim for continuity.¹ Or, as the book of Acts emblematically puts it, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified" (Acts 2:36). The continuity could not be stated in any stronger terms. It was the crucified Jesus whom God made the Lord.

Those who first observed Christians also saw this connection. The deity of Jesus earned Christians the label of "heretic" from orthodox-minded Jews, while Pliny, a Roman governor, identified the Christian practice of singing "a hymn to Christ as to a god" as a distinguishable feature of the movement. Historically, at least, the divinity of the historical Jesus was a major way for Christianity to define itself against both Judaism and paganism, and for both Jews and pagans to recognize Christians. Despite our liturgical listlessness about the doctrine, the divinity of Jesus was, quite possibly, the most provocative and pivotal feature of Christianity.

That Christians began to engage in the regular, public, and communally sanctioned worship of Jesus—and have continued to do so—is all the more remarkable, given two historical constraints.² First, there was a strong tendency within Judaism to worship only one divine being (not two or three figures). Just like fourth-century Christianity came to be marked and bounded by fully Trinitarian commitments, so first-century Judaism was marked and bounded by monotheism. To be a Jew was to worship God—and only God. Second, Jesus was a good Jewish monotheist. His Kingdom preaching underscored the uniqueness and preeminence of

God. Not only did Jesus not question God's unrivaled position, he was reluctant to receive public veneration himself.

And yet, as Stephen Davis' essay points out, the earliest Jewish-Christian communities did, in fact, worship the risen Jesus—and did so quite early on. We thus arrive at a curious historical and theological dilemma. If first-

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century Judaism had a long and strong tradition prohibiting the veneration of any other figure other than Yahweh, and Jesus himself seemed to live within this theological constraint, just why did the earliest Christians—Jews at heart—begin to worship Jesus? Or, put another way, how do we get from where first-century Jews were (worship of only Yahweh) to where we are today (the public and accepted worship of the risen Jesus alongside of and as Yahweh)?

This question becomes all the more intriguing when asked in light of the last 200 years of

research into the historical Jesus. As a general rule, the quest for the historical Jesus has made it more difficult, and not less, to see how the early church ever got to the point of worshipping Jesus. For example, The "Old Quest" (ca. 1770-1900) was an expressly antitheological and antidogmatic endeavor. In fact, the Old Quest sought to demonstrate that the orthodox belief in Jesus as divine had little or no footing in the historical record. Although Albert Schweitzer's landmark work *Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906) mercifully ended the Old Quest, his portrait of Jesus as a radically minded, Jewish apocalyptic prophet hardly commended Jesus as candidate for the second person of the Trinity.

The period of the "No Quest" (1920s-1950s) combined skepticism about the historical value of the canonical Gospels ("They can tell us nothing about the historical Jesus") with a robust reliance upon comparative religions ("Any significant theological development should be explained by parallels in Hellenistic religion"). Because the "New Quest" (1960s-1970s) so focused upon "Q" (a way of referring to the substantial overlaps in Matthew and Luke not present in Mark) it carried with it little hope for answering how Jesus came to be worshiped. The "Renewed New Quest's" (1980s-1990s) portrait of Jesus as a non-Jewish, noneschatological, Hellenistic Cynic-sage has only widened the gap between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith" (at best) or shown that what came to be known as orthodox Christianity was a terrible misunderstanding of the historical Jesus (at worst). The "Third Quest" (1980s-1990s) runs the same risk as that of Schweitzer—by making Jesus so Jewish, so political, and so

human, that it becomes more difficult to see how he was ever considered anything other than a prophet.

Ironically, then, an answer to the question about whether and why we should worship Jesus—an important question, maybe even the best of questions—has been put in jeopardy by the rigors of historical research. Still, the worship of Jesus is such a novel innovation, one that strikes at the heart of traditional Christianity, that it deserves a historical explanation.

One way to approach this question is to argue that *the innovation had already occurred within Judaism*. This, in reality, turns into an argument about the nature of pre-Christian Judaism. Pre-Christian Judaism, it is asserted, had already entertained the possibility of a second divine being—particularly a divinized human being, commonly referred to as *the Messiah*. Thus, Jesus, by publicly identifying himself as the Messiah, was also proclaiming himself to be divine. However, while it is true that pre-Christian Judaism speculated about all sorts of gloriously described heavenly figures, at no time were any of these divine agents ever worshiped. Indeed, just the opposite. In other words, pre-Christian Judaism never envisioned a second, divine being who merited worship right alongside Yahweh. Moreover, the whole notion of the Messiah, a picture culled from many different texts and then homogenized into a singular figure, lacks a solid historical and textual mooring.

A second approach, favored by many apologetically minded evangelicals, is to argue that *the historical Jesus is the real source of the innovation*. It was Jesus, through his provocative words and deeds (especially his miracles), who first claimed to be

God's equal and thus meritorious of worship. While not wishing to dismiss out of hand the value of such an approach, we must frankly admit that Jesus' divine nature was not central to his Kingdom preaching and praxis. While Jesus prophetically called Israel to repent and messianically embodied the true destiny of Israel, he did not spend his time proving his equality with God. Jesus was crucified under the charges of a false prophet and a would-be Messiah—not for

How do we get from where first-century Jews were (worship of only Yahweh) to where we are today (the public and accepted worship of the risen Jesus alongside of and as Yahweh)?

claiming to be the second person of the Trinity.

A third approach claims that *the deity of Jesus was simply the creation of the church*. It is thought that Christianity either borrowed or developed the doctrine to compete with Hellenistic religions or to silence internal opponents. In either case, the deity of Jesus was not an intrinsic necessity to the Jesus traditions. This explanation, however, fails to reckon with how early and how essential the worship of Jesus was to the new movement.

I would like to put forward a fourth option. I rather think that *it was the resurrection of Jesus which functioned as the historical and theological trigger for the acclamation "Jesus is Lord."* It was because of the

resurrection that the followers of Jesus first engaged in the radical practice of venerating Jesus just as they did God.

Surely no one would argue with the fact that the resurrection validated the messianic claims of Jesus. The resurrection transformed what seemed improbable—"Jesus is more than a prophet; he is Israel's Messiah"—into one of the two pillars of Christian preaching: "Jesus is the Christ."

However, there is more to the resurrection than just vindication. The resurrection was a revelatory event itself. As Paul would say, it is an *apocalupsis*, a revelation. The resurrection not only put existing information about Jesus in a new light ("Jesus' claims about the nature of the Kingdom, God's purposes for Israel, and his own role as prophet and Messiah are all true"), it also disclosed new information about the historical Jesus to his community of followers ("Jesus is Lord"). In and through the resurrection, the followers of Jesus discovered that this crucified Messiah had become installed as God's equal. This is precisely the point of the Philippian hymn (in 2:5-11): It was the resurrection which installed Jesus as a heavenly plenipotentiary worthy of the veneration formerly reserved for Yahweh. The resurrection discloses what was true all along—Jesus the Christ is Lord.

