

## **JESUS SCHOLARSHIP**

### **Origin ideas of the Incarnation texts**

Ample studies of Jesus as a historical figure have enriched the scholarly community. By delving into the backgrounds of the earliest source texts fascinating insights have emerged, which in turn have led to greater in depth studies within adjacent fields. Currently, the epic making series “*Christianity in the making*” by James D.G. Dunn is turning the whole field of study in different directions as academic and laymen alike seek to make the best use of professor Dunn’s material conclusions.

But on an entirely other level, we must also affirm that most research on historically religious persons runs the risk of evidencing modern critical forms of plagiarism. Since so little new evidence is offered, fresh solutions to critical problems are rare and hard to present to a public eye inundated with one book after another on a given topic. Despite the foregoing statements, I do believe that there is always room for more innovative theories. New Testament scholars, by natural instinct, put forth conclusions for further analysis, or to be pursued along alternate lines of thought or wholly disregarded if proven to be spurious.

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### **NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES**

It can be said that reaching backwards in time for facts can be as frustrating as grasping for objects in a large darkened room. All of the difficulty is naturally related to the inability to focus one’s sight. In Greek parlance *to know* is conjunctive to one’s ability *to see*. It is at this point that Jesus research becomes less certain. A fog or mist seems to shroud many of the New Testament scenes, and modern textual debates often do little to further reader access into these first century scenarios.

Indeed, the study of Jesus has inaugurated so many new ethical inventions today. It is well known that German criticism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century went far in undermining the veracity of the claims often found in the New Testament documents.<sup>1</sup> And this swing to the opposite side away from ‘textual inspiration’ is linked to how attitudes began to change in the approach to what is considered objective scholarship when contrasted with what is deemed slavish perpetuation of traditional ideas.

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<sup>1</sup> These methods are now furthered by the hotly debated Jesus Seminar, whose findings tend to deny authenticity to most of the pericopae ascribed to Jesus. Their cut and paste methods have brought out the ire of evangelical scholars who still write in defense of the truth claims of New Testament Gospel literature.

From medieval times until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the scholars generally involved in Jesus studies were classicists, and were men who typically reflected in their publications the teachings transmitted through their professors. Then changes in theological training forced out classical studies for more focused interaction with historical theology. As time progressed, more questions were raised than were answered and in the end Jesus studies became a specialty subset within the broader curriculum of biblical studies.

And so, in American university divinity departments, Jesus reemerged as a relative topic to be compared with ancient Greco-Roman figures. Eventually, most studies related to Jesus took on a more or less Post Enlightenment form as each one read what were supposed to be infallible documents. The more controversial an idea—if derived from Judaic or philological aspects—the higher its estimation of probability became.

By the 1970s critical scholarship became a misnomer whenever a “believer” was associated with a project. It was the prevailing view then, as it remains now, that believers in Jesus rarely display objectivity with respect to the original source histories of Jesus, while at the same time, asserting that non-believers in Jesus could elucidate passages along more professional lines seeing that they were outside of the so called Christian camp—so quite naturally a scholarly skeptic seemingly worked out his trains of thought by questioning the witnesses without bias or partiality!

Even now this is mirrored in American university publications. As an example of this, the Yale university publications of the works of Jonathan Edwards’s have gone far out of their way to produce an astounding series of critical education literature, but have done so at the expense of utilizing true blue reformed personnel who believed as the eighteenth century evangelical believed.

And this slight marginalization is the main reason behind the tenor in orthodox Christian circles to avoid certain publications whose editorial boards shun the inclusion of Christian adherents capable of doing critical research on a scholarly level. Historically, this has never been so. In fact from the earliest of times in Judeo-Christian history the authors wrote from within the sphere of faith and practice and produced tomes of literature which did much and little in the way of edifying succeeding generations about the culturalisms of the Jesus’ day.

It is the discipline of Biblical criticism which often stands at the forefront of the many departments of biblical studies. Primarily concerned with the evolution of a text’s history, reception and interpretation through time it separated into higher and lower forms of criticism. Both, of which when applied properly, may yield space and time for thoughtful reflection.

Reimagining the settings of the Bible can be fruitful: (1) we need to patiently pore over texts which reveal the life and times of average citizens in Galilee and Judea and greater Israel. (2) attention should be given to the masterly teaching sessions outlined in scripture to see how/if Jesus' methods correspond to Rabbinic tradition, (3) historical figures and incidents mentioned in the Gospels must be researched for corroboration in other literature forms, (4) textual strata needs redefinition, (5) it is necessary for the Incarnation Text's inter-textuality to be noted, compared to other ancient classical texts and duly annotated.

