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## CONTENTS

Editorial		2
Articles:		
Doubting Thomas: Is the Gospel of Thomas an Authentic Witness to Jesus?	Craig Evans and Steven J. Patterson	3
Jesus, Abba, and the Seminar	Ronald V. Huggins	41
Radical Feminism as a New Religious Movement	Alan Branch	57
The Cross: New Religions, New Theologies and the Only Difference in a Pluralistic Society	Viola Larson	84
Back to the Basics or Back to Egypt: Emergent is Dying...Is Origins the Answer?	Rodney Harrison	96
Book Reviews		104
Book Review Index		123
List of Publishers		123

## **Editorial**

This issue contains several articles of interest and help to both ministers and scholars. Each contributing author is committed to scholarship in the service of Christ and the church.

The articles in this issue are a selection of the papers presented at the Evangelical Ministries to New Religions conference on Missions to an Unbelieving World. These papers were originally presented at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in March of 2009. The first article is a transcribed and edited version of a debate on the impact and importance of the Gospel of Thomas. I am sure the debate will prove very valuable for our readers who may have heard about the Gospel of Thomas but desire more information on the topic.

The second article is a piece offered by Midwestern Seminary's own Dr. Ron Huggins. Dr. Huggins weighs in on the Gospels debate as well and examines some salient points relating to the Jesus Seminar and the veracity of the Gospels.

The third article is a helpful piece submitted by Alan Branch who teaches ethics at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. This article gives a helpful analysis and critique of the development of the feminist movement and the religious principles that are currently associated with that movement.

The fourth article is a submission from Viola Larson. She takes a careful look at the impact pluralism has had on the way the Gospel is understood.

The final article is by Midwestern professor, Rodney Harrison. He provides a helpful piece on the recent developments within the Emergent Movement and its possible offspring.

This is my last issue as managing editor for the MJT. It has been a pleasure serving our readership. I would like to welcome Dr. Ron Huggins as the new managing editor and wish him all the best. I would like to offer special thanks to Ms. Cheri Smith for her hard work in helping me get the debate article put into printed form.

If you would like to have a Midwestern Seminary faculty member speak in your church, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are more than happy to serve you.

Enjoy!

N. Blake Hearson, Ph.D.  
Managing Editor

## **Doubting Thomas: Is the Gospel of Thomas an Authentic Witness to Jesus?**

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### **Abstract**

The following piece is an edited transcript of a debate given at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in March of 2009. Dr. R. Philip Roberts, President of Midwestern Seminary, moderated the debate and has provided an introduction. The debate centers on the relationship of the Gospel of Thomas to the synoptic Gospels. The debate concludes with a few questions from the audience.

### **Introduction**

The contents of the following debate—"Doubting Thomas: Is the Gospel of Thomas an Authentic Witness to Jesus?" deals with an important and controversial subject in the arena of New Testament scholarship. Opinions on the historic connection of the "Gospel" are varied and basically split the divide between evangelical and other confessional elements of the conservative spectrum and the liberal/skeptical element of scholarship. Notably the major issue of contention revolves fundamentally around the question of whether or not The Gospel of Thomas is a reliable testimony of the person of Jesus Christ.

In a fascinating twist of logic and argumentation the more liberal side of scholarship often vigorously argues for Thomas' reliability versus conservative elements which generally argue against, the non-biblical material of the witness of the so-called Gospel. Notably, these lines of difference are exactly opposite or reversed from discussions of the four canonical Gospels. In that case, conservative scholars often argue vigorously for the four Gospels' reliability as a witness to Jesus (see, for example, Richard Bauckham's *Eyewitnesses to Jesus*) while more skeptical scholars question the four Gospels' historicity. The Jesus

Seminar, for instance, made the determination that only 18 percent of the words of Jesus recorded in the canonical Gospels actually are attributable to Him. In relation to the Gospel of Thomas, however, this same Jesus Seminar published a copy of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John together with a copy of the Gospel of Thomas entitled *The Five Gospels*. Conservative New Testament scholarship finds this development amusing. The battle lines about the authentic witness of Thomas are clearly drawn.

The Gospel of Thomas was discovered in Egypt in 1945-46 as part of the Nag Hammadi finds. These discoveries were an uncovering of various proto-gnostic or gnostic texts, the Gospel of Thomas being the most discussed and circulated because of its claim to be a gospel (*kata euangelion* –as prefaced in the document). Comprised of 144 sayings attributed to Jesus and written in Coptic, Thomas has received much attention.

The argumentation for, or against, Thomas' authenticity hovers around several important issues. First is the content of the Gospel itself. Thomas contains numerous texts, which appear to have biblical or nearly biblical roots. Among them are verse 9 on the sower; verse 20 comparing the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed; verse 26 on the twig in our brother's eye and the beam in our eye; verse 44 on the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and so on. It is obvious that there is a remnant of biblical content in Thomas. In this sense, for people committed to biblical authority, Thomas has authentic elements.