I recently celebrated a birthday, a hard one since it had a zero behind it. After a nice evening out with my wife—just the two of us—I returned to find a house full of friends and stacks of letters and cards. Leanne, my wife, had successfully put one over on me. While I had looked forward to our dinner together, I had not suspected this. However, after the surprise, I was able to

look back over the week and see clues—Leanne's careful attention to the mail; the multiple trips to the store; and several hushed phone conversations. All of these, as suggestive as they were individually and collectively, didn't add up to a party. But having experienced the party, it was easy to look back and see the outlines of what was true all along.

We read the Gospels with a luxury. We bask in the light shed by the revelatory powers of the resurrection. We see things about the historical Jesus that the first followers didn't and couldn't. We now see clearly that the historical Jesus was more than a prophet, the one who came to call Israel to repentance. We now see clearly that he was more than the Messiah, the one who came to embody, literally, Israel's destiny. Because of the resurrection, we now know something that was true all along—that Jesus is the Lord, the one who was the bodily incarnation of the one true God.

We thus arrive at a position where we can answer our original set of questions. The historical Jesus is central to the worship of the confessing Church because of the resurrection. It is the resurrection which allows us to remember and, most importantly, it is the resurrection which demands that we worship. It is the resurrection which binds the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith. Simply stated, the resurrection transforms our remembering into worship, our commemoration into veneration.

The practical implications of this are enormous. For example, we should never be shy about preaching the Gospels. In fact, preaching about Jesus—the historical Jesus—is an essential act of worship. Remembering what he did and what he said becomes imperative once we have learned who he really was and that being his faithful disciples

entails modeling our life after his. Baptism not only explicitly makes this connection between Jesus' earthly death and heavenly resurrection, but it does so in a way which provides structure for spiritual development. We are to die to self and be reborn over and over again. It is precisely this process of transformation that Paul calls true worship (see Rom. 12:1-2). The Eucharist, while memorializing the words of Jesus' final meal with his disciples, is also eaten under the sign of resurrection. We memorialize his death "until he comes" in the fullness of resurrection life. The songs of the church aid greatly by

It is the resurrection which binds the Jesus of history to the Christ of faith. . . . The resurrection transforms our remembering into worship, our commemoration into veneration.

grounding our veneration of the risen Lord in the model of humility and self-sacrifice exemplified by Jesus.

In other words, every act of remembering is an act of worship, and every act of worship is predicated on the fact that there is One to remember. And it is the resurrection which both allows and compels us to exclaim, "The historical Jesus is Lord." ■

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ENDNOTES

¹ See, especially, L. W. Hurtado, "Lord," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin and D. G. Reid (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 560-69.

² Alan F. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

³ See, further, A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982).

⁴ Richard Bauckham, "Jesus, Worship of," *Anchor Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:812-19.

⁵ See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1997).

⁶ L. W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

Jesus and Judaism

BY CRAIG A. EVANS

What more than anything else," says Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, "incited them to the war was an ambiguous oracle, found in their sacred scriptures, to the effect that at that time one from their country would become ruler of the world" (Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 6.5.4 §312). We suspect that Josephus has in mind the prophecy of Numbers 24:17 ("from Jacob a star shall go forth") not only because it fits so well the immediate context, but because a few paragraphs earlier he mentions a star that appeared over the city of Jerusalem, followed by a comet that shone in the sky for a year: "By the inexperienced this was regarded as a good omen" (*Jewish Wars*, 6.5.4 §289-91).

This is a remarkable admission on the part of Josephus, for the wily survivor of the great rebellion scrupulously avoids the subject of messianism in his scattered discussion of Jewish beliefs. He does this deliberately, so that his Roman audience will view Jewish faith as constituting no threat to the empire. This apparently inadvertent admission is carefully camouflaged, for Josephus claims that the prophecy of Jewish scripture was in fact fulfilled by the acclamation of Vespasian as emperor while on Jewish soil. Notwithstanding Josephus' clever strategy and resignification of sacred scripture, we nonetheless catch an important glimpse of popular Jewish messianic expectation. It is in the light of this expectation that Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom of God (Mark 1:14-15) should be understood.

Josephus' reluctance to acknowledge the messianic dimension of the Judaism of his

day is curiously paralleled by a similar reluctance in scholarly circles today. Some scholars who are engaged in the "Third Quest" of the historical Jesus assume that Jesus had no messianic self-understanding and had no interest in eschatology or in the

Josephus' reluctance to acknowledge the messianic dimension of the Judaism of his day is curiously paralleled by a similar reluctance in scholarly circles today.

restoration of Israel. Indeed, some of these scholars deride the notion.¹ But an even-handed assessment of the sources—biblical and extra-biblical—suggest that Jesus' message and activities situate him squarely at the center of Jewish hopes and concerns. There are five important elements that make this clear: (1) the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the expectation of Israel's restoration; (2) the miracles and exorcisms; (3) Jesus' messianic self-understanding; (4) a high view of the authority of Torah; and (5) teachings and activities in the Temple precincts. Let us review these elements.

PROCLAMATION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL

The Markan evangelist summarizes Jesus' message in this way: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). Jesus' teaching is characterized by Kingdom parables in all sources and layers of tradition (i.e., Mark, Q, and material unique to Matthew and Luke). These parables closely resemble those of the rabbis in subsequent generations.² Moreover, the very proclamation itself, "The kingdom of God is at hand," reflects the Aramaic paraphrase of Isaiah 40:9 and 52:7, both of which read: "Behold, the kingdom of your God is revealed!" Jesus' predilection for the book of Isaiah, his frequent preaching and teaching in the synagogue, and the coherence between his teaching and the Aramaic paraphrase of Isaiah (which emerged in the synagogue)³ strongly argue for understanding Jesus' proclamation in the light of a popular Jewish piety deeply influenced by prophetic scripture. Burton Mack's recent attempt to understand the expression "Kingdom of God" in Hellenistic, philosophical tones is not persuasive.⁴

Jesus' appointment of the Twelve (Mark 3:14, 6:7) suggestively points to ideas of the restoration of Israel.⁵ Also of significance is that Jesus called these special disciples "apostles," that is, those "sent" to proclaim the message of the Kingdom. This concept is most probably rooted in Isaiah 52:7 (cf. Rom. 10:14-15, where Paul appeals to this passage to clarify the apostolic office) and 61:1-2. The latter passage Jesus applied to himself in his reply to the imprisoned John the Baptist: "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised

up, and the poor have good news preached to them" (Matt. 11:5; cf. Luke 4:16-30).