Any present attempt at authenticating 'alleged' source documents and the several hands that may or may not have been involved in the text's construction is comparable to the doctor who tries his hand at reconstructing a (badly damaged human) corpse from tendons and muscle tissue alone, which are strewn about over an area of one square mile, then returning to the scene one hundred years after the sensational explosion has occurred in order to collect and process data to begin his work.

### **THE NEW TESTAMENT EPOCH**

New Testament Judaism was not as monolithic as is often depicted in historical books. The Hebrew Scriptures plainly note that the patriarch Abraham was from Ur of the Chaldees—an ancient Sumerian city in Mesopotamia, birthplace of both, Isaac and Jacob's wives. Speaking a dialect of the Near East and accustomed to Mesopotamian tradition they became progenitors of the Jewish dynasty. Mosaic writings even give a nod in the direction of this truth in Deuteronomy 26:5.

So in their origin one is able to see Jewish transnational ties eastward to an area which in Post-World War I parlance is popularly known as Iraq. Moving forward in time several millennia, by Jesus' day there were several ancient cultural streams converging to make up the Israelite river. Palestine, by now, had become an outlet overflowing its banks, into which Assyrian, Medo-Persian and Babylonian ideas, idioms and customs had rushed forth. From the South, even a small Egyptian rivulet of Hellenistic Judaism poured in and aided in the mix of Jewish culture.

Egyptian wisdom was ingrained in Jewish culture in more ways than one. Aside from the Torah translated portions of the Septuagint in circulation, there were the hundreds of people with the name *Moses*; a designation of Egyptian origin, going about their day to day affairs. Archaeologists have discovered various derivatives in hieroglyphic and demotic writings. Often, it was affiliated with deity to give a celestial sense of 'god giving birth to the bearer of the name. Hence, we read of Pharoah Thut-moses and of Raamses, literally Ra-Moses with Ra {the god} as primogenitor.

All of the above, sketches what I believe is a critical flaw in the way Jesus studies are progressing. First of all, Jesus' internal and external makeup was not as homogenous as historically—and currently presented. 1000 years ago Jesus was seen as the Aryan Jew of Norwegian appearance—Western portraits of Jesus still reflect this theory. Presently, he represents the purebred Jew—whatever that means—fulfilling ancient prophecy, but in reality, he was quite the cosmopolitan Savior. This uniqueness later licensed His death and resurrection to be interpreted as having done away with Jewish ritual and cultural distinctions.

In as much as the period commonly called Second Temple Judaism was a milieu of East/West thought, there is one noteworthy and remarkable affinity to Roman Gold Age literature also extant during the same time: The popular usage of oral methods as a means for transmitting—for safekeeping—stories and traditions judged by various groups to be valuable pieces of information.

The Homeric tales passed on in antiquity down to the Hellenistic era carefully display how an oral text may come to be written down for preservation and reader enjoyment. And in the Greek language, by the Augustan era, there were already linguistic terms which speak of tradition: *paradosis*, *paradidonai*, *paralambanein*—which mean tradition, to pass on tradition, and to receive tradition respectively. These are terms that Paul the Apostle would liberally incorporate in his letters to various followers of the Jesus tradition.

On a far different scale, the Gospel narratives are literary treasure chests in which vastly distinct types of literary strands are located. At the moment, it is Mark's Gospel that is viewed as first in origin among the four—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.<sup>2</sup> There is no definite way of ascertaining the exact manner in which prototypes and such were actually constructed, but a reasonable theory, in my humble opinion, is to posit a belief that the Gospels as a whole pre-date the current schemes of 70-90AD by about 30 years.

A responsible reading of the Gospels can lead to no other conclusion than one affirming 'had the authors written after the destruction of Jerusalem and the demolishing of the Temple, such an episode would have at least merited an honorable mention'. Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 include prophecies that found their fulfillment in the cessation of Temple ministrations. Therefore, why leave this important fact out?

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<sup>2</sup> Although there are small scholarly societies positing other positions on each of the Gospels, The Jerusalem School of Synoptic Studies favors a Lukan priority.



The Jewish parties of the day had very rich traditions with regard to recording their mentor's teachings. The Mishna texts of Jewish lore are mainly rabbinical discussions systematically outlined and redacted by Rabbi Ha-Nasi in the third century. All of these variegated texts show chains of transmission which reach back several centuries. Some rabbis even lived to ripe old ages. Also they were able to cite the oral lessons they received from their former teachers who, themselves, were elderly at the time of the transference of their ideas.