The issue arises, however, with other texts which are clearly non-biblical, probably reflecting a gnostic or proto-gnostic influence such as the very closing of the "Gospel" itself- verse 114:

"Simon Peter said to them, "Mary should leave us because women do not deserve life.' Jesus said, 'Look, in order to make her male, I myself will guide her, so that she too may become a living spirit-male, resembling you. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'"

Secondly, the theology of Thomas does reflect gnostic elements as in the above quote. Such elements seem contradictory to the Jesus of the canonical gospels, at least for more conservative scholars; and introduce elements of a value system inconsistent with those seen in the Jesus of the four gospels.

Thirdly, the dating of Thomas is widely viewed as mid-second century, dated by most scholars from around A.D. 150-175. This chronology would put it well beyond the age of the apostles and the more traditional dating of the canonical gospels. We possess only fragmentary

portions of these earlier Greek texts: a few introductory lines of the text and a paragraph or two of sayings. The very fragmentary Greek document parallels a later Coptic document (A.D. 300).

Despite the above facts, for some scholars the debate continues: “Is the Gospel of Thomas an Authentic Witness to Jesus?” So before you lays the interchange between Patterson and Evans, the content of their discussion at Midwestern Baptist Seminary’s chapel in March of 2009.

ROBERTS – First of all, let me introduce to you Dr. Stephen J. Patterson. Dr. Patterson is professor of New Testament at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis. He has taught there since 1988. Dr. Patterson grew up as the son of a pastor in rural South Dakota. He received a B.A. from Yankton College; holds graduate degrees from Harvard University and the Claremont Graduate School where he received a Ph.D. in New Testament in 1988.

Dr. Patterson specializes in the study of historical Jesus, Christian origins, and the Gospel of Thomas. He has authored and co-authored several books, most recently *Beyond the Passion: Rethinking the Death and Life of Jesus*. He has also authored numerous essays and reviews. Dr. Patterson is the chair of the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins. He and his wife Debra have two children.

Sharing in the dialogue is Dr. Craig Evans. Dr. Evans is certainly not a stranger to Midwestern Seminary. He’s been guest professor and seminar director here on several occasions including two years ago when we had him for our Dead Sea Scrolls workshops.

Dr. Evans is Payzant Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Acadia Divinity College in Wolfville, Nova Scotia, Canada. He earned a B.A. in History and Philosophy from Claremont McKenna College, a M.Div. from Western Baptist Seminary, and an M.A. and Ph.D. in Biblical Studies from Claremont Graduate University, the same place where Dr. Patterson studied. Dr. Evans taught at Trinity Western for twenty-one years where he directed the graduate program in Biblical Studies and founded the Dead Sea Scrolls Institute. He joined the Acadia faculty in 2002.

Author and editor of more than fifty books including his latest *Jesus, The Final Days: What Really Happened* and hundreds of articles and reviews. Dr. Evans has appeared in several History Channel and BBC documentaries and is a regular guest on Dateline NBC. He and his wife Virginia have two daughters and one grandchild.

Our dialogue will begin with Dr. Patterson, and he will discuss his perspective on the Gospel of Thomas. I would ask you, Dr. Patterson, just provide maybe a few moments of historical insight into the Gospel

of Thomas. Then, after Dr. Patterson speaks, we will have Dr. Evans come and he'll also respond in an equal amount of time. After they're finished, Dr. Patterson will have a chance to respond, Dr. Evans will do the same, and then we will have a time for open question and answer. So please express your appreciation as we welcome Dr. Patterson to the podium.

PATTERSON – Good evening, everyone. Thank you all for coming out this evening for this program, which I hope will prove to be as interesting to all of you as it is to us. Let me say, that the discussion tonight is structured as a kind of debate, and I suppose it will be. But you should also know that we've been looking at this gospel for a relatively short period of time now. A lot of issues about it are not yet settled, so part of what we're doing is debating, but part of what we are doing is trying to come to some clarity about how we should understand this gospel and its role in Christian beginnings. I understand that some of you may not be familiar with this gospel, the Gospel of Thomas, and so before I offer the prepared remarks that I have, let me just introduce you briefly to the gospel.

“These are the secret words which the living Jesus spoke and Didymos Judas Thomas wrote them down. And he said, ‘Whoever finds the explanation or interpretation of these words will not taste death.’ Jesus said, ‘Let him who seeks not, cease seeking until he finds, and when he finds he will be troubled. And when he has been troubled, he will marvel and he will reign over the universe.’ Jesus said, “If those who lead you say to you, ‘See the kingdom is in heaven’ then the birds of the heaven will precede you. If they say to you, ‘it is in the sea’, then the fish of the sea will precede you. But the kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves then you will be known and you will know that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you are in poverty and you are the poverty.’

Those are the first three sayings of the Gospel of Thomas. It was discovered in 1945 rather by chance in Upper Egypt along the Nile by a farmer looking for fertilizer. It was found as part of a larger collection called the Nag Hammadi Library, 13 codices that were stuffed into a jar and reemerged that day after many centuries of being buried in the sand. Among the codices found that day was Codex II, following the conventional numeration subsequently imposed, in which was found this text, the Gospel of Thomas. Scholars had known about the Gospel of