What You See Is What You Get: Context and Content in Current Research on the Historical Jesus

By Paula Fredriksen

A century ago, scholarship on the historical Jesus had polarized around two distinct options. To the one side stood the ethical constructions of the liberal Protestants. Optimistic about the use of history in service of theology, endlessly producing studies of the life of Jesus to anchor their religious formulations, these scholars held that Jesus' basic message centered on preaching, in Harnack's famous formula, "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man."

To the other side stood scholars less optimistic-indeed, pessimistic-about the Gospels' servicability as witnesses to Jesus. The erosion of scholarly confidence in the Gospels' historical adequacy can be plotted along a trajectory that passes from Lessing's publication of the Reimarus essays in the late eighteenth century to Weiss's book on Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God in the late nineteenth century. This trajectory terminated in the conclusion, summed up by Weiss and energetically extended by Schweitzer, that the kingdom Jesus preached was the kingdom anticipated by his first-century Jewish contemporaries: an apocalyptic event, centered on a new or renewed Jerusalem, inaugurated by the messiah, and established by God.

Where are we, a hundred years later? Jesus the charismatic healer and existential religious thinker, Jesus the wandering cynic sage, Jesus the social revolutionary, Jesus the prophet of the impending end of days-all of these versions of Jesus populate the pages of the most recent books, all presented with the same calm authority, all constructed through appeals to the same data. If this is progress, we might wish for less of it.

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Our intellectual circumstances differ greatly from those of our nineteenth-century counterparts. Their quests for Jesus stood within a context much more self-consciously theological. We are the beneficiaries of the transfer of New Testament studies into the critical and comparative world of the liberal arts. We have enormous freedom and variety in our methodological choices-literary criticism, social anthropology, archaeology. We

know more about ancient Christianity and Judaism than they did, thanks to the stunning manuscript finds in Egypt and the Judaean desert, and we have reaped a harvest from Jewish Studies, which has produced important insights into the rich varieties of late Second Temple Judaism, the historical matrix of both Jesus and the early church.

Fundamentally and formally, however, not much has changed; this, in any case, is what I shall argue here. Jesus the apocalyptic Jew-the Jesus of Weiss and Schweitzer-remains for many New Testament scholars an awkward and unwelcomed stranger. And the various Jesuses they pit against him all come down to some form or other of the ethical Jesus, conceived no longer as a nineteenth-century liberal but as his twentieth-century avatar: radically egalitarian, anti-elitist, anti-nationalist, antiracialist, anti-patriarchal.

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I propose to review several recent interpretations of Jesus, all published since 1985: those of E.P. Sanders, Burton Mack, John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, and N.T. Wright. I shall also offer a new reconstruction of the events surrounding Jesus' death that differs from my own earlier views. But, before filling in all the various backgrounds and portraits, we should begin by stretching our canvas over the familiar narrative frame. This frame derives primarily from New Testament material: the four Gospels, Paul's letters, and Acts.

JESUS: NARRATIVE AND CONTEXT

Jesus of Nazareth was probably born in the final years of the reign of Herod the Great. He died in Jerusalem when Caiaphas was High Priest and Pilate the Roman prefect. His active ministry began sometime after his encounter with John the Baptist, who was, himself, a prophet of impending apocalyptic redemption. Jesus taught, traveled, and healed primarily in the lower Galilee. He called twelve disciples. He ate with sinners. He exorcised demons, healed the sick, and much of his teaching, mediated frequently through parables, concerned the kingdom of God.

However long his public teaching lasted-one year according to Mark, perhaps three according to John-it ended not in the Galilee but in Jerusalem, where Jesus journeyed for Passover. On or just before Pass-

over, he was secretly arrested by a force sent out by the priestly authorities, brought before Pilate, and crucified for sedition.

Shortly thereafter, his followers, most of whom had fled at his arrest, proclaimed him to be raised from the dead. Eventually, other Jews such as Paul, who had not known Jesus, also had experiences of the risen Christ. (I've now moved from secondary evidence, the

Gospels, to primary evidence, Paul's letters.) Jesus' followers regrouped, gave up the movement's Galilean roots, and settled in Jerusalem, continuing to preach about the kingdom and, also, about Jesus. Within very few years, this gospel spread to the diaspora, where the new communities began to absorb significant numbers of Gentiles. Gentiles were not required to convert to Judaism; yet these communities, whether mixed or exclusively Gentile, continued to place themselves within the traditions of Israel, to regard Jewish scripture as sacred, and to await the kingdom, increasingly identified with the return of Jesus, also spoken of as "Christ," "Son," and "Lord."

This is a fairly uncontroversial gloss of the history of the early movement around Jesus. I shall now complicate the picture by bringing on the professionals. But first, a brief discourse on method.

The "quest for the historical Jesus" requires the reconstruction of his message and, to the degree that we can get at it, his motives and goals. This effort at reconstruction, in turn, requires getting a fix on Jesus' religious, social, and political context. The reconstructed context requires that we analyze the material presented in the Gospels before we can assess, historically and critically, their-and, in a sense, Jesus'-Content. This effort at interpretation can land us, of course, in the proverbial hermeneutical circle. Hence the title of this essay.

But the situation is not hopeless. We are doing history, and while sometimes the method we use creates the data we then interpret, there are other fixed points by which we can measure whether we write, and read, good history or bad. A good historical hypothesis should account for data coherently, plausibly, and parsimoniously. As theories go, simple, public, and falsifiable should be preferred to complex, non-public (such as "subconsious" or "repressed"), and non-falsifiable.[1] I shall lay this out as I go on. For Jesus and early Christianity, our data are these: He preached in the Galilee. He was executed by Rome in Jerusalem around Passover. His movement relocated itself in Jerusalem. It proclaimed that he had been raised from the dead. Within a very few years, it also embraced Gentiles.

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[1] On the search for the subconscious beliefs of first-century Jews, see N.T. Wright, The New Testament and the People of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), p. 245. For an example of repressed data and a non-falsifiable hypothesis, consider Dom Crossan's explanation for Jesus' (first and only) journey to Jerusalem at Passover in Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994), pp. 135-136, "Was James a Pharisee? ... Did he come there [Jerusalem] only after the execution of Jesus, or had he been there long before it? ... Above all, was he in Jerusalem long before Jesus' death, and did his presence there invite, provoke, challenge Jesus' only journey to Jerusalem?" Crossan concedes that his proposal is "tentative" and "terribly hypothetical." I think it's desperate and will say more below.

THE APOCALYPTIC JESUS

I turn first to the apocalyptic Jesus. His academic genealogy runs from Weiss and Schweitzer to, recently and most exhaustively, E. P. Sanders; and I place myself in this stemma. The operative context for this Jesus is Jewish restoration eschatology. Restoration eschatology describes a particular biblical perspective on God and history, namely, that God is good, that he is in control of history, and that he will not countenance evil indefinitely. Ultimately, God will destroy evil, and, if one can read the signs of the times, one can know when.[2]

Certain key elements appear variously, and in various combinations, in those writings that describe the End. Some mention a cosmic battle between good and evil; others, the resurrection of the dead, or, perhaps, only of the righteous. Some attribute a major role to a messiah or (as at Qumran) several messiahs, More frequently, an archangel or God himself directs the endtime scenario. Jerusalem is restored and made beautiful; the Temple is rebuilt, renewed, or enlarged; the twelve tribes are gathered in from exile. In some, Gentiles are made subject to Israel. In others, Gentiles cease worshiping their idols, acknowledge the God of Jacob, and worship with Israel in the New Jerusalem. Righteousness pours down like waters; social and natural harmony pervade.