The Jews of Israel and of the Diaspora (throughout the Roman Empire) practiced—as a means of preservation—oral transmission with a view to fencing in provincial belief systems. Through the centuries this same practice of transmission found new life in each generation. Talmudic sages who discussed various tractates of the Jewish Canon were able to mold and shape entire communities on the basis of chains of interpretation and the faithful transmission of ancient thought.

Early on the Gospels came to be known in Hebrew as “B’surah” texts.<sup>3</sup> A word which defines *flesh* or *meat*; hence, we use it in this paper to reflect the Incarnation Texts that tell the story, particularly, of how *God became a flesh-man* in order to redeem humans from their sinful status. This idea permeates the entirety of the corpus of the four Gospel texts.

And subtle little Hebraisms, shadowed in Greek nuance, often hide this one important aspect of Jesus’ self awareness of his messianic role. Traditional Jews would have regarded any belief in Jesus Sonship as an adaptation of the Hellenistic ‘hero’ teachings found in Greek tales; tales that rabbis frowned upon. In fact, the Hebrew word for Greek is *Yavan*, *mud*; a derivation Jews believed adequately described Greek wisdom.

Each of the incarnation texts outline several characteristics. All of which reveal basic commonalities among the earliest traditions later recorded to be preserved for all time. First of all, in each text, Jesus is portrayed equally as a Rabbi—a Master Teacher. Today there is very little left of its earliest definition and when read outside of first century Jewish culture obstacles abound. For the most part, the typical learned Jew recognizes the term Rabbi (and in some circles Rebbe) to signify an acronym Reish/Rosh B’Israel—Great in Israel. That Jesus was tagged Rabbi by his disciples is a noticeable fact and worthy of continuing study.

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<sup>3</sup> Not to be confused with the Arabic word surah. In the Quran a surah (verse) is often defined as a step up or an elevated ascent to greater knowledge. Truthfully and etymologically it refers to a fence or enclosed area. And early on each surah—verse—of the Quran was thought to be a mysterious prism in which multiple meanings and truths could be arrived at by reflection and understanding. Thus, wisdom gained led to growth.

Another dominating thought of the Gospels is the *euangelion*—the *Good Message* to which one should subscribe in order to be correctly led in this world. Each Incarnation Text is a tract written to encourage the reader to accept one basic premise: Jesus is the Christ/Messiah and that you should become his disciple. Each Gospel then adds a number of remembrances of His life and work and death.<sup>4</sup>

Augustan era Rabbis generally conducted Old Testament oral seminars as they traveled about the country side. In these varying terrains, classes of instruction were given to potential rabbis. The Rabbi-disciple construct is better understood by the medieval notion of the Master-scholar; a basic apprenticeship on a need to know basis, to be followed by journeyman status and ultimately the coveted role of teacher or rabbi.

### NEW TESTAMENT FIGURES

Of the many persons caught in the historical web of the Gospels the most prominent parties were the traditionists—Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes. Certainly there are a number of other figures whose place at the Gospel table deserves recognition but it is not within the scope of this paper to define them extensively. So the below critical thoughts are merely sketches of what little is truly known.

All Gospel source texts present the Pharisees as the keepers of past traditions. They were a preservationist group in which members sought to adhere to the unwritten utterances of their ancestors, and to pass these, along with their comments on biblical texts, down to succeeding generations. And it is clear from the Gospels that their sect usually stood on the opposite side of those persons in favor of Jesus. The Pharisees also controlled the Palestine synagogue institutions.

It is believed that their origin lay in the Maccabean revolt times where apostasy and profane uncleanness surrounded the much of the happenings of the day. Their emergence as a dominant fraternal organization resulted from the populace's desire to preserve Israel's identity among outside forces seeking internal control. So they arose as caretakers of Israel's holiness.

Juxtaposed to the Pharisees were the Sadducees who were allied to the Roman Empire elite. Early on in their beginnings they established themselves as the extravagant avant garde of the Jewish way and show some arguably irreligious tendencies that feel foreign in every respect. The Sadducees are historically caricatured as people who will do

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<sup>4</sup> In the Middle Ages most parties did not look on the Gospels as chronological narratives but as collected memories inscribed and circulated for the keeping of Jesus' teachings.

whatever is politically expedient.<sup>5</sup> The High Priest presided over, quite possibly, the world's largest religious revenues and controlled the most important links to Jewish sovereignty and identity: The feasts and sacrifices; ceremonies which were carried out under the watchful eye of their patrons, Rome.