Moreover, Jesus promises his disciples that they will sit upon 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28; Luke 22:28-30). This promise, in combination with the threatening Parable of the Wicked Vineyard Farmers (Mark 12:1-120), clearly implies that Jesus foresaw a change in Israel's administration. The exploitative ruling priests will be replaced by Jesus' disciples. Thus, Jesus understood himself as anointed of the Spirit to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom, a task he has delegated to 12 chosen disciples, whose very number signifies the restoration of Israel.

MIRACLES AND EXORCISMS

Jesus linked his miracles and exorcisms to the proclamation of the Kingdom of God: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20). Evidently Jesus understood himself as the one, promised by John (cf. Mark 1:7), who is "stronger": "But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house" (Mark 3:27). For Jesus the miracles, especially the exorcisms, offered powerful, tangible evidence that God's Kingdom was invading and overpowering Satan's kingdom.

Morton Smith tried to define the miracles and exorcisms of Jesus in terms of Greco-Roman magic.⁶ This approach, however, has gained few adherents. Geza Vermes' Jewish holy man paradigm rings truer.⁷ The upshot is that Jesus' miracles are still best explained in the light of Palestinian Judaism of late antiquity, miracles intended to document the powerful presence of God who is in the process of reclaiming and restoring Israel.⁸

MESSIANIC SELF-UNDERSTANDING

The proclamation of the Kingdom of God, the sense of empowerment, and the demonstration of power over Satan at the very least lead to the conclusion that Jesus possessed a sense of mission. But his appeal to Isaiah 61:1-2 suggests that he understood himself as the one "anointed" of the Lord, that is, as Israel's Messiah. A recently published scroll from Qumran has lent additional support to this traditional Christian belief. According to 4Q521, "Heaven and earth will obey his Messiah and all that is in them will not turn away from the commandments of the holy ones . . . for (the Lord)

It is highly probable that Jesus was understood by himself and his closest followers in messianic terms prior to the Easter event.

will honor the pious upon the throne of the eternal Kingdom, setting prisoners free, opening the eyes of the blind, raising up those who are bowed down. . . . For he will heal the wounded, revive the dead, proclaim good news to the poor." This passage, which contains allusions to Isaiah 26:19 (raising the dead), 35:5-6 (opening the eyes of the blind), and 61:1-2 (proclaiming good news to the poor), parallels Jesus' reply to John the Baptist. Because 4Q521 implies that these wonderful

things happen at the time of the Messiah, we may correctly assume that by describing his ministry in the same terms, Jesus was telling John that, yes, indeed he is the Messiah, the "one who is to come."

It is highly probable that Jesus was understood by himself and his closest followers in messianic terms prior to the Easter event for two basic reasons. First, all of his followers spoke of Jesus as the Messiah or Christ. There may have been theological differences about this matter or that, but there is no evidence of anyone in his following who simply thought of Jesus as a beloved rabbi or prophet. Such widespread, universal opinion is best explained as having its origin in Jesus himself, and not simply in an idea that arose solely on the basis of Easter. Second, the Easter event alone cannot account for a messianic assessment of Jesus. There simply is no tradition that expected a messianic contender to die and then be resurrected as evidence of his messiahship. Had no one thought of Jesus as the Messiah prior to Easter, his alleged resurrection should not have led people to think of him as the Messiah. Had Jesus died on the cross simply as a rabbi, or prophet, or philosopher, then in the aftermath of his resurrection his followers would have continued to think of him as a rabbi, or prophet, or philosopher, whose teaching and life had been dramatically vindicated.

Finally, his crucifixion as "King of the Jews" is best explained in reference to a prior messianic identity, as opposed to an identity as a rabbi, or prophet, or philosopher. The epithet "King of the Jews" is very probably authentic, for it does not represent Christian titles for Jesus. Jesus is Messiah, Son of God, Lord, and Savior. He is not King of the Jews.

HIGH VIEW OF THE AUTHORITY OF TORAH

According to Luke 10:25-28, an expert in the Law asks Jesus: "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus responds with questions of his own: "What is written in the Law?" And how does he read it? The Scripture scholar responds by reciting the double commandment, a commandment which Jesus also is said to have recited (Mark 12:29-31): "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself." Jesus commends the man for his answer: "You have answered right; do this, and you will live." The Scripture scholar's question constitutes the classic Jewish religious question (see also Mark 10:17). His answer, prompted by Jesus' question, reflects a summary of the Law that is attested in various forms in many sources (cf. *T. Iss.* 5:2; 7:6; *T. Dan* 5:3; *Ep. Artist.* 229; *Philo, Virt.* 1, 95; *Spec. Leg.* 2.63; *Abr.* 208).⁹ Jesus' positive response, in which he alludes to Leviticus 18:5, could not possibly be more thoroughly Jewish.

Does the question of the greatest commandment derive from authentic tradition? It probably does. Had this exchange been produced by a Christian community, surely the right answer would have been different. After all, Christians proclaimed that salvation came through faith in the risen Jesus (e.g., Acts 2:38; 4:12; Rom. 10:0), not through obedience to the Jewish Law. Therefore, Luke 10:25-28, even if edited and recontextualized, must derive from the life and ministry of Jesus, not from the Christian community.

What is especially interesting here is that once again Jesus' teaching presupposes Jewish interpretive tradition. Jesus' assurance to the legal expert ("Do this, and you will live") alludes to

Leviticus 18:5, as commentators recognize.¹⁰ But Leviticus 18:5 says nothing about "eternal life" which is what the legal expert had asked about. Evidently, Jesus presupposed the Aramaic paraphrase: "You should observe my ordinances and my laws, which, if a person practices them, he shall live by them in eternal life" (*Tg. Onq Lev.* 18:5). The antiquity of this interpretive tradition is attested at Qumran, where those

We have a very Jewish Jesus who spoke the language of Judaism and spoke to the needs and hopes of many of his countrymen.

who do "the desires of his will, 'which a man should do and so have life in them' [Lev. 18:5] . . . shall receive eternal life" (CD 3:15-16, 20). Jesus' high regard for Torah places him squarely at the center of Jewish faith and piety.

ACTIONS IN JERUSALEM

Jesus' actions in Jerusalem during Passion Week are entirely consistent with actions taken by other Jews in late antiquity. Jesus spends virtually all the daylight hours in the Temple precincts teaching and disputing points of Jewish interpretation and belief. His entry into the city appears to have been deliberately modeled on Zechariah 9:9. Other elements of Zechariah are in evidence, such as criticizing the business activities in the Temple precincts (Mark 11:16-17; cf. Zech. 14:20-21). In his demonstration (the so-called "cleansing of the Temple") Jesus appeals to the great oracle of Isaiah 56:1-8, which envisioned the day when peoples from all over the world would come to Jerusalem to worship. This is not the creation of the church, but

authentic tradition. Why would early Christians have Jesus speak of people going to Jerusalem to worship God in the Temple? Christians were seeking to bring people into the church, to worship God in the name of his Son Jesus.