It is within this tradition that Sanders constructed his Jesus. He began by stating, as a matter of principle, that any historical reconstruction must realistically anchor Jesus within first-century Judaism, broadly conceived. The key theological points are monotheism, election, law, repentance, and forgiveness. The key points of praxis are circumcision, food laws, the Sabbath, purity, cult, and prayer. Further (in part to avoid the bog of indecision surrounding Jesus' sayings-which are authentic and which are not?) Sanders proceeded from a scaffolding of Jesus' deeds, derived from the Gospel narrative. All these strategies combined to highlight the deed with which Sanders began his reconstruction: Jesus' action in the Temple.[3]

The Gospel narrative emphasized Jesus' speech: "Is it not written, 'MY house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?" But you have made it a den of robbers."[4] Sanders focused, rather, on Jesus' action,

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[2] On the major themes of Jewish restoration theology, see E.P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), pp. 77-119, 222-241 (a reconstruction of Jesus' views within this perspective); E. Schürer-G. Vermes et al., History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: 1973-86), 2:514-546; and P. Fredriksen, From Jesus to Christ. The origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), pp. 77-86.

[3] Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, pp. 1-58, which includes a clear statement of the historical problems and method of proceeding; see also pp. 61-76, on Jesus and the Temple; and pp. 77-119 on the development of the context of restoration eschatology in general and traditions concerning a new or restored Temple in particular. These ideas, less programmatically, likewise contour Sanders' popular reprise of his project, The Historical Figure of Jesus (Harmondsworth: Penguin Press, 1993), chs. 6, 7, and 16. See also the excellent review essay on this latter book and Sanders' project generally by Heikki Räisänen, "Jesus in Context," Reviews in Religion and Theology (1994), pp. 9-18.

[4] Mk. 11:17 and parallels; cf. Jn. 2:15-17, an elaboration on this theme.

construed within the practices of first-century Judaism. Moneychanging and the sale of unblemished animals were necessary for the normal functioning of the Temple, whose principal role was to serve as the site for the offerings enjoined by God on Israel through Moses at Sinai. Sanders then set Jesus' specific gesture-overturned tables-within the context of restoration eschatology, with its traditions that a new or renewed Temple would come at the end of days. So what did Jesus do? He symbolically enacted an apocalyptic prophecy. The present Temple, his action proclaimed, would soon be destroyed, to cede to the final temple, the temple of God's coming kingdom.

Let's leave this apocalyptic Jesus there, on the Temple Mount, and turn our attention to three of his ethical alternatives: Jesus the cynic, Jesus the Jewish cynic, and Jesus the anti-nationalist. As I review these, I will draw attention to the methodological commitments of their creators, to the picture of first-century Judaism their constructions require, to the meaning, consequently, given to the phrase "the kingdom of God," and to their assessment, finally, of Sanders' interpretation of the Temple incident.

JESUS, THE CYNIC

Jesus, according to Burton Mack and others, was a wandering Cynic.[5] This reconstruction draws on archaeological data and a knowledge of Hellenistic philosophy. It privileges the sayings material (known as Q) over the narrative material in the Gospels-the opposite of Sander's approach-as the best way to get at Jesus' intention and teaching. It looks to wisdom traditions within Judaism rather than, say, prophetic or apocalyptic ones, for a consonant context.

On the basis of archaeology, proponents of this model of Jesus as Cynic can argue that Galilee itself had considerable cities built in the Hellenistic style-Sepphoris, only a short walk from Nazareth, and Tiberias. "Lower Galilee was an urbanized region."[6] Ringed round with the Hellenistic cities from the Seleucid era, Galilee was itself "an epitome of Hellenistic culture. "[7]

A different sort of archaeology is worked on the Q material. Analysed for redactional layers, Q is then separated into different strata, with different communities hypothesized as their social matrices.[8] The earliest layer, according to this theory, is the wisdom or sapiential sayings (Q1). A second, apocalyptic layer represents a later stage of disappointed

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[5] Burton Mack, A Myth of Innocence (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988). My discussion here also draws on the work of David Seeley, "Jesus' Death in Q," New Testament Studies, 38 (1992), pp. 222-234; "Jesus' Temple Act," Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 55 (1993), pp. 263-283; and Deconstructing the New Testament (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994).

[6] Seeley, Deconstructing the New Testament, p. 169,

[7] Mack, Mark, p. 66.
[8] This approach is most associated with the work of John Kloppenburg; see now, most recently, Burton Mack, The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian origins (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993).

hope. Judgment language is mobilized against those who have ears but do not hear. Finally, a still later layer, composed post-70, depicts a scribal Jesus who quotes Scripture and grieves over Jerusalem.

Q1 is the clue to Jesus. Comprised of pithy sayings and aphoristic social critique, it most resembles in form and content the wit and wisdom of the wandering Cynic sage. This insight, in turn, coheres with Jesus' known modus operandi and his call to followers: Live on the road; be homeless; travel light-again like the Cynic. Cynics were urban creatures, and Galilee was urban, so this is not impossible. Thus, Jesus, a radical individual in the mode of a Cynic philosopher, addressed other individuals, inviting them through his subversive wit to live as he did. Jesus had no specifically Jewish concerns; his interest, rather, was social experiment.[9] His "kingdom" is most like the Cynic "kingdom": a question of attitude, of knowing how to remain confident in the midst of confusion.[10] style='mso-spacerun:yes'> The later miracle traditions about Jesus, in fact, are restated reminiscences of the socially transformative power of his presence.[11] style='mso-spacerun:yes'> Finally, a telling point of coincidence: Philosophical cynicism, like early Christianity, taught that the true disciple must be prepared to follow his master into death.[12]

According to this reconstruction, the Temple incident never occurred.[13] style='mso-spacerun:yes'> The story is Mark's fiction, a measure of the evangelist's anti-Judaism. I cannot reasonably complain that this Cynic Jesus makes no sense out of the other data we have from the Gospels-his going to Jerusalem for Passover, the issues surrounding his crucifixion, the traditions about resurrection, and so on-because, on this theory, these, too, are heavily overlaid or simply created by Mark. "Jesus must have gone [to Jerusalem] on some occasion, most probably during a pilgrimage season, was associated with a demonstration, and was killed.... [He] need not even have been the instigator of such a tumult. There is nothing in early traditions about him that would indicate a motivation for doing So. "[14] This reconstruction of Jesus, in other words, does not rely on characterizations of early first-century Judaism, because Judaism is not the context that counts to explain his teachings and actions.

style='mso-spacerun:yes'> [9]"The Cynic's self-understanding must be taken seriously as that which many must have expected of Jesus.... [Jesus'] themes and topics are much closer to Cynic idiom than to those characteristic for public Jewish piety. One seeks in vain a direct engagement with specifically Jewish concerns," Mack, Mark, p. 73.

[10] *Ibid*.
[11] "The [miracle] stories were a reminder about the effect Jesus had upon people as some remembered him.... They give the impression that Jesus was the source of a divine power capable of effecting radical human transformations.... The stories suggest that Jesus was able to set something in motion that enabled people to "see..... talk," "walk..... eat," and function freely within a transformed ethos," Mack, Mark, p. 76.
[12] Seeley, "Jesus' Death in Q"; Deconstructing The New Testament, pp. 162-165.
[13]Mack, Mark, pp. 242f., 288-296.
[14] *Ibid*. p. 89. He continues, "[Jesus] may, of course, have been trying out a few ideas about the Kingdom of God away from home.... One dare not overly dramatize, however, thinking the spotlight must have fallen on Jesus as the gospels have it. Only his followers took note, and then, not all of them."

Many of the interpretations fundamental to this reconstructionarchaeological data as testimony to a hellenized Galilee and the assignment of redactional levels and social worlds to Q-are, in fact, extremely controversial.[15] style='mso-spacerun:yes'> I will note here simply that the Cynic hypothesis leaves a tremendous amount to accident, not least of all Jesus' death.[16] style='mso-spacerun:yes'> It allows no important connection between Jesus and his native religion and culture and none between him and the religion to which his movement eventually gave rise. This is minimalist history. And it requires much more elaborate theories to explain where all the rest of Christian tradition comes from.