We do not want to leave the impression that the Sadducean movement stood against all forms of non biblical tradition.<sup>6</sup> It is well known that some of their own members were included among the Pharisees, and that in some respects the priests had, by the time of Jesus, developed their own laws and traditions because there were Temple procedures carried out by them not noted in the Pentateuch; Alfred Edersheim's depictions, in his book *The life and times of Jesus the Messiah*, of the water ceremony amid the Feast of Tabernacles is a good illustration of this fact.

So here, once again, we take note of how selective the Gospel authors were in their inclusion of specific material. The authors of each Gospel scrutinized the events surrounding Jesus' life with the only methods known to them. Thus, first century Jesus' scholarship begins with the idea that God truly did become a man. However modern readers analyze the extant narratives today, no other conclusion may be reached.

#### THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Here are a few of the major topics of study guiding Jesus scholarship today: Modern developments in Jesus research: Assumptions and sources; many volumes exhaustively investigate Galilean and Judean links, There are the many ranges of New Testament history: Politics, Culture and Roman Empirical Law There are now some relatively good examinations of Jesus studies in the dark ages, Renaissance periods and 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, modern controversies in contemporary Jesus scholarship and encouraging much debate but few results are foreseen. Within current debate are the new perspectives on Jesus: Jew or Christian—the evidences for many scholars is too vague to speak with a real sense of authority. Linking Jesus, Jewish miracle myth and Greco-Roman miracle stories has also found many students. I wish that more comparative studies would be accomplished in the way of The Pharisees' real relationship to Jesus. Again, Jesus' rhetorical style: Grecian, Hebraic Aramaic or Latin needs further elucidation.

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<sup>5</sup> Josephus gives us our earliest references of them in his work "*The Antiquity of the Jews*". Personally, I believe the origins of the Sadducees to stem from Roman Empirical influence. That they were operating as more of a syndicate than as a religious body of any use to the general mass of Jewish populace. Their religious beliefs: (1) of there being no resurrection, (2) of belief in only the first five books of the Jewish canon, (3) their total distrust of the traditions of the elders of the Jewish peoples, (4) their opposition to anything that appeared to usurp Caesar's First Place role, all seem to be foreign exports imported into a fledgling small sect which was later propped up by the Roman powers of the day. That their strict adherence to these beliefs were necessary for the control of the greatest entity in the ritual Jewish person's life: The Temple, is readily apparent from the most casual of readings of the New Testament texts.

<sup>6</sup> The Scribes were the experts of the Law who gained notoriety from their abilities in copying, transcribing and later giving instruction in the minutiae of legal matters. Their labors involved the handling of Targums--their transmission—and the oral translation of orations in the synagogue. Scribes were often joint members of both Sadducee and Pharisee orders along with their own sect's individual status.

There have been comparisons to other Greek and Latin authors but the Incarnation Texts serve vastly different purposes than those written by Greek and Roman historians and geographers of Second Temple Judaism. Suetonius (born AD 69) was at one time secretary to the emperor Hadrian. With access to the royal archives he assembled enough data to issue his Latin *biographies of twelve Caesars*. Notwithstanding, his memoirs are cut from a different cloth in comparison to the Christ narratives.

Furthermore, Suetonius wrote of twisted personalities with scandalous habits—from Julius Caesar to Domitian. All of the sordid and seedy details are offered in abundance to the reading public. Whereas, the Incarnation Texts paint in broad strokes an *Imperator*-Mat 26:53; Jn 18:36, or even an Anointed one without any flaws. For Messiah to possess error or sin undermines the idea of a “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world”.

Decades later, Lucian who lived 120-180AD, wrote several works that have biographical qualities. He was Assyrian and published in the Greek tongue. His *‘Life of Demonax’* (A Cynic philosopher c. 70-170AD) has been studied alongside the Gospel narratives.

However, similar phraseology and nuance is no clear determinative in attempting to establish literature types. Lucian’s volumes situate philosophers in their settings and portray them as witty wise sages worthy of emulation. Though written 100 hundred years after Jesus, Lucian’s lives do share one commonality with the Gospels: Each is written to perpetuate a memory by means of recorded sayings and unique demonstrations of gifts; but in Jesus’ case, a divine mind attended by supernatural powers.

\*Lucian concludes his treatise on Demonax with these words “*These are a very few things out of many which I might have mentioned but they will suffice to give my readers a notion of the sort of man he was.*”

\*When compared with John’s final statements of Christ they look similar: “*Many other signs truly did Jesus...but these are written that ye might believe*” {John 20:30,31 }.