Critical of Temple polity, Jesus alludes to Jeremiah 7:11 ("cave of robbers"), thus implying that the Temple establishment faced the same danger that the Temple establishment centuries earlier had faced. In appearing to Jeremiah 7, Jesus has once again assumed the role of Jewish prophet, much as another Jesus (this one a son of Ananias) would do 30 years later (cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 6.5.3 §300-309).¹¹ Jesus utters the Parable of the Wicked Tenant Farmers, which again reflects acquaintance with the Aramaic paraphrase of Isaiah, warns of the avarice of the scribes, laments the poverty of the widow who gave her last penny (her whole life), and debates with Sadducees the question of resurrection. Finally, he speaks of the Temple's certain doom, retires to eat the Passover meal with his disciples, and slips out to pray. At every point we find Jesus behaving in a manner that is perfectly intelligible from a Jewish perspective.

CONCLUSION

A more thorough review of Jesus' teaching would only add to this picture. Jesus is situated squarely within Palestinian Judaism. It is true that there was no such thing as a non-Hellenistic Palestine, at least not after Alexander's conquest, but some scholars in recent years have exaggerated the degree of Greco-Roman influence and in so doing have minimized the Jewish context in which Jesus lived and ministered. Some in the Jesus Seminar have tried to refashion Jesus as a philosopher of sorts, perhaps even a Cynic. It has even been argued that a Cynic or two

might have lived in Sepphoris and that because Jesus lived in nearby Nazareth he might have come in contact with one of these Cynics.¹² Perhaps. But in growing up in Nazareth, Jesus grew up next door to a synagogue; and as we have seen, there are in Jesus' teaching and behavior numerous indications of longtime acquaintance with the synagogue. Where the weight of probabilities fall I shall let the reader decide. The Jesus Seminar cannot simply make a Jesus a "Cynic Jew"; they have to create a "Cynic Judaism." In the final analysis, we have a very Jewish Jesus who spoke the language of Judaism and spoke to the needs and hopes of many of his countrymen. The movement he launched cannot really be adequately understood in another context.

One of the first things seminarians are taught about biblical interpretation is the importance of context. If the interpreter has found the proper context, his or her interpretation will be the better informed and more accurate for it. Becoming acquainted with Jesus' Jewish context is a must for sound exegesis; finding it brings us much closer to the Jesus of history and of faith. ■

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ENDNOTES

¹ Notably, B. L. Mack, "The Kingdom Sayings in Mark," *Forum* 3.1 (1987) 3.47, esp. 17. Mack caricatures traditional scholarship, which supposedly holds to the "view that Galilee was abuzz with apocalyptic hysteria, the hotbed of rebellion under Herod Antipas."

² See B. H. Young, *Jesus and His Jewish*

Becoming acquainted with Jesus' Jewish context is a must for sound exegesis; finding it brings us much closer to the Jesus of history and of faith.

Parables: Rediscovering the Roots of Jesus' Teaching (New York: Paulist, 1989); H. K. McArthur and R. M. Johnston, *They Also Taught in Parables: Rabbinic Parables from the First Centuries of the Christian Era* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). B. Scott (*Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 18) views Jesus' rabbinic-like parables "as composed out of the elements of a traditional thesaurus."

³ On the coherence between Jesus' teaching and the Aramaic paraphrase of Isaiah, see B. D. Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus' Use of the Interpreted Scripture of His Time* (GNS 8; Wilmington: Glazier, 1984).

⁴ B. L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 69-74 idem, "The Kingdom Sayings in Mark," 3-47. Mack claims that the expression "Kingdom of God" is rare in Palestine, but its appearance in the Aramaic paraphrases of Scripture and the numerous references to it in the Songs of the Sabbath Scrolls at Qumran and Masada belies this claim.

⁵ As is rightly argued by B. F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 154; and E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 95-106.

⁶ M. Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978). For a better, more carefully nuanced comparison of Jesus' miracles with magical practices and beliefs in late antiquity, see J. M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (SBT 2.28 London: SCM Press, 1974); Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 157-73; and H. C. Kee, *Medicine, Miracles and Magi in New Testament Times* (SNTSMS, 55; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

⁷ G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (London: Collins; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 58-82. See also G. H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist: A Contribution to the Study of the Historical Jesus* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1993; repr. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993).

⁸ See also C. Brown, "Synoptic Miracle Stores," *Forum* 2/4 (1986), 55-76.

⁹ See D. C. Allison, "Mark 12.28-31 and the Decalogue," in C. A. Evans and W. R. Stegner (eds.), *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 270-78.

¹⁰ See J. A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke X-XXIV* (AB 24A; Garden City: Doubleday, 1985) 881.

¹¹ Jesus son of Ananias proclaimed Jerusalem's doom from A.D. 62 until his death in 69. According to Josephus, his words alluded to Jer. 7:34.

¹² J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991).

The Jesus Seminar

BY MARIANNE MEYE THOMPSON

Jesus is news. In the last decade or so, Jesus has been featured regularly on the cover of major magazines such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *The Atlantic*, especially at Christmas and Easter. Consider that while political figures, sports heroes, and celebrities regularly appear on magazine covers, founders of religious movements rarely do. Buddha, Muhammad, and Joseph Smith do not appear yearly or semiannually on *Time* magazine. Jesus does.

The recent attention devoted to Jesus in the news media can be attributed to a large extent to the work of "The Jesus Seminar." The seminar's efforts to discover the "historical Jesus," and to publicize their often controversial findings, have attracted wide attention. It is not just Jesus who is suddenly headline news, but academics studying Jesus who grab the headlines. For scholars whose academic publications are seldom read by the general public, this turn of events has been both surprising and perplexing. What is the *Jesus Seminar*, and why has it attracted such attention?

ORIGINS OF THE JESUS SEMINAR

The Jesus Seminar was founded in 1985 by Robert W. Funk, a former executive secretary of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL), the primary North American scholarly organization for the study of the Bible. Funk founded Scholars Press, the publishing house of the SBL, and later, after he had left his position with SBL, founded Polebridge Press. Polebridge sponsors the Jesus Seminar and publishes the *Foundations and Facets Forum*, a journal which publishes papers and reports of the seminar's

meetings. The organizing board of the Jesus Seminar consisted of John Dominic Crossan, Fred Francis, Burton Mack, Robert Tannehill, and Robert Funk. At one time, the seminar had about 200 members or "Fellows," but the number consistently attending and participating in its semiannual meetings is understandably smaller. The Jesus Seminar is not affiliated with the SBL in any official capacity, and its member-

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ship is but a fraction of the more than 5,000 scholars who regularly attend the meetings of the SBL.

The seminar's goal is to carry on historical investigation in order to find the "real facts" about Jesus. In other words, the seminar was undertaking its own version of the so-called "quest of the historical Jesus." In its initial investigations, the seminar focused solely on the words of Jesus, but in recent years has also studied the acts of Jesus. The seminar meets twice a year to present papers and discuss its findings, with the hope of reach-

ing a consensus concerning the actual words and acts of the historical Jesus.