JESUS, THE WANDERING JEWISH CYNIC

I turn now to a refined version of the same thesis: Jesus was a wandering Jewish Cynic. John Dominic Crossan introduced this figure in The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant,[17] and presented him again, in more popular form and with further refinements, in Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography.[18] Unlike Mack and Seeley, Crossan takes seriously both the sayings material in Q and the narrative material in Mark. Thus, Jesus began his career after contact with John the Baptist, who was an apocalyptic prophet, and, for a while, Jesus himself might have been so convinced. But he became disillusioned with that message after John's death. Then, "Jesus, finding his own voice, began to speak of God not as imminent apocalypse, but as present healing."[19] He took to the road, speaking witty aphorisms, eating with peasant strangers, performing miracles, exercising compassion, embodying through this medium a message of unbrokered egalitarianism and radical commensality. All this against Jewish purity regulations, Mediterranean patronage structures and "civilization's timeless inclination to draw lines."[20]

style='mso-spacerun:yes'> [15]For a different cultural construal of the archaeological (and other) data, see Sean Freyne, Galilee, Jesus, and the Gospels (Fortress: Philadelphia, 1988); on the difficulty of matching social reconstruction to archaeological evidence, James F. Strange, "FirstCentury Galilee from Archaeology and from Texts," SBL Seminar Papers (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 81-90; also, in the same volume, Richard A. Horsley, "The Historical Jesus and the Archaeology of Galilee: Questions from Historical Jesus Research to Archaeologists," pp. 91-135; Horsley, "Wisdom

Justified by all her Children: Examining Allegedly Disparate Traditions in Q," pp. 733-751, a critical look at recent redactional theories and analytical categories applied to Q.

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[16] "There is a friendly joke circulating among Jesus scholars: Burton Mack's Jesus was killed in a car accident on a freeway in Los Angeles. The point: for Mack, there is no significant connection between what Jesus was like and the fact that he was executed. His death was, in an important sense, accidental," Marcus J. Borg, "Portraits of Jesus in Contemporary North American Scholarship," Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship (Trinity Press International: Valley Forge, 1994), pp. 18-43 at p. 38, n. 28; the chapter reprints his article by the same title for Harvard Theological Review, 84 (1991), pp. 1-22.
[17] John Dominic Crossan, The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991).
[18]See note 1 above.
[19] Crossan, Historical Jesus, p. xii. He further developes his conjecture about Jesus' post-Johannine lapse from apocalyptic on pp. 237f.
[20] Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, p. 196.

This Jesus does not look particularly Jewish, fighting, as he did, the inequities of peasant culture in general .[21] But, indeed, he was Jewish in that his message was less individual and more communally-oriented than that of regular (Gentile) Cynics, who operated in cities. Jesus as Jewish peasant Cynic worked the "houses and hamlets," moving through a peasant society thick with resentments and unrest,[22] reaching out not just to the poor but to the destitute. He taught a sapiential kingdom, one that was present here and now in the quality of people's relations with each other.[23] His eating with sinners and touching the sick shattered the social boundaries erected by Jewish purity regulations, which directed Jews toward that great brokerage center in Jerusalem, the Temple.[24] But Jesus ignored these ritual laws, which "of course, was to subvert them,"[25] style='mso-spacerun:yes'> Thus , Jesus was the Temple's "functional opponent, alternative, and substitUte."[26]

This opposition to the Temple sharpens in Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography. Here Jesus' message is the same, but this time, when he gets to Jerusalem for Passover, "the spiritual and economic egalitarianism [Jesus] preached in Galilee exploded in indignation at the Temple as the seat and symbol of all that was nonegalitarian, patronal, and even oppressive on both the religious and political level. "[27] style='mso-spacerun:yes'> "Confronted ...

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with the Temple's rich magnificence," Jesus overturned the tables in its courtyard. This was an act of symbolic import. What did it symbolize? Destruction. Of what? The Temple's religious function. "It seems clear that Jesus ... symbolically destroyed its perfectly legitimate brokerage function in the name of the unbrokered Kingdom of

God."[28] This act in turn led immediately to his arrest and crucifixion. He is killed by "religiopolitical agreement"-some combination (Crossan is vague here) of the priests and Pilate.

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[21] Crossan, Historical Jesus, p. 263, which moves from first-century Judaean peasants to Europe to Southeast Asia; similarly Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, pp. 71-74, which ends on a quotation, used also in the larger book, from Hobsbaum's work on nineteenth-century Sicilian bandits.
[22] Crossan, Historical Jesus, p. 100.
[23] See esp. ch. 12, "Kingdom and Wisdom," and ch. 13, "Miracle and Meal," in Historical Jesus, for Crossan's non-apocalyptic interpretation of the evangelical kingdom-motif.
[24] *Ibid*., p. 323.
[25] *Ibid*., p. 263.
[26] *Ibid*., p. 355. See also, Ch. 14, "John and Jesus," where baptism, healing, and magic all cast negative aspersions, be they explicit or implicit, on the Temple cult," p. 235,
[27] Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, p. 133.
[28] *Ibid*., p. 197; see also, p. 133.

This Jesus lives in two first-century Jewish contexts. The first is with Jewish peasants. This society, reconstructed through an appeal to historical sociology and social anthropology (Lenski, Hobsbawm, Wilson, and so on), turns out to be only incidently Jewish. Jesus' operative context is generic Mediterranean peasant society. I quote Crossan: "Such egalitarianism [as the type preached and practiced by Jesus] stems not only from peasant Judaism but, even more deeply, from peasant society as such."[29] style='mso-spacerun:yes'> "Magic and meal or miracle and table"-Jesus' program, as Crossan defines it-"is pointed directly and deliberately at ... the very heart of ancient Mediterranean society."[30] Jewish religion itself, argues Crossan, thus made no essential difference in Jewish peasant behavior. I'm sure that the poor Romans (and the Seleucids before them) would have wished that it were so.

The second Jewish context, the one that matters most for Crossan's understanding of Jesus' behavior, is "purity" within "Temple" Judaism, the opposite of what Jesus stands for. He is egalitarian; this Judaism is hierarchical and patriarchal. He is inclusive; it is exclusive. He is liberating; it is oppressive. He stands for "unbrokered" religion; it is the Salomon Brothers of first-century religion.[31] This definition of Judaism, much as the picture of Galilee's grinding poverty, seems generated partly by the socio-anthropological method[32] and partly by the necessities of Crossan's plot: style='mso-spacerun:yes'> Purity-Judaism provides his Jesus with some ideological traction.

It also explains the growth of the later church. Christianity took over the inclusive missionary traditions of Hellenistic Judaism and enriched them with "the enabling vision and abiding presence of Jesus."[33] The Jewish wars against Rome in 66, 115, and 132, however, "facilitated the move from levitical to rabbinical Judaism, and also the

ascendancy of exclusive over inclusive Judaism."[34] Christians were inclusive; rabbinical Jews were exclusive.[35] Both religions, Crossan assures us, are or were

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[29] *Ibid*., p. 263.
[30] *Ibid*., p. 304.
[31] Cf. Historical Jesus, p. 360, quoted above; similarly Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, p. 133.
[32] Cf., for a different construal of the same evidence, Freyne, Galilee, p. 28 (on the danger of using social models to generate sociological facts about first-century Galilee); p. 39 (the good health of the Galilean economy); pp. 155-175 (more on Galilean economics); also David Adan-Bayewitz, Common Pottery in Roman Galilee: A Study of Local Trade (RamatGan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 1993), especially ch. 11. Jim Strange notes that "from archaeological surveys in Galilee it is possible to posit another dimension of social reality. It seems that there are more farmers on small plots of land than those plots will support. This suggests that the small land owner had to work for wages for somebody else at least part of the time, or else develop a specialty on the side which could be marketed. Thus the simple designation "peasant" for this social stratum is misleading, since these people appear to have also been artisans and small entrepreneurs as well as agricultural laborers. " (my emphasis). "First-Century Galilee," p. 89. Lenski's model might not speak to this more varigated social picture.
[33] Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, p. 423.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 421.
[35] Crossan seems to envisage a market competition, wherein "inclusive" Christians outsold "exclusive" Jews in the race to convert the empire: "Did Judaism give too little in

" equally valid": "I insist once more that in linking exclusive Judaism with rabbinical Judaism and inclusive Judaism with early Christianity I am not making a comparison perjorative in either direction."[36] But saying this does not make it so, and, clearly, after so many hundreds of pages stirringly depicting a Jesus who struggles for social and sexual equality, Crossan's preference is unambiguous, emphatic, and clear. Indeed, what right-thinking person among us would champion a religion of, sexism, hierarchy, and exclusion?