The foregoing statements show stylistic connections and little else. The question to ask at this point is “Are the Gospels critical documents?” Well, this really depends on what one means by “critical”. German criticism nearly did away with academic uses of the Gospels for understanding the historical Jesus.<sup>7</sup> They pounced upon passage after

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Grant explains his procedures for writing on Jesus’ life and history by saying: “I shall go ahead and look at the Gospels the way one would look at other ancient

passage and accused the text of being unreliable. So when we speak of critical scholarship we must ask “critical by what standards?” We fail to reach our own standards of supposed scholarship daily. Our propensities for ‘tolerance and relativity’—in the way of irenics have left us little room for polemic of any sort. And even when argument is permitted certain hot button topics are off limits. So the Gospels do well to reflect the emotions and feelings of each author in terms of mood.

As far back as the Roman Republic subversion was not tolerated. In the case of the vast expanse of provinces which dotted the wider world of the later Empire a strong security apparatus was needed to keep the natives under lock and key. With respect to Israel, they had always been known to be a rebellious little colony. And therefore Rome stationed a significant amount of troops there in country and within Temple confines.

Israeli leadership was not the fondest of her Roman bosses and that there was no love lost between the two was evident to all, but they still, as a norm, attempted to keep the Rome’s wrath at bay. Their cruel forms of execution were known to all: Crucifixions, tortures of every kind, death by being forced to be bound up in sacks with venomous snakes and dropped in deep waters, even banishment. This is partly the reason for Rome’s longevity and success: They understood how to deal crushing blows to an enemy in revolt.

This is what makes the Gospels all the more unique. These short treatises were subversive in that they contained information hostile to authority figures of the day; empowered persons who had religious and political right and might to do as they will. We must remember that the Roman poet, Ovid was exiled to the Black Sea area because he ran afoul of Augustus. Furthermore, Juvenal, a Roman satirist is said to have been banished to the remote location of Aswan in Egypt supposedly because of a few lines mocking Emperor Domitian. It is said that authorities confiscated Juvenal’s possessions, removed his wife and summarily dismissed him from Rome without the slightest blink.

To be sure, the Gospel writers were taking their lives in their own hands as they began to chronicle events in the career of Jesus. To begin with, they assert that a new Kingdom has begun with Jesus as the head of this community; a religious scheme that few Romans could understand. And is the reason why years later we find Pliny writing of the confusing mishaps of Christian treatment in his letters.

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historical sources: endeavoring to reconstruct what really happened. The phrase ‘what really happened’ of course is a well known snare because it is beyond the power of human beings to be really objective.” Introduction to his book ‘Jesus’ 2008 ed.

Any rule and reign by Jesus was offensive to Jews and, in the beginning, ignored by Romans. On the one hand, a Jewish reading of the Gospels would situate Jesus in a Mosaic sphere ‘coming to let His people go.’ But on the other, Romans who suffered *paganum* to continue their own practices so long as they did not conflict with Roman ideas; or Caesarean cult ritual, would read in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John the skillful compositions of ones attempting to do for Jesus and the origins of His Kingdom, what Vergil, in a previous generation, had accomplished in his tribute to mighty Rome; the *Aeneid*, adding renown to one robed in flesh.

On top of all this, included in the Gospels were caustic remarks about various sub groups and authority figures. Herod is portrayed as a killer of babies {Mat 2:16} Another Herod is written up as having stolen his brother’s wife—which is against Jewish law {Mat 14:3,4}, Pilate is accused of mingling the blood of Galileans with Jewish sacrifices {Lk 13:1-3}, The new King, Jesus is calling the ruling authority ‘a fox’ {Lk 13:32}, The Pharisees are consistently shown to be unjust in their dealings {Mat 23; Jn 9:22}.

Moreover, the Herodian clan is pictured as ruthless in their handling of opposition figures—decapitating John the Baptist {Mk 6:17-28}, Roman soldiers are seen taking bribes from the chief priests immediately after Jesus arose from the dead {Mat 28:12,14}, All four Gospel writers give a God/Man identity to Jesus, All four writers emphasize his innocence over against the guilty Roman and Jewish leaders who presided over a deeply flawed court proceeding, but were complicit in his death.

Returning to the question as to whether or not the Gospels are critical documents we must add a further thought. Namely, the texts were meant to be instructional pieces. Luke, in his preamble<sup>8</sup> to his own text, writes of the many narratives of Jesus already in circulation. He then explains his method as having searched through the extant materials—as a good modern critic would, arriving at---what he declares is—‘perfect understanding’, he proceeds to make his case—a parallel to this may also be found in the opening paragraphs of Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* who writes of the difficulties of acquiring data after so great a time lapse, nevertheless he searched on and weighed what was available, utilizing what he believed to be trustworthy sources. Is this Critical scholarship? It was for the time.