The seminar's methods and conclusions soon began to garner public attention. In his opening remarks at the first meeting of the seminar, its founder, Robert Funk, made it clear this was part of the seminar's strategy: "We are going to carry out our work in full public view; we will not only honor the freedom of information, we will insist on the public disclosure of our work and, insofar as it lies within our power, we shall see to it that the public is informed of our judgments."¹ Funk also made it clear that it was the seminar's goal to inform the church and the public of the "assured results of criticism" which had been hidden from it by "the religious establishment." In a nutshell, the "assured results of criticism" were that the Gospels of the New Testament are products of the faith of the early Christian community which render unrecognizable the words and acts of Jesus. According to Funk, it was time the church became aware of the vast gulf between Jesus as he is pictured in the Gospels and spoken about in the church, and Jesus "as he really was."

One of the aims of the Jesus Seminar was to replace the church's picture of Jesus with a reconstruction it deemed more historically adequate and more serviceable to life in the world today. Again, in his opening remarks to the first meeting of the Jesus Seminar, Funk argued that the narrative of the Bible, from creation to ultimate recreation, simply does not work today. Funk bluntly said, "We need a new narrative of Jesus, a new gospel, if you will, that places Jesus differently in the grand scheme, the epic story."

But it is not only the church's picture of Jesus that has to go. The dominant academic picture of Jesus must be banished to the rubbish heap as well. That

dominant academic picture is sometimes called the "apocalyptic" or "eschatological" Jesus. This phrase captures the belief that Jesus thought God would soon usher in the eschatological or end-time Kingdom, and that the proclamation of and preparation for the coming of that Kingdom lay at the heart of Jesus' mission. Since the work of Johannes Weiss and Albert Schweitzer in the early 1900s, this has been the dominant view of Jesus, and in one form or another it persists in the work of most scholars today. Some scholars have taken up the traditional view, but modified it by arguing that Jesus did not expect an imminent cataclysmic event, the establishment of the Kingdom of God, but spoke of his work as "inaugurating" the Kingdom which would be established someday. This view, often dubbed "inaugurated eschatology," was championed in various forms by authors such as W. G. Kümmel, Joachim Jeremias, and George E. Ladd. According to the Jesus Seminar, this portrait of Jesus does not faithfully represent the Jesus of history; unhistorical, unbelievable, and unserviceable, the portrait has to go.

METHODS OF THE JESUS SEMINAR

The seminar's discussions and conclusions regarding the words and works of Jesus have been published in two volumes, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (Macmillan, 1993) and *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus*. (HarperCollins, 1998). It reached its conclusions by employing the typical academic model of discussing papers written by its members. But the seminar gained notoriety for the procedure it introduced of having members vote on the historicity of the Gospel material. By now its infamous practice of voting on the historicity of the words and deeds of Jesus by casting colored beads is probably the most widely

known thing about it. The four colors of beads—red, pink, gray, and black—are explained this way in *The Five Gospels*.

Red: *That's Jesus!*

Pink: *Sure sounds like Jesus.*

Gray: *Well, maybe.*

Black: *There's been some mistake.*

Through its procedure of voting, the seminar hoped to test its consensus and to publish the ultimate "red-letter" edition of the Gospels with the *real* words of Jesus set in red type, and with all the "shades" of historical prob-

The rationalist and anti-supernaturalist presuppositions which have determined [the Jesus Seminar's] conclusions are clearly evident.

ability graphically presented as well. The product is *The Five Gospels*. This volume includes the seminar's translation, dubbed the "Scholars Version" of the four Gospels and the Gospel of Thomas, the "fifth" Gospel.

The seminar has published its materials through academic channels, but has also issued press releases to the popular media and press. Headlines that announced its conclusions caused more than a few raised eyebrows. "Jesus didn't teach the Lord's Prayer" and other such negative conclusions were trumpeted abroad. The publication of *The Five Gospels* merited a feature story on National Public Radio, and Dominic Crossan appeared on *The Larry King Show*.

What assumptions could lead scholars to study the New Testament in such a way that it led to denying even the Lord's Prayer to Jesus?

ASSUMPTIONS OF THE JESUS SEMINAR

The Jesus Seminar assumes that the canonical Gospels, all written after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, are so shaped by the faith and beliefs of the early church and developments in early Christianity that they obscure rather than present the Jesus of the Gospels and of Christian creed is not the "real" Jesus—Jesus "as he really was." The *real* Jesus is the Jesus behind the Gospels, and this *historical* or *real* Jesus is the more important figure for the life and faith of the church today.

In order to ferret out the *real* Jesus, members of the Jesus Seminar hold that the Gospels should be studied using historical-critical methods of investigation. Such methods include putting Jesus in his historical context, assessing the relative date of sources and development of the traditions, and making historical judgments about the material of the Gospels. These procedures are standard historical methods, although not all New Testament scholars who use them today come to the same sorts of conclusions. The Jesus Seminar also urges the use of newer methods of social-scientific criticism. So, for example, the sociological study of peasant groups can illumine first-century Palestinian culture and Jesus. Dominic Crossan's massive *Jesus: The Life of a Jewish Mediterranean Peasant* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), makes extensive use of such methods and of computer analysis to assess the historicity of the Gospels.

As already stated, the Jesus Seminar takes a dim view of the reliability of the Gospels. The oral traditions behind the Gospels are assumed to be very fluid. Early Christians freely created material which came to be part of the tradition. Therefore, the burden of proof falls on the scholar who wishes to establish the authenticity of the material in the Gospels, rather than on the one who

questions it. In other words, the material is assumed to be nonhistorical. Those who wish to use the Gospels to argue that they are reliable guides to what Jesus said and did must first establish their historicity.

One of the criteria used by the seminar to assess the historicity of Gospel material is the so-called "criterion of dissimilarity," renamed "distinctive discourse." According to this criterion, material can be assigned to Jesus if it could not have come to him from his Jewish context or been attributed to him by the early church. As has repeatedly been pointed out, but is apparently ignored by the Jesus Seminar, this criterion will yield a Jesus who cannot be explained within his Jewish context, nor provide the impetus for early Christian theology. The irony is that in avowing to be thoroughly objective, the Jesus Seminar seems not to acknowledge the tremendous historical problems inherent in the use of this criterion.

The Jesus Seminar has charted a very distinct path in other ways. Most questionable is its high regard for the historical value of the Gnostic *Gospel of Thomas*. The Jesus Seminar argues that this Gospel was written between AD 50 and 60, and that it is an early, independent source for studying Jesus. On the contrary, the vast majority of New Testament scholars hold that while there may be sayings in the Gospel of Thomas which really go back to Jesus himself, Thomas is of limited value as a historical source because of its second-century date and overtly Gnostic interpretation of synoptic traditions. So in its insistence on the early date and historical value of Thomas, the Jesus Seminar evidences an idiosyncratic use of sources. Still, of the sayings which do not have synoptic parallels, only two of them got even a pink rating.