What about some of the other items of the gospel tradition? Where do Jesus' miracles, exorcisms and healings, and his proclamation of the Kingdom come from? Here we have the definite pay-off of Crossan's interpretation: Christianity without embarrassment. The Kingdom language, as I've mentioned, refers to the here-and-now; it's actually about relationships. The miracles and exorcisms are really about shattering social boundaries. Jesus doesn't heal in any crude literal way; rather, he " refuses to accept the disease's ritual uncleanliness and social ostracization." Jesus "heals the illness [that is, social rejection] without curing the disease ... in a way subversive to the established procedures of his society."[37] Illness is. really about ostracism, and demonic possession about colonial oppression.[38] Evidently the only demons this Jesus can exorcize are our own.

“Evidently the only demons Crossan's Jesus can erorcize are our own. "

The empty tomb, the resurrection, what about these? In his first book, Crossan proposed "Nobody knew what happened to Jesus' body.... With regard to the body of Jesus, by Easter Sunday morning, those who cared did not know where it was, and those who knew did not care."[39] The resurrection stories are a kind of theological hindsight about Jesus' significance. In the Revolutionary Biography, Crossan expands this idea in a haunting chapter, "The Dogs Beneath the Cross." "Roman crucifixion

failing to convert the Roman Empire? Did Christianity give too much in succeeding?" (Crossan, Historical Jesus, p. 423; for his entire discussion of missions, pp. 418-426). There is little evidence that Judaism of any sort, whether Hellenistic or not, ever established missions to Gentiles; and Crossan is led astray here in part by his dated secondary sources. See now Shaye J.D. Cohen, "Crossing the Boundary and Becoming a Jew," Harvard Theological Review 82 (1989), pp. 13-33 and "Was Judaism in Antiquity a Missionary Religion?," Jewish Assimilation, Acculturation and Accomodation: Past Traditions, Current Issues and Future Prospects, edited by M. Mor (1992), pp. 14-23; P. Fredriksen, "Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galations 1 and 2," Journal for Theological Studies, 42 (1991) pp. 532-564; E. Will and C. Orrieux, "Prosélytisme juif?" L'histoire d'un erreur (Paris 1992); and Martin Goodman, Mission and Conversion. Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1994).

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[36] Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, p. 422.
[37] *Ibid*., p. 82.
[38] *Ibid*., p. 91.
[39] Crossan, Historical Jesus, p. 394.

was state terrorism; its function was to deter resistance to revoltand

the body was usually left on the cross to be consumed by wild beasts. No

wonder we have found only one body [the Giv'at ha-Mivtar skeleton of Yehochanan] from all the thousands crucified around Jerusalem in that single century. Remember those dogs. And if you seek the heart of darkness, follow the dogs. "[40]

I honor this kind of effort. It takes a stand for divine consistency and against "historical malfeasance" (Crossan's excellent phrase). Treating supernatural claims as historical data is cheating, unless we are willing to honor all supernatural claims as historical. So Crossan translates these claims into more rational terms: metaphor, guilty revision. Whether such translations are persuasive is another issue. Jesus' healing miracles and exorcisms can, of course, be explained in other ways, such as by an appeal to psychosomatic healing, auto-suggestion, and other such phenomena we are familiar with today. I incline to see Jesus as that kind of healer, rather than as someone who regards

disease as a social metaphor but changes nothing. For one thing, I doubt many afflicted peasants would have flocked to him for a cure and returned home satisfied with a hug.[41]

But the resurrection is something else. The movement stands or falls with it, and I cannot imagine so many people in the first generation changing their lives so radically without taking them at their word. They were convinced that Jesus had risen from the dead. If they just thought that he had died but his truth/went marching on, they could have said that. But they didn't; they spoke of resurrection. Please read me correctly: I am not saying that Jesus really rose from the dead because his disciples said that he did. I am saying that they really thought he had.

Crossan's dogs account for the empty tomb. It's a gripping, horrifying, and powerful image. The resurrection stories as a kind of creative aphasia, however, I find much less compelling. "Those who had originally experienced divine power through his vision and his example continued to do so after his death.... They talked eventually not just of continued affection ... but of resurrection. They tried to express what they meant by telling" stories such as the supper at Emmaus. Its "symbolism is obvious, as is the metaphoric condensation of the first years of Christian thought and practice into one parabolic afternoon." Incapable, for whatever reasons, of saying simply "Jesus died, but I still believe and live according to what he died for," the early community constructed narrative metaphors whose import was exclusively existential, not historical. "Emmaus never happened. Emmaus always happens."[42]

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[40] Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, p. 127.
[41] Cf., on healing miracles, Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, pp. 157-173; on the relation of healing to religious authority within Judaism, Geza Vermes, Jesus the Jew (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), pp. 86-98. Ancient texts-pagan, Jewish, and Christian-depict too many miracle-workers and healers for us to reasonably conjecture that all such were actually disguised reports of social critique.
[42] Crossan, Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography, p. 197.

JESUS, THE ANTI-NATIONALIST

My fourth and final example of Jesus in current research draws on two sources: Marcus Borg's collection of essays, Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship,[43] and N. T. Wright's 1992 publication, The New Testament and the People of God.[44] Wright's book is the first of a projected five-volume study, and he has kindly shared with me the next 350 pages of typescript destined for volume two, Jesus and the Victory of God These two scholars respond to and react against the three portraits of Jesus we've already examined, and each approves the work of the other. I've christened their creation the anti-nationalist Jesus.

I start with Borg. His essays urge three major points: First, Jesus used kingdom-language, but not eschatologically. Second, Jesus was a teacher of wisdom who practiced inclusive

table fellowship, "open commensality." Third, first-century Palestine was a purity society.