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<sup>8</sup> From archaeological remains it has been shown that the name Theophilus—to whom the Gospel of Luke is addressed, along with Caiaphas, was the name of a High Priest who served from 37-41AD. Thus, Luke’s treatise may be a bible study presented to the highest ranking personage in Temple proceedings; thus, explaining its extended Priestly scenes.

We must remember that the Incarnation Texts are concerned with a divine presentation of the God-Human/Man-Almighty status of Jesus, and this is done through various means:

1. Classical terms are used throughout which show the author's familiarity current Greco-Roman cult and myth. The intertextuality of meanings in part two of Luke's treatise—the *Acts of the Apostles* and the *Bacchae* is astounding.<sup>9</sup>
2. Usage of terms like *Kurios/Lord* in the epistles, signal a desire to shore up Jesus position, politically, in the eyes of rural Roman Empire inhabitants.

What more can be asked of any ancient writer whose task was to compile, compare and contrast, then construct an immortal image for all times. Without doubt, for the day in which they lived, the Gospels were critical documents in a brand new way. Rarely did religious texts of the day interact cross-culturally with other mythic traditions for the purpose of evangelism. In the end though, this is the traditionally preserved form in which each Gospel has descended upon us; as a tract calling men and women to look to the newly established traditions of Jesus.

#### **\*JUDAISM AND EARLY POST APOSTOLIC LITERATURE**

It can also be said that early The Patristic fathers who succeeded the disciples performed critical studies—of the religions of their day—and at the end of the evaluations concluded that Jesus had bested them all. This in no way infers that their work in early Jesus scholarship is to be, nor should be, compared to the efforts of the Alexandrians who were—in actuality, scholiasts--of a professional type. But it does mean that comparative religious study arrived early on in the history of Jesus scholarship. And the results of Jesus' doing and dying were central, as it is now, to all thorough studies of the materials.

With the spread of the small Christian sect more and more persons became acquainted with the traditions of Jesus, the Jew. It was the initial persecutions of Jew against the little Nazarene sect which led to the Christian Diaspora to the far flung corners of the Roman Empire. And history is replete with examples of the early Christian's labors, struggles and triumphs. The first two centuries after Jesus are crucial to

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<sup>9</sup> I am grateful to John Moles, professor of Latin at the University of Newcastle for sending to me an offprint of his lectures on *Jesus and Dionysus in The Acts of the Apostles and early Christianity*. Personal Note: One's belief in the inspiration and preservation of Holy Scripture is no reason to deny God's governess in the utilization of both sacred & pagan linguistic constructs for epistolary apologetics e.g. Acts 17:28.

understanding how various Jesus groups developed and sought to conserve and enhance the traditions received.<sup>10</sup>

Now, looking back some two thousand years, we are able to re-analyze the formative periods and dig up conclusions which counterbalance the popular opinion pieces of today. One of the items which needs to be redressed and stricken from the historical record is the notion that the early church Fathers were a host of anti-Semitic clerics<sup>11</sup> who knew little Hebrew and therefore fostered the division of Judaism and Christianity.

This is essentially a mental error, and is not correctly grounded in theological—or logical—fact. Coinciding with the growth of the Church Father's missives were the Mishnaic readings whose editing, by Rabbi The Prince, was completed in the third century. It is apparent from any definitive study of the Church Fathers that their theological predispositions were grounded by the manner in which (they believed) the Cross of Jesus was to be understood. They took the salvific work of Jesus to mean that the tree of Jewish tradition is now without fruit in light of Jesus ascension and they wrote accordingly. {Cf. Didache 8:1,2}

To read the Mishna, there is little discussion on Jesus, but the matter is resolved only as the Gemara or Talmud is brought to our attention. Within the Talmud are numerable references to Christians as '*minim-Heretics*.' Really, from a Jewish standpoint the accusation is true. For Christians do claim: (a) that Jesus was born of a virgin; (b) lived entirely without sin while fulfilling Old Testament requirements; (c) was a Messiah whose substitutionary sacrifice for man's sins was God ordained; (d) that a Messiah was crucified; (e) and that he arose from the dead to return again sometime later.

For both Jew and Christian the Hebrew Scriptures were and are important; for the Jew they contained the Torah. This was and still is the loadstone to which all Jews are drawn. And is the crux of the remainder of Hebrew Scriptures and the base of the oral tradition, believed to have begun at Sinai with Moses reception of the written law—*Torah she b'ktiiv*.