The other early source is Q, contemporaneous with Thomas. "Q" is a designation in New Testament scholarship for the

material common to Matthew and Luke, but not found in Mark. Again, the majority of New Testament scholars working today adopt some form of the so-called Two Source theory of the origin of the Gospels, holding that Mark and Q are sources used by Matthew and Luke in composing their Gospels. Oddly enough, however, the seminar loves Q, which it has not seen, a good deal more than Mark, which it has seen. Only one saying in Mark makes the red letter edition: "Pay the emperor

In its attempt to get "the real Jesus," the seminar has baptized its own reconstruction of Jesus in the place of the canonical witnesses.

what belongs to the emperor, and God what belongs to God" (Mark 12:17). Yet even Q is suspect, for the eschatological material in it comes from an alleged second layer of the hypothetical Q.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE JESUS SEMINAR

The seminar concluded that about 18 percent of the Gospel sayings which are attributed to Jesus were actually spoken by him. In other words, this "red-letter" edition has very little type set in red! All eschatological material, including warnings of judgment and references to the future coming of the Kingdom or the Son of man, disappears. Jesus' followers either misunderstood or misrepresented Jesus, defecting to the more pedestrian and apocalyptic conceptions of John [the

Baptist]. The "Jesus of history" has been virtually entirely eclipsed, except for the few fragments of his teaching which the Jesus Seminar has been able to salvage.

The seminar concluded that about 16 percent of the acts attributed to Jesus could be colored red or pink, and hence were likely actions done by or to him. The bare outlines of his life fit here: He was baptized by John; had followers, but did not "call" them; was arrested, tried, and crucified as a public nuisance. But Jesus did not walk on water, feed the multitude, change water into wine, or raise Lazarus from the dead. Neither did he himself rise bodily from the dead. In other words, almost nothing of what the Gospels report about him is historical. While the seminar justifies its conclusions as the fruit of historical research, the rationalist and anti-supernaturalist presuppositions which have determined their conclusions are clearly evident.

Jesus emerges neither as a miracle worker, eschatological prophet, nor Messiah. He had no real mission to and among his own people, Israel, but mixed it up with Gentiles and Cynic philosophers, itinerant teachers of a way of life entailing freedom from all constraints and social entanglements. Indeed, the seminar frequently describes Jesus as a "party animal." Jesus himself is a wandering teacher of wisdom, a "secular sage," particularly akin to the ancient Cynics. A controversial social critic, Jesus shocked his contemporaries by calling for a reversal of roles or frustrating ordinary, everyday expectations. He was egalitarian, nonhierarchical, and antipatriarchal. A "laconic sage," he used parables, humor, and exaggeration to defend himself and his disciples from criticism, but did not initiate debate or dialogue. His authentic words have no connection with the Old Testament, and all passages which show Jesus quoting from it are ruled inauthentic. He never made claims for

himself, most certainly not messianic claims. True, he had a strong consciousness of God, but he apparently had no sense of a mission he was sent to carry out.

The grand result is a far cry from the confession, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Instead, Jesus was a person who apparently said some things now and then. A few of these things can be detected by scraping away the layers of dirt that have encrusted the original. Why one would have crucified this Jesus, and how he could have been the impetus for the rise of Christianity, remain on such accounts utterly inexplicable. Traditional Christianity is simply a colossal mistake, and the Gospels are gross misrepresentations of Jesus.

RESPONSES TO THE JESUS SEMINAR

In its attempt to get "the real Jesus," the seminar has baptized its own reconstruction of Jesus in the place of the canonical witnesses. Christian theologians have been rightly critical of the sharp break posited between Jesus and the church. Historians have criticized the Jesus Seminar for its reconstructions of the ancient world. For example, the assumptions that Jesus resembled the Greek Cynic philosophers more than first-century Jewish rabbis or prophets, that he had regular contact with them and Gentiles, and that there were no Pharisees in Galilee during Jesus' time, cry out for historical justification. Scholars of the Gospels have taken the seminar to task for their assumptions about the nature of the Gospels, the transmission of the Gospel traditions, and their confidence that their methods can "rescue" Jesus from the writers of the Gospels.

More traditional biblical scholarship is nowhere near making the public splash that the seminar has made. This leaves the impression in the public mind

that all scholars who study Jesus pursue the same methods and arrive at the same conclusions that the seminar comes to, or that those who do not are "covering up" the facts. But in spite of their claims to be promulgating the "assured results of scholarship," the seminar has a clear ideology, idiosyncratic set of assumptions, and dubious methods by which it reaches highly disputed conclusions. The seminar speaks only for a small group of North American

The goal of such studies was to pare the Gospels down to a bare minimum of "assured results," and to replace the Gospels' rich portraits of Jesus with minimalist sketches.

scholars, committed to a certain ideology and set of assumptions. Many scholars who undertake study of the historical Jesus come to drastically different conclusions.

In many ways, the seminar represents an older method of doing studies of the historical Jesus. The goal of such studies was to pare the Gospels down to a bare minimum of "assured results," and to replace the Gospels' rich portraits of Jesus with minimalist sketches. But recently, other scholars who have studied the historical Jesus have taken a different tack. E. P. Sanders, himself no friend of orthodoxy, argues "that we can know pretty well what Jesus was out to accomplish, that we can know a lot about what he said, and that those two things make sense within the world of first-century Judaism."²

The Jesus Seminar has sparked renewed interest in Jesus, with a veritable explosion of

publication. Unfortunately, much of this solid body of material has not been made as public as have the disputed and controversial conclusions of the Jesus Seminar. Too much is at stake to leave the territory of Jesus studies only to those whose portrait of the historical Jesus is so significantly at odds both with witness of the Gospels themselves and with the confessions of the Christian church. ■

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ENDNOTES

¹ These remarks can be found at the following Internet address: <http://westarinstitute.org/JS/Remarks/remarks.htm>. The Jesus Seminar has a site as well. One can log on either through www.religion.rutgers.edu/jseminar/jsem_b.html or www.westarinstitute.org/jesus_seminar.html. The site also provides access to scholarly critiques of its work on this site.

² Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 2.

Learning Jesus in Liturgy

BY LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

I propose a way of knowing Jesus other than through historical reconstruction, namely, through church liturgy. My problems with the variety of quests for the historical Jesus is well-documented (see *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (Harper-SanFrancisco, 1996) and need only brief summarizing here.