This purity system, centered on the Temple, had dominated Israel since the exile .[45] At the top of this society were the purity elite: large land-holding high priestly families. Just below them came their retainers (this analytical language draws again on Lenski)-scribes, lawyers, and Pharisees-_whose interests coincided with those, of the elite.[46] At the bottom of the heap came the peasants: degraded, expendable, and generally "not only impoverished but also impure."[47]

Enter Jesus. He does not like this system. "Conflicts about issues of purity constitute one of the central strands of the Jesus tradition."[48] Jesus was a social prophet, engaged in radical social criticism, and, for this reason, he "threatened Jerusalem," the home of these ruling elites. The healings and exorcisms-lepers, demoniacs, tombs-show Jesus "shattering" purity taboos.[49] His use of kingdom language was part of his world-subverting wisdom. He did not intend it eschatologically. Jesus' kingdom, the goal of his mission, was the formation of a "contrast society" or an "alternative community" seeking to live in history under the kingship of God.[50] Thus, while Palestine practiced the politics of purity, Jesus preached and lived the politics of compassion.[51]

One might think, what with all the getting, spending, purifying, and sacrificing going on during the high holidays, that Jesus wouldn't be caught dead in Jerusalem at Passover. But he went because he had a plan. With Sanders, Borg holds that Jesus caused an incident in the Temple, and, again with Sanders, he agrees that this act was symbolic, but not of destruction or replacement. On that reading, Borg rightly observes, Jesus

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[43] Marcus Borg, Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1994).
[44] N.T. Wright, The New Testament and the People of God (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).
[45] Borg, Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship, p. 109.
[46] *Ibid*., p. I 10.
[47] *Ibid*.
[48] *Ibid*., p. 111.
[49] *Ibid*., p. 123, n. 51.
[50] *Ibid*., p. 61.
[51] *Ibid*., p. 26.

would not be indicting the Temple itself.[52] But given what the Temple stood for, how could he not? The overturned tables express a mixture of anger, protest, and indictment, a repudiation of what the Temple had become: "the center of a purity system that was also a system of economic and political oppression."[53]

Wright picks up this picture and expands it. The Temple was at the dark heart of the purity system. Defilement could not only separate someone from communal life, it also

"meant dissociation from the people of the covenant god."[54] The only way to attain forgiveness-and here Wright seems to say that impurity requires "forgiveness" as opposed to purification-was to go to the Temple and perform rituals and worship.[55] Beyond ritual purity, Judaism was also focused on "racial purity," and had been ever since the return from Babylon. Who was a pure-bred Jew? Works especially from the Roman period dwelled on race as the criterion of belonging to the true people, and this racialist emphasis was particularly instantiated in the Temple, which forbade entrance to Gentiles past the outer court.[56]

Finally, the Temple was the site of animal sacrifices. "We know beyond a shadow of a doubt that most Jews took part in the sacrificial system, but we do not know why.... Was there an inner rationale?"[57] Wright detects a clue to a "sub- or semi-conscious meaning": "If the Exile itself was seen as 'death' and therefore the return from exile as a 'resurrection', " then "it is not a long step to see the death of Israel as in some sense sacrificial.... Exile itself is to be understood as a sacrifice."[58] Sacrifices were thus a strange sort of historical and existential metaphor, the dramatic reenactment of the movement of judgment and salvation.[59]

First-century Jews, it turns out, had an excellent sense of the possibilities of metaphor, because this is also how they understood apocalyptic language, in particular of the coming kingdom. They knew that such words did not refer to the end of the space-time universe. "There is abundant evidence that they ... knew a good metaphor when they saw one."[60] It is wrong to think that Jews took mythological language literally. Such language was part of a "complex metaphor system" that served to invest history with theological significance.[61]

Jesus sought to reform his native religion, and he had his work cut out for him. Against a tradition that excluded sick people as ritually unclean and, thus, cut off from the people of God, Jesus went out to the sick.[62]

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[52] *Ibid*., p. 113.
[53] *Ibid*., p. 115.
[54] Wright, The New Testament and the People of God, p. 225.
[55] *Ibid*.
[56] *Ibid*., pp. 230-232.
[57] *Ibid*., p. 274.
[58] *Ibid*., p.276.
[59] *Ibid*.
[60] *Ibid*., p. 333.
[61] *Ibid*., p. 424.
[62] Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God, manuscript page 182.

Whereas other Jews had assumed that wealth was a sign of Yahweh's favor,[63] Jesus welcomed precisely the poor and the outcast. This was the sign of the real return from exile, the new age, the resurrection coming into being.[64] In brief, Jesus also knew a good metaphor when he saw one, and this is how he used kingdom language, devastatingly misread by later historians as literal apocalyptic.

Obsessed with purity and exclusiveness,[65] bribing and wheedling God with almsgiving, prayer, and fasting,[66] Israel had made herself as unattractive as possible.[67] Jesus summoned Israel away from the rules of Deuteronomy, which in his view had been part of only a temporary phase in the purposes of Yahweh: Now, "the true people of God can be demarcated by the state of their hearts, not by taboos."[68] By coming to Jesus, people could get what they previously had to go to the Temple for: forgiveness.[69] In other words, Jesus was "inaugurating a way of life that has no further need of the Temple."[70]

But more than purity, more than sacrificial cult (however metaphorically understood), the Temple was also the center and symbol of Judaism's "violent nationalism,"[71] and this at last gives us our key to Jesus' mission and message. Jesus called his contemporaries to repent of exclusiveness, to repent of the purity obsessions, and, perhaps most of all, to repent of their violent nationalism. People had to change their life-style,[72] and if the people did not give up their militant confrontation with Rome and follow Jesus' radical alternative vision of the kingdom, then Israel's time was up.[73] "Throughout his public career, Jesus told a story in which the judgment usually associated with YHWH's action against the pagan nations would fall upon those Jews who were refusing to follow in the way that he was holding out to them. "[74] Thus. at Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem to confront the Temple. Moreover, he pronounced himself to be its "actual replacement."[75] How so? Remember, everyone here understands metaphor. Jesus projected himself and his followers into Israel's own myth of persecution and vindication, exile and return: "The plot is the same, the dramatis personae different."[76] Jesus represents freedom: Jerusalem, unfreedom. Jerusalem is now Babylon .[77] And Jesus prophesies that, if Israel does not change, the

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[63] *Ibid*., ms. p. 295.
[64] *Ibid*., ms. p. 254.
[65] *Ibid*., ms. p. 282.
[66] *Ibid*., ms. p. 284.
[67] *Ibid*., ms. p. 282.
[68] *Ibid*., ms, p. 279.
[69] *Ibid*., ms. p. 267; see also ms, p. 152.
[70] *Ibid*., ms. p. 317.
[71] *Ibid*., ms. p. 252.
[72] *Ibid*., ms. p. 290.
[73] *Ibid*., ms. p. 300.
[74] *Ibid*., ms. p. 318.
[75] *Ibid*., ms. p. 325.
[76] *Ibid*., ms. p. 321.
[77] *Ibid*., ms. p. 336.

Temple will be destroyed within that generation. Its fall would be his vindication.[78] The devastation of Jerusalem-Babylon will signal the end of the exile for the people of God, namely, Jesus' own followers.[79] Thus, the kingdom of God will come, here on earth in the time-space world.[80]

This hypothesis is coherent and parsimonious, offering the simplest explanation so far of the rise of Christianity: Jesus created it. We have to ask ourselves, though, Is this reconstruction plausible? First-century Judaism and Jesus' mission transmute into huge abstractions; everything mediates metaphor. We, of course, are capable of reading these texts like this, as Wright has just demonstrated. But, in principle, what evidence can we have that first-century Jews "unconsiously" or "subconsciously" thought this way too?

Perhaps, again, Jesus did think that God's Torah (that is, Leviticus and Deuteronomy) was an outdated set of taboos, but we have no evidence that he did, and, in the behavior of the later church, we actually have counterevidence. If he had taught or, mysteriously, embodied an antiTorah message, his apostles-the ultimate link in the chain connecting the New Testament texts to Jesus of Nazareth-evidently entirely misunderstood him. On the evidence of Paul's letters, the Gospels, and Acts, these apostles chose to live in Jerusalem, worship in the Temple, and keep the festivals, the Sabbath, and the food laws.[81] Could they really have understood nothing?