For the Christian, Hebrew Scriptures were and now must be comprehended in light of Jesus atoning work. Ritual was dispensed with and ceremonial laws were annulled in Christ—as amplified in the Pauline epistles i.e. Romans, Galatians, Hebrews et cetera. Thus, the

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<sup>10</sup> There seems to be no end to the number of books being published on the various sects of early Christendom.

<sup>11</sup> Protestant Reformation leaders displayed very hostile attitudes toward the Jews—engaging quite often in personal attacks. Even later Puritan scholarship magnified this trend. Cf. J. Lightfoot's *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*. It was published from 1658-74, revised in 1859 and republished in 1979.

early Patristic writings went far in distancing Christian communities from being indoctrinated with—what are referred to as ‘Judaizing’—heretical ideas and tendencies in order to preserve the shared reconciliatory grace received through Jesus’ blood.

It is often forgotten that as the Fathers composed their volumes Christians were looked upon in a less than flattering way; in some cases, their circumstances were worse off than the Jews whose religion and practices was recognized by the Roman government. In all cases, early Christianity was known to be an offshoot of Judaism and more often than not people were standoffish in their approach to them.

Circumstances later improved and improved immensely but the formative period was not comparable to the normative period of the mid-fourth century. So to call the Church Fathers anti-Semitic is to also label the Talmudic sages anti-Christian. These types of polemics constantly need redefinitions of terms because the early Christians, in the main, DID NOT HATE Jews, although they were adamantly opposed to the Judaism in practice at the time of writing. Since Jesus was a Jew, as was his first followers, the anti-Semitic label is pejorative and unfounded.

Aside from doctrinal discussions in the writings of the Church Fathers and Talmudic sages, personal attacks are rare. And where they do occur, it is in the pages of the Talmud—where Jesus is always mockingly treated, written some five centuries after Jesus when Christianity was well established in Babylon and other adjacent areas.

So the Greek, Latin and Syriac fathers indeed have left us a corpus of material that is understudied, underused and unknown in the wider Body of Christ. With so few academics able to control the materials in these vast resources the whole Church is inadequately prepared for any true historical study of Jesus and/or the invention of early Christianity. And it shows with each new volume rolling off the presses in the West. It is unfortunate but, historically, the West has never Taken Eastern traditions seriously; and our impoverished resources are proof of this thesis.

As to the accusation that the Church Fathers were unlearned in the Hebrew tongue. This may be the case in many instances with respect to the Greek or Latin fathers but is a slander to the Aramaic Fathers who wrote large and long volumes on Judaism and its doctrinal divergences from orthodox Christian teachings.

And one would do well to be careful about casting this aspersion upon the Greek and Latin Fathers. Many of them described and rebutted Judaism in such a way that their approach to Post 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple Judaism

displays a more personal acquaintance to the practices of the Jews than many today care to acknowledge.

Any indictment of 'ignorance' on the part of some of the Fathers is for the most part misplaced. But this kind of rhetoric grants prejudicial scholars a window in time to refashion arguments which, at the time, were non-existent, and also, permits the leveling of charges of Hebraic misunderstanding against them.

The early Patristic sages are guilty of a number of things but not of all the accusations leveled against them of late. They were well aware of the former activities of the Temple ritualists, and those aspects of Judaic liturgy and tradition which were no longer profitable were spoken of as such. Siftings of this type are carried out daily in critical circles. So here again, we readily admit that Jesus scholarship would really benefit from some new studies in the life of Jesus in the minds of first and second century adherents.

#### **\*A SUPPLEMENT ON 'JESUS SCHOLARSHIP' AT THE END OF THE FIRST CENTURY AD**

Publishing in the study of Jesus from non canonical documents among believers is an underserved market. This aversion to late first century writings stem from the general feeling attached to books that did not providentially enter into the canon. This perspective is understandable for laymen but irresponsible for a New Testament scholar. The reasoning is that "they {the writings} are historically spurious so what is the point in examining them?" Well, the main point at stake is the overlooked issue that they are of *historical* value!

So by scanning their pages you equip yourself to be able to sift through the true and false, possible and probable, and are no longer bound to the theories of mankind. And so, meticulous research operates on an entirely separate level in the department of classical studies apprehension; sort of like a needle threading pertinent questions together with relevant solutions. The texts are the fields of exploration for true philological adventurist and without digging through the stratum of each volume new findings are impossible. So we carry on..