First, the status of our sources does not allow the sort of full reconstruction that would enable us with a high degree of probability to say, "This was Jesus' messianic project." Second, the effort to push beyond the limits of responsible historiography ends up by distorting good historical method and producing a Jesus who mirrors the ideal self of the questers in each generation. Third, such efforts distort historiography further by assuming its normativity—as though the determination of "what really happened" in the past would ever matter apart from the contemporary decisions of communities about their past. Fourth, because historical reconstruction inevitably involves the dissecting or harmonizing of the Gospels, the rich and complex images of Jesus conveyed by those literary compositions as narratives are at least neglected and often rejected outright. Fifth, the effort to ground Christianity in a historical reconstruction of the human Jesus is theologically wrong-headed, because Christianity takes its stand on the good news that through the resurrection the human Jesus now shares God's own life, so that the "real Jesus" in the ontological sense is, for Christians, not a dead man of the

past, but a powerfully living Lord in the present.

As I try to show in my most recent book on the subject (*Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), an alternative to this dreary series of pseudoscientific

The various questers who represent the last hurrah of modernity insist that the church's tradition must be measured by the results of historical research.

quests is available. All that is required is taking the witness of the New Testament about the resurrection seriously, the willingness to consider faith as a genuine mode of human cognition, and participation in the worship life of a community that is still recognizably Christian.

The New Testament does not speak of Jesus' resurrection as a resuscitation but as a new creation, not a historical but an eschatological event. The defining event of Christian existence escapes historical detection because it transcends the capacity of historical categories to contain it. Jesus, says Paul, has become "life-giving Spirit," which is to say that he shares the very life of God. The symbol of Jesus' new way of being is his glorified body. That Jesus is resurrected bodily means that it really is the human Jesus who lives, not some vague and

impersonal world-spirit; the resurrected Jesus who appears at the disciples' meals is continuous with the Jesus who ate with them before his death. But that Jesus' body is *glorified* means that Jesus is now more than human, indeed shares God's own power and life. He is no longer confined to the empirical, historical body that was his before his death, but can as Spirit enter the bodies of others. This is precisely what is meant by Paul when he speaks of Christ being "in us" and we being "in Christ," and when he speaks of the Church as the "Body of the Christ." This is not for Paul—or for the classic Christian tradition—a nice metaphor. It is a symbol, a bodily representation, of spiritual reality.

If the resurrected one is life-giving Spirit and can intimately and internally touch all the bodies of the earth, then the ways of knowing the living Jesus instantly become remarkably rich and complex. Jesus can be encountered and learned within the body of disciples with whom he has chosen to associate. Christians value Jesus' declaration, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst," not because Jesus necessarily said it in the past, but because it speaks truth about the resurrected and living Jesus in the present. Jesus can also be learned in and through the saints, those humans whose lives have been transformed into the image of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. In their variety in expression and consistency in character, saints remind us of the multiple ways the same "mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) can be embodied in the world. Finally, Jesus can be met and learned through all the "little ones of the earth," the children and the poor

and the marginal and the outcast, with whom in particular he associated himself (see Matt. 25). Receiving the stranger in hospitality, visiting the sick and imprisoned, feeding and clothing the poor, these are not for the Christian a matter of *noblesse oblige*; they are an opportunity to see the embodied face of Christ and learn how Jesus continues to visit the earth and call humans to faith and love.

If all this is true—and the entire history of Christianity insists that it is—then the liturgy of the church is a preeminent locus for learning Jesus. It is not a seminar for studying the historical past of Jesus. It is a place where the living Jesus is engaged through the assembly that is a chief embodiment of his presence in the world. The church becomes Church in the fullest sense when it gathers in the name of Jesus and when, filled with the power of his Holy Spirit, it practices prayer and reading and preaching and the meal. In the church's liturgy, everything that is meant positively by "tradition" comes into play: The liturgy brings to expression the convictions and practices of the living community across time in conversation with its living Lord. And if tradition can and does obscure dimensions of the truth about Jesus—tradition certainly needs critical assessment if it is to remain creatively loyal to the one in whose name it exists—tradition nevertheless has to do with a living presence and not a reconstituted historical figure.

Notice what a fundamental epistemological decision is involved by seeking to learn Jesus in the context of the church's worship. Since the time of the Enlightenment, religion's cultured despisers have rejected faith as a legitimate mode of human understanding, insisting that only empirical knowledge counts. In the case of Jesus, the various questers who represent the last hurrah of modernity insist that

the church's tradition must be measured by the results of historical research: If historians could show that Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah, Christians are wrong to consider him so; if Jesus did not think of himself as God's child, then Christians are mistaken when they so declare him. In effect, this stance nullifies the knowledge of Jesus that comes from the experience of him today within the life of the church. Against such epistemological monism, faith insists on taking its stand not on empirical research but on existential reality. And by opening the eyes of faith to the ways in which Jesus makes himself known in today's world, faith insists that such learning is not only legitimate but indispensable.

The liturgy brings to expression the convictions and practices of the living community across time in conversation with its living Lord.

able. It begins by trusting that the Jesus who speaks and acts within the liturgy is real and finds that trust confirmed by the experience of an enriched reality.

The risen Jesus can be learned in and through the liturgical assembly itself, for in that "Body of Christ," the face of Jesus can be discerned in multiple forms. Each community contains not only those whose lives are being transformed by the Spirit of Jesus but also those who represent the little ones of the earth. The voice of Jesus can be spoken by each and heard by each. The presence of the risen Jesus in the assembly means that Christians must cultivate gifts of speaking and hearing alike. Not only in the

formal expressions of the cult, but in all the verbal conversation and mute body language of the congregation, Jesus can be learned—if the eyes and ears of faith are open.

For communities that have a strong sense of sacrament, it is above all the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist that enables a learning of Jesus that is both spiritual and embodied. The Eucharist is the supreme example of how the glorious body of the risen Lord both transcends and is immanent within the body of the believing community, the way in which believers "recognize him" in the gestures of breaking and blessing (Luke 24:31) as he makes himself "known to them in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35). The celebration of Jesus' presence in the Lord's Supper is the church's most consistent ritual witness to the reality of the resurrection.

The learning of Jesus in the Eucharist is profound because it is communal, because it is ritualized, and because it involves the magic of the common meal. The community that is marked by the sign of the cross in its baptism and understands itself to be a paschal, that is, a dying and rising community, now hears in its shared meal where Jesus is present in the Spirit, the words of Jesus over the bread and the wine that define his existence as one of life given away so that others might live: "This is my body, the one that is for you. . . . This is the cup that is the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:24-25).

The church that not only hears these words every week but also eats that bread and drinks that wine enters into a mode of exchange, a way of knowing, that resembles imprinting more than it does information. The church "drinks of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:12) and becomes the "Body of Christ" (1 Cor. 12:27). And what

does the church thereby learn? It learns "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16) as expressed in the bodily self-disposition of Christ, and learns "this mind that was in Christ Jesus" that it is to have within it as well, by living in mutual service and upbuilding (Phil. 2:5-11). The community is thus reminded that any self-aggrandizing behavior that destroys or even diminishes others absolutely contradicts the pattern of life learned in this meal. Week after week, the community that gathers itself in this name and gathers into itself this food and story finds itself shaped by a vision of the world that consists in the profoundest service of the world. And that is to *learn Jesus*.