This view reduces the purity codes and the operation of the Temple to a weird system combining caste and sacrament, ossifying society along class lines. This picture is simply false. Impurity is not sin. It is removed not through forgiveness (which is in any case not "dispensed" at the Temple) but through purification. Most forms of impurity could be dealt with (I paraphrase Sanders here) by a quick wash and waiting for the sun

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[78] *Ibid*., ms. pp. 324,344.
[79] *Ibid*., ms. pp. 330.
[80] The conceit is elaborate. Since the book is not yet in print, I quote a key passage in full from the typescript: "As a prophet, Jesus staked his reputation on his prediction of the Temple's fall within a generation, and when it fell he would thereby be vindicated. As the kingdom-bearer, he had constantly been acting . . . in a way which invited the conclusion that he thought he had the right to do and be what the Temple did and was, thereby implicitly making the Temple redundant. The story he had been telling, and by which he had ordered his life, demanded a particular ending. If, then, the Temple remained forever, and his movement fizzled out ... he would be shown to be a charlatan, a false prophet-maybe even a blasphemer. But if the Temple is destroyed and the sacrifices stopped; if the pagan hordes tear it down stone by stone; and if his followers escaped the conflagration unharmed, in a re-enactment of Israel's escape from their exile in doomed Babylon-why then he is vindicated, not only as a prophet, but as Israel's representative, as (in some sense) the 'son of man'" (Wright, MS, p. 334).
[81] Living in Jerusalem, Lk. 24:52; Acts 1:12 and passim; Gal. 1:17-2:1; worshiping in the Temple, Lk. 24:53; Acts 3:1, 5:12, 42; 21:26ff. (Paul); 22:17 (again); specifically sacrificing, Mt. 5:23-24; Sabbaths, e.g., Mk 16:1 and parallels, especially Lk. 23:56b ("On the sabbath day they rested according to the commandment"); fasts, Mt. 6:16-18; festivals, Acts 2:1 (Pentecost, i.e., Shavuot); cf., perhaps, 1 Cor. 16:8;

food laws, Acts passim and especially Peter's vision, 10:10-16; Gal. 2:12, and the controversy generally. For discussion, Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, pp. 245-269; on confusions resulting from conflating the evangelical portraits with the Pauline evidence, Fredriksen, From Jesus to Christ, pp. 102-112.

to set. Impurity was a fact of life, but not of class. The wealthiest grande dame, the fussiest Pharisee, the highest high priest would all be impure any time they (mutatis mutandis) menstruated, had a baby, had a seminal emission, or buried their dead. Again, impurity is not sin, nor did it effect normal table fellowship.[82]

The removal of corpse impurity did require a week-long process, punctuated on the third and seventh day by a sprinkling of water mixed with the ashes of the red heifer. For this, one went to the Temple. That is why, for example, pilgrims arrived in Jerusalem for Passover by the eighth of Nisan, though the holiday itself came on the evening of the fourteenth: One had to eat the Paschal meal in purity.[83] This is also probably why Jesus, arriving with all the other pilgrims, had enough time to "teach daily in the temple" in the days before the feast (Lk. 19.47). For good reason-purity-he was there one week early.

Wright calls the animal sacrifices "strange,"[84] and so they may seem to us in the modern West. In the first-century Mediterranean, however, this mode of worship was universal. It is the least peculiar thing about Judaism. According to Wright, "Early Christians offered no animal sacrifices, "[85] and again, "No Christians ever offered animal sacrifice qua Christians. Nobody ever thought that the worship of the god made known in Jesus of Nazareth required the blood of calves or lambs."[86]

If by "early Christians" Wright means "Gentile Christians," then I submit that we cannot know. Before 70, Gentiles could make offerings at the Jerusalem Temple ,[87] and later Jewish tradition held that Gentiles could sacrifice to God anywhere, since they, unlike Israel, were not bound by halakhah to offer such worship exclusively in Jerusalem.[88] We have no good reason a priori to rule Gentile members of the early Christian

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[82] See Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, pp. 182 ff; Sanders, Judaism: Practice and Belief (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992), pp. 72-77; 213-240. Wright consistently confuses sin and impurity, while resting his discussion on citations to Sanders, People of God, pp. 213, 225, and frequently comparing to Crossan, who conflates sickness, impurity, sin, and forgivness (Historical Jesus, pp. 323f.).

[83] The biblical legislation is found in Num. 9:2-11; regarding complications caused by corpse impurity at Pesach, see especially w. 9-1 1. Pesach sheini was a second Passover held one month later to accomodate those who were corpse-impure for the holiday in Nisan; see also Num. 19 on the red heifer ashes and the ceremonial detergents for removing impurity. See Sanders, Historical Figure, pp. 249-252 on purification, Passover, and Jesus' last week in Jerusalem.

[84] Wright, The New Testament and the People of God, p. 278.

[85] *Ibid*., p. 120.

[86] *Ibid*., p. 363.

[87] The question, though, is complicated. See the review of the evidence and arguments by Daniel R. Schwartz, "on Sacrifice by Gentiles in the Temple of Jerusalem," Studies in the Jewish Background of

Christianity (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1992), pp. 102-115.
[88] J. Reynolds and R. Tannenbaum, Jews and God-fearers at Aphrodisias (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1987), pp. 64-65. Tannenbaum adduces in support, in note 277, a string of citations to tractate Zebahim. These seem to refer, on the contrary, to offerings brought to the Temple. His reference in the following note, however-Sifra 83b, parasha vav-is a legal discussion on the status of Gentile sacrifices outside of Jerusalem (they were acceptable). I thank my colleague Mark Hirschman for guiding me through this rabbinic material.

movement out of this group. Further, the accusation in Acts 21:28-29, that Paul brought Gentiles into the Temple past their boundary, presupposes sacrifice; prayer alone could have been offered anywhere.

If however, by "the early Christians" Wright means "the first followers of Jesus," some awkward data still lie scattered around. Where does he think Jesus picked up his lamb for the seder envisaged in Mark 14? What's the point of the instruction on how the Christian should offer at the altar in Matthew 5:23-24? Why does Paul still praise the latreia, the Temple cult, in his hymn to Israel's divine privileges in Romans 9? Why, indeed, does Paul (who had no self-esteem problems) see his apostleship in terms of a "priestly service" (Rom. 15:16)? Metaphor, true, just as Christ sacrificed as a paschal lamb, but why use such images as metaphors if Jesus himself had condemned their referents as morally, socially, and religiously wrong?

To review, we have four Jesuses. We have one apocalyptic Jesus (two, counting mine, of whom I haven't spoken yet). He caused a scene in the Temple to symbolically enact a prophecy of impending redemption (Sanders). We have two non-apocalyptic Jesuses, a Cynic and a Jewish Cynic. The Cynic Jesus went up to Jerusalem as a normal pilgrim and was killed-no Temple tantrum (Mack, Seeley). The Jewish Cynic Jesus went up for the first time in his life that one Passover. Disgusted by what he saw (he had had no idea, remember, what Jerusalem would be like), he overturned the tables, thereby symbolically destroying the Temple's brokerage function (Crossan). And, finally, we have one metaphorically apocalyptic anti-nationalist Jesus who went up to Jerusalem at Passover to confront the Temple system, which he symbolically challenged, indicted and condemned (Borg, Wright).

JESUS: ANOTHER VIEW

What about my Jesus?

In 1988 1 published From Jesus to Christ. My study traced the growth of apocalyptic Jewish traditions from the historical Jesus to the Christs of the early churches, especially in light of the kingdom's continuing delay. For my reconstruction, I drew particularly on Sanders' work. Thus, I had an apocalyptic Jesus who went up to Jerusalem for Passover at or as the climax of his mission, He symbolically enacted the Temple's impending destruction. The gesture implied no condemnation of his native religion but, rather, announced the imminent coming of a new Temple and, hence, as well, God's kingdom.

The act brought him to the attention of the priests, who became alarmed at the potential for mass disturbance during the holiday when Pilate was in town. They facilitated his arrest, and Pilate killed him.[89]

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[89] The incident at the Temple, pp. 111-114; arrest and "trials," pp. 115-122; narrative summary, pp. 127-130.

I expanded and refined one aspect of my interpretation in a later paper, "Jesus and the Temple, Mark and the War."[90] There, I argued that both the christological strategy and the historical appearance of Mark's Gospel could be best understood if we posit that the evangelist knew of Jesus' original prophecy, and accomodated it to his own circumstances, post-70. Thus, proclaimed Mark, the generation that saw the Temple destroyed would also be the generation that saw the Son of Man coming in glory (Mark's reworking) to establish the kingdom. The Roman destruction of Jerusalem mobilized Mark to restate this traditional prophecy in order to reassure his community that everything was indeed occurring just as Jesus had said it would. They had but to endure and have faith.[91]

I thought this reconstruction elegant and, but for one awkwardness, extremely compelling. This awkwardness, however, has not gone away. How could Jesus have made such a spectacular prophecy, which Peter, John, and others must have known, and yet Paul-who knew Peter and John and who talked frequently of the coming Kingdom-never even mentions it at all?

"The Cynic Jesus went up to Jerusalem as a normal pilgrim and was killed--there was no Temple tantrum."

In the time since, I have pondered Burton Mack's Myth of Innocence, with its close reading of the Markan passion material. I have corresponded with David Seeley on the way the Temple incident works in Mark. I've reflected on the superiority of the Johannine chronology[92] and passion traditions to that of the synoptics. I have read two excellent recent studies on modern apocalyptic movements, Paul Boyer's "en Time Shall be No More[93] and Stephen O'Leary's Arguing the Apocalypse.[94] I have changed my mind, and I present and defend my pentimento here.

Mark's passion narrative makes up in drama what it lacks in historical probability. The priests' motivations are obscure; the two trials before the full Sanhedrin on the night of Passover beggar belief. Everything is set in motion by Jesus' action in the Temple in the days before the holiday. Once he overturns the tables (et cetera), "the chief priests and scribes ... seek a way to destroy him" (1 1: 18). The action leads directly to his trial, which provides the dramatic foil for the Gospel's sustained christological reticence: Jesus finally comes out ("Are you the Christ, the Son of the

[90] SBL Seminar Papers (Atlanta 1990), pp. 293-310.
[91] See also From Jesus to Christ, pp. 177-185.
[92] John provides the following sequence of Jesus' trips to Jerusalem: 2:13 Passover (and the "cleansing" of the Temple); 5:1 a feast; 7:10 Sukkot (Tabernacles); 10:22 feast of Dedication (and thus a celebration of the Temple's purification!); 11:55 Passover again.
[93] Paul Boyer, When Time Shall Be No More (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
[94] Stephen D. O'Leary, Arguing the Apocalypse: A Theory of Millennial Rhetoric (New York: Oxford University Press', 1994).

Blessed?" "I am." 14:61f). The Temple action sets up the theological climax of the Gospel.

John needs no such device. His Jesus has preached a very high christology virtually since his first appearance. Consequently, unlike Mark, John does not need (two!) highly charged Sanhedrin trials to bear the weight of articulating Christian doctrine. His Jesus, again, had already assumed that task. The Johannine sequence of events, less dramatic, is also less improbable: Jesus comes to town, preaches, and is arrested the night before the night of Passover. He is detained briefly at the High Priest's house, where he is questioned "about his disciples and his teaching" (18:19). He, then, passes on to Pilate. The priests' motivation is clear and commonsensical: "If we let [Jesus] go on.... the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation." Caiaphas continues, "It is expedient that one man should die for the people, that the whole nation not perish" (11:48,50).[95]

So what do I now think happened? Shortly after John the Baptist's execution, Jesus would have carried on preaching his message of the coming kingdom, meant literally: Justice established, Israel restored and redeemed, the heavenly Temple "not built by the hand of man" in Jerusalem, the resurrection of the dead, and so on. He gathered followers, some itinerant like himself, others settled in villages. He went up to Jerusalem for Passover-perhaps he always did; I don't know. Then, he went back to the Galilee, and continued preaching and healing. Next Passover, up again, and back again.

And then, perhaps on the third year, he identified that Passover as the one on which the kingdom would arrive. I'm guessing, of course, but for several reasons. In the (very reworked) traditions of the triumphal entrance, we may have a genuine echo of the enthusiasm and excitement of this particular pilgrimage.[96] Also, to the other side of events, we have the traditions about the resurrection. I take this fact as one measure of the level of excitement and conviction on the part of Jesus' followers. They went up expecting an eschatological event, the arrival of the kingdom. What they got instead was the crucifixion. But then, an unexpected eschatological event happened: They were convinced that Jesus had been raised.

Why? Had Jesus named that Passover as the last? Within apocalyptic movements, a specifically named date concentrates and raises eschatological attention and prompts fence-sitters to commit to the movement (I draw here on O'Leary's analysis of the Millerites in the 1840s).[97] Perhaps

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[95] John also knew some version of the Temple incident. He placed it early in Jesus' ministry, where its significance is mostly symbolic; it sets the tone for Jesus' relations with offical Judaism, and it foreshadows the Passion (2:13-22). He may have gotten it from Mark-the issue is contested--or he may have gotten it from an independent tradition.
[96] Mk. 1 1: 1-10 and parallels.
[97] See Arguing the Apocalypse on the growth of the Millerites-especially after the failure of Miller's apocalyptic prediction (also known as "The Great Disappointment") of March 1844-into the Seventh Day Adventist Church, pp. 99-133.

this is what Jesus had done. With this scenario, we do not need the Temple incident as a device to bring Jesus to the (negative) attention of the priests. He had already been to Jerusalem the previous Passover and the one before that, getting the crowds all worked up about the coming kingdom. This year, both he and the crowds seemed even more excited. How long could Pilate be counted on not to act? Thus, the secret arrest, the rushed interview with Caiaphas, or Caiaphas and Annas, and then on to Pilate and death.

Two last points. First, the disciples' experience of Jesus' resurrection points indisputably to the Christian movement's origins in the eschatological hopes of first-century Judaism-the resurrection of the dead, the vindication of the righteous. The disciples' choice to remain in Jerusalem rather than return to Galilee suggests further that they continued to expect something to happen, and soon (think of the first several chapters in Acts). And if something is going to happen, it happens in Jerusalem.

Finally, the movement from the beginning received Gentiles without requiring that they be circumcised. By mid-century, there would be a crisis. Some Christians, in the face of the kingdom's continuing delay, thought Gentile adherents should normalize their relation to Israel by converting, which, for men, meant to be circumcised. Paul refers to these colleagues as "dogs" and "mutilators of the flesh." James, Peter, and John agreed with Paul: no circumcision. No idols, and no circumcision. This pattern also points to the movement's origins in Jewish apocalyptic traditions: Eschatological Gentiles, at the end of days, were to join with Israel qua Gentiles and so to be included in the kingdom.[98] The first generation, improvising in their curious now-but-not-yet situation, incorporated Gentiles accordingly. Jesus would be back soon.

FAITH, HISTORY, AND METHOD

In conclusion, I advance three points: on the relation of faith and history, on the Christian study of Judaism, and on history and method.

First: What about history and faith, or history and theology, or Jesus and Christ? These categories still, after a century, stand in uneasy and confused relation. A Jesus securely anchored in his first-century Jewish apocalyptic context-working miracles, driving away demons, predicting the imminent end of the world-is an embarrassment. Is it sheer serendipity that so many of our reconstructions define away the offending ackwardness? Miracles without cures, time without end, resurrections without bodies. The kingdom does not come, it is present as an experience, a kinder, gentler society, mediated, indeed created, by Jesus. Then what is this kingdom language doing here anyway? As one critic has noted:

Jesus' idea of the Kingdom of God appears to be inextricably involved with a number of eschatological and apocalyptic views which theology has been

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[98] See From Jesus to Christ, pp. 16, 149-156, 165-176; for further citation to primary sources for this Jewish tradition of the eschatological inclusion (not conversion) of Gentiles, see Fredriksen, "The Circumcision of Gentiles," especially pp. 544-548.

accustomed to take over without critical examination. But now it is necessary to inquire whether it is really possible ... to employ the idea of the Kingdom of God in the way that has recently seemed appropriate. The question arises whether "Kingdom" is not thereby divested of its essential traits and, finally, so modified that only the name still remains the same.