#### **First Clement**

There have been many non canonical writings brought to our attention in the last two hundred years which have stimulated thoughtful debates. Of the many with longer histories in the Clementine documents. As to its authorship, Eusebius and Origin believed Clement to be the man mentioned in Phillipians 4:3, and that the date of the text is about 95 AD.

*Just a few notes on this should suffice:* From a good scan of the text all internal evidence points to its author's expertise in the Hebrew Scriptures. In this sense, he must have been a Hellenistic Jew familiar with the original Hebrew source

texts. This conclusion is discoverable from a scan of the language and religious terms employed and the rhetorical style of the author.

Often accused of making use of the Septuagint, Clement is forced to admit to textual variance of little scholarly significance. There is no evidence that by this period the whole of the Septuagint was completed. *The Letter of Aristeas* only speaks of the translator's work on the Torah or Law portion. Moreover, Clement is clearly composing from Hebrew texts and, in semiotic terms, he uses a profuse amount phrasal structure for his composition—rather than formal equivalence citations; often using *legei gar pou*, somewhere it says—for {in} a place {it} reads..

His fulsome knowledge of the Old Testament and his comparisons with New Testament teachings posit a Hellenistic background; one where he would be in a bilingual position to educate others in the new faith. It is far too early on in the history of the small Nazarene sect for most gentiles to be this acquainted with Jewish saga and historical figures. Clement's mastery of his material functions well for his uses.

Doctrinally, this letter employs the standard uses for Church-*ekklesia* as 'those called forth'; Clement is unique in that he uses the Greek *despotes* as his descriptive term for God, the overarching power—here are a few illustrations: {8:2;11:1;20:11;24:1;33:2;36:4;40:1;48:1;52:1;55:6;56:16;59:4;61:1;64:1} ; he sees the believer's sanctification as the outworking of a relationship to Jesus. He makes general use of inter-testamental texts and in the whole of his epistle there is no lexical attestation of anti-Semitism<sup>12</sup> in his Greek Text.

### **The Didache**

One of the earliest Post Apostolic writings is the *Didache* or the *Teaching of the twelve Apostles*. It has a perplexing manuscript history but one MS, the codex Hierosolymitanus (1056AD) alone contains the whole of its teachings. It includes admonitions and prescriptions for various thanksgiving procedures. To situate its relation to other periodic literature of the day we cite the *Dead Sea Scrolls* which, if W.F. Albright and his students are correct, may be dated to late 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.<sup>13</sup>

At the other end of our timeframe is the Mishna, a c.220AD document. The *Didache* is centered between the two with an approximate date of 100-105AD. Like the *Manual of Discipline* of the DSS and *Ethics of the fathers*—a Mishnaic

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<sup>12</sup> The word "Semitism" is derived from the "Shem" of the Genesis account. Historically, a Semite was one descending from the lineage of S{h}em. Hence, the Arabs, Jews and those whose dialects are Semitic, such as the Maltese to a degree and Ethiopic were semitically related. It has now become a prescriptively pejorative term of little lexical value as it only constitutes a reference in the direction of Jews. But the Jew/Arab issues of today which fuel this is not an issue of anti-Semitism but of anti-Jewishness and anti-Arabism/Islamism. A more thorough philological effort should be exerted in this sphere.

<sup>13</sup> For an excellent alternative view to the traditional Qumran Essene theories, read *The Judean Scrolls* by Sir G.R. Driver. He questions their dating methods and was an outstanding Semitist. Or, read the published works (including: *Who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls?*) of Norman Golb, Ludwig Rosenberger Prof. of Jewish History and Civilization. He has all but demolished the theories of W. F. Albright's mentees single handedly.

tract, the Didache is chock full of pithy sayings and rules for living. Each of the three give instructions to those either seeking to enter the community of faith or to those already initiated into the mysteries...

1. There are a few shared commonalities in their structure. Antithesis plays a major role in the Manual as in the two path/way preamble of the Didache. By antithesis I mean light-dark, true-false, good-evil, life-death types of format.
2. Also, the Mishna gives citations from more than 60 rabbinical figures that lived from the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> century BC unto the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD. The teachings of the Twelve summarize the oral teachings of Jesus and His disciples, passing them on thru this small catechetical treatise for memorization.

By my reckoning this short document is comprised of 2211 Greek words. Without the original MSS it is impossible to properly conduct an analysis of variations in hand styles but linguistic studies are yet possible. Stylistically, the Greek vocabulary corresponds to the Greek of the Sermon on the Mount passages. So if there is interdependence among them it is only in the sense that certain distinct concepts were widespread at the time of the formation of the Didache. Once gain, in the whole of treatise there is no textual attestation of anti-semitism.