The worshiping community also learns Jesus through the reading of Scripture and preaching, through modes of prophecy and prayer. The reading of Scripture itself creates a complex conversation concerning Jesus—or better, witnessing to the reality of the living Jesus—within the liturgical assembly. The church not only reads aloud Gospel passages and Epistles that speak explicitly about Jesus past and present and to come, but joins these to readings from Torah and the responsorial singing of the Psalms. The Gospel passages about Jesus are given new contexts consisting of these other narratives and prophecies and writings addressed first to Israel and then to the church of the first generation. Those hearing these texts are invited to construct, in an almost kaleidoscopic manner, images of Jesus with shifting dimensions and aspects. The Jesus story echoes or answers the texts of Torah; the words of the Psalms can be sung as the words of Jesus himself as well as the words of Israel and the church; the Epistles establish angles of intersection and tangent with the story of Jesus. All these intertextual connections interact with the

complex ways in which the living Jesus is experienced by those speaking and hearing in the assembly, creating a sense of Jesus within the imagination that transcends literal or univocal reduction.

Preaching in the assembly actualizes the texts of Scripture by explicitly connecting them to the situation and experiences of contemporary believers. People's understanding of Jesus is deepened and given new dimensions by the ways in which the stories of the past and the many stories of the present are brought into conversation by the act of preach-

In all the verbal conversation and mute body language of the congregation, Jesus can be learned—if the eyes and ears of faith are open.

ing. The readers and preachers of the texts bear witness to Jesus as foreshadowed in Torah and the Prophets, as sung in the Psalms, as speaking and acting in the Gospels, as interpreted in the Letters, and as experienced in the world today.

Words of prophecy also speak with the Spirit and voice of the living Jesus. In some traditions—such as the Pentecostal—the ancient modes of prophetic speech (in tongues and in intelligible speech) continue to be active. But there are other modes of prophecy as well. Preaching at

its best is an obvious example; for at its best it can do what Paul said of prophetic discourse: One hearing it can have the heart convicted and declare, "God is in the midst of you" (1 Cor. 14:25). But there are also all the forms of witnessing, storytelling, advocacy, and protest, that the church allows itself to hear as it seeks the presence and the call of the living God. The Book of Revelation portrays the risen Jesus speaking in such a voice of prophecy to the real-life churches of Asia in the first century (Rev. 2-3). The church continues to be a place where prophecy can be spoken in the name of Jesus.

Christians learn Jesus through prayer. Some forms of prayer are liturgical. Paul's community in Corinth addressed Jesus when they prayed, "Maranatha, our Lord, come!" (1 Cor. 16:22). Paul spoke for all when he declared that because Jesus is the "yes to all God's promises," so also we say "Amen to God through him" (2 Cor. 1:20). The Acts of the Apostles describes a particularly powerful example of liturgical prayer: After the persecution of the apostles they gather and pray:

"And now Lord, look upon their threats and grant to thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness, while thou stretchest out thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of thy Holy Servant Jesus." And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31, RSV).

Less dramatically than this, but no less powerfully, Christians through the ages have experienced the powerful presence of Jesus in the Holy Spirit when at

gathered prayer. Such prayer is not always or necessarily spoken aloud. Indeed, some of the most powerful experiences of Jesus' presence have occurred in those spaces of silence within worship when the word is allowed to gather and come to a point in the hearts of the believers.

In the liturgy of the church, the living Jesus is learned in multiple and complex ways. It is a real knowledge, for the minds and hearts of those learning are changed in fundamental ways through participation in the Eucharist and reading and preaching and prophecy and prayer. It is a real knowledge of Jesus, for he is the one spoken of by the texts, he is the one proclaimed, he is the one addressed in prayer, he is the one heard in prophecy. It is a knowledge that is never-ending and always complex, for it responds to a living presence and invites learning from many sources. It is a knowledge that always contains elements of ambiguity, precisely because it is the epistemology of faith, which refuses to reduce what is essentially mysterious to the level of a problem.

Is this a scholarly or scientific knowledge? Of course not. Knowing *persons* is not the same thing as knowing facts or learning theories. This is the sort of knowledge, rather, that human persons experience when they give themselves to each other in trust and loyalty over time. Is it a knowledge that can be disconfirmed? Yes, for a life lacking in the transformative power of the resurrection, a life devoid of self-donative service to other humans, would strongly suggest that whatever was learned in the assembly, it was *not* Jesus.

Is this a learning of Jesus, finally, that is true to the Scriptures? I hold that it is, not only

because the liturgy itself breathes the words of Scripture in each of its parts, but because it was for the liturgical assembly that the Scriptures were first written and where they were first read. It was by people within such communities of worship and prayer that the narratives about Jesus were first composed on the basis of shared memories. There exists a perfect fit between the Gospels and the liturgy based on the fact that they speak of the same Jesus. Each in its way and each together bears witness to Jesus, not as a

The "real Jesus" in the ontological sense is, for Christians, not a dead man of the past, but a powerfully living Lord in the present.

dead person of the past, but as a powerful person in the present. The very thing about the Gospels that is the biggest obstacle to the questers after the historical Jesus—namely, their resurrection perspective—is the very aspect that makes them most valuable to believers and most true to their experience of the living Jesus.

Contrary to some claims, the knowledge of Jesus gained through the liturgy, above all through the reading of Scripture in the context of the sacramental meal, is not abstract and detached. It is as specific and embodied as those gathered in his name, far more specific than those sociological types that pass for historical Jesuses. Through the power of the risen one, believers are progressively shaped according to the pattern of life found

uniquely and unmistakably in the human Jesus: a life of radical obedience to God and of self-sacrificing service to others. The liturgy is a practice that shapes and expresses the learning that is discipleship. ■

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Upcoming Events

JULY

7-8 *Alpha Training Conference in Beaverton, Oregon*

AUGUST

30-31 *Alpha Training Conference in Menlo Park, California*

SEPTEMBER

2-3 *Alpha Training Conference in Oak Brook, Illinois*

OCTOBER

13 *Installation of Joel Hunt in the D. Wilson Moore Chair of Ancient Near Eastern Studies, School of Theology*

15 *Child Abuse Workshop, featuring Tamera Anderson*

19-20 *Conference on Ministry, Christ Church, Oak Brook, Illinois*

20 *Installation of Charles H. Kraft in the Sun Hee Kwak Chair of Global Mission, School of World Mission*

NOVEMBER

3-4 *School of World Mission Annual Missiology Lectures, featuring Samuel Escobar*

(Unless otherwise noted, events will be held at Fuller Seminary.)



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