So Johannes Weiss, in 1892.[99]

One scholar reviewed refuted the possibility of an apocalyptic Jesus on the basis of how weird apocalyptists are now: "Most of us have heard street preachers ... whose message is, 'The end is at hand, repent!' In my experience, people who strongly believe 'the end is near' sound very different from what I hear in the Jesus tradition."[100] This is not an argument. Another scholar defended the authenticity of Jesus' (fairly detailed) predictions of the fall of Jerusalem with an appeal to Josephus: Such prophecies of the Temple's destruction are "the necessary and predictable focal point of Jesus' whole prophetic ministry.... Like Josephus, he claimed to see that destruction was inevitable."[101] Jesus died around 30. The Temple was destroyed in 70. Josephus, who was present at the siege, wrote his history in 77-78. Josephus' successful "prediction" cannot, thus, establish the likelihood of Jesus' having done the same thing.

And again: "If Jesus expected the end of the world, then he was mistaken."[102] But if he did, and if he was, so what? Do historians in search of Jesus of Nazareth really expect to turn up the Chalcedonian Christ? The inerrant incarnate Second Article of the Trinity, fully God and fully man without mixture or confusion, is the theological construct of a different period. If we want to find this figure in the first century, the historical Jesus is

not whom we're looking for. History can be reconciled, variously, with faith, but never with anachronism.

My second concluding point concerns the Christian study of Judaism. In many of these studies of the historical Jesus, Judaism still serves as the dark backdrop rather than the living context of Jesus and the early church. Something bad had happened to Judaism after the exile, and by Jesus' time it had run completely down hill. Think of the descriptions we have been offered. First-century Judaism was economically and politically oppressive, exclusive, hierarchical, patriarchal, and money oriented. It focused excessively on ritual purity, racial purity, and nationalism, and it encouraged meanness to sick people.

Sanders' 1977 book Paul and Palestinian Judaism finally removed the Pharisees from the cross-hairs of Christian historical fantasy. But the

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[99] Johannes Weiss, Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom (ET, Fortress: Philadelphia, 1971; orig. pub. Göttingen, 1892), p. 131. 1 would like to thank theologian Wesley Wildman for sharing with me the typescript of his forthcoming book, The Quest for a Believable Jesus. His review of the nineteenth-century roots of our century's christological dilemmas refreshed my sense of the value of Weiss' discussion and suggested the framing of the present essay. I am very grateful. See, too, Räisänen's appreciation of Weiss, "Jesus in Context," p. 18.
[100] Borg, Jesus, p. 83.
[101] Wright, MS 326, on Jesus' “mindset."
[102] Wright, MS 88.

replacement target of choice now seems to be the Temple and the biblically-mandated laws of purity. The indictment of Judaism consequently broadens from about 6,000 men (Josephus' estimate of the Pharisees' numbers) to include virtually every Jew in the first century, Jesus and his followers (to my mind, wrongly) excepted. And the old polemical opposition "law versus grace" has simply been replaced by an even more self-congratulatory antithesis, purity versus compassion.

This is not history, nor is it realistic description. It is caricature generated by abstractions, whereby a set of politically and ethically pleasant attributes define both Jesus (egalitarian, caring, other-directed, and so on) and, negatively, the majority of his Jewish contemporaries. Jesus thereby snaps nicely into sharp focus. This clarity, however, is purchased at the price of reality.

Whence this artificial and innocently insulting group portrait? In part, from those methods that specifically structure societies along lines of group or class antagonisms. These scholars then link their methodological enthusiasms to their own political commitments, most frequently an idealized (read "radical") vision of social equality. The

whole package then fuses with two more traditional characteristics of New Testament historiography: the conviction of Jesus' singular moral excellence and a

"The old polemical expression 'law versus grace' has simply been replaced by an even more self-congratulatory antithesis, purity versus compassion.

long cultural habit of "explaining" Christianity by having Judaism be its opposite. The result is that ancient Christian texts become statements of immediate contemporary political relevance and ancient Judaism becomes their contrasting background.

Thus, "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female"-Paul's description in Galatians about oneness in Christ (3:28)-interpreted socially, is taken as a statement of Jesus' uniquely anti-ethnic, anti-hierarchical, anti-nationalistic political agenda.[103] style='mso-spacerun:yes'> This agenda has been generated by seeing the primary data through the lens of methods that, at the same time, unobtrusively block perception of other, messier, unobliging facts. Everything that does not fit the model drops silently away, as the method determines both the

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[103] Thus, for example, Crossan, on Jesus' social program: "No importance was given to distinctions of Gentile and Jew, female and male, slave and free, poor and rich." He does not cite Galatians (Historical Jesus, p. xii); "Open commensality profoundly negates distinctions and hierarchies between female and male, poor and rich, Gentile and Jew," again without citation (p. 263).

historical description and its explanation.[104] A perfect fit! History this tidy is a form of aesthetic delusion.

Consider Judaism as focused on racial purity, which in turn was expressed in the Temple regulations keeping Gentiles in the outer courts.[105] Did the priests really refuse members of the house of Adiabene entry into the Temple? Of course not. If converts enter, the operative category is not "race." Or consider the claim that Jews viewed wealth as a sign of God's favor. The ruling elites in Judea ensconced by Rome should have been more effective: these were chosen on the basis of wealth. In fact, they failed to rule, in no small part, according to Martin Goodman, because wealth did not command social esteem among Jews, among other reasons because the religious regulations mandating charity weakened the webbing of patronage.[106] Or consider the Temple as a center of virulent nationalism. How do the priests and "first men" act, according to Josephus, whenever an outbreak threatens? They try to quiet the crowds.[107] But in most of the studies we have considered, method has so controlled historical reconstruction that these nonconforming data simply disappear.

This brings me to my final point, on method and history. The methods of other fields refresh and challenge our work in our own, and I think this is all to the good. But we need

to be sensitive to the utility of the method; and we can never let the method control the evidence. We-the historians-must control both.

If we relinquish control, or fail to exercise it, or so enjoy where the method is taking us that we fail to direct our own way, we risk wandering in a past exclusively of our own imagining, distant not only from our own time, but also from the reality of those ancient persons whose lives and worlds we seek to understand.

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[104] See, for example, Crossan, Historical Jesus, p. 292, where his four-fold typology generates Jesus' social role and function ("My proposal is that when we cross apocalyptic and sapiential with scribes and peasants, it becomes necessary to locate Jesus in the quadrant formed by sapiential and peasant.").

[105] "The most notable sign of the emphasis on racial purity is, of course, the notice in the Temple that forbade non-Jews to penetrate farther than the 'court of the Gentiles,' Wright, People of God, p. 232. See also Marcus Borg, Jesus, p. 109.

[106] "The failure of wealth to bring social esteem among Jews was only partly caused by the egalitarian ideals of the Torah.... Neither Hebrew nor Aramaic had a term like the Latin bonus, which equated high social standing and morality with riches.... The prestige gained by many rich Greeks and Romans by paying for their city's religious cults was undermined by the uniquely Jewish and deliberately egalitarian tradition that every adult male Jew should pay a half-shekel towards the upkeep of the sacrifices, the rich being positively prohibited from contributing more (Exodus 30:15). . .," Martin Goodman, The Ruling Class of Judaea (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 128ff., also pp. 51-75.

[107] For example, Bellum, 2.316, trying to calm the crowds in the face of Florus' provocations; 2:320, urging the crowd to follow Florus' wishes; 2:410, attempting to persuade the younger priests in not to suspend sacrifices for Rome's wellbeing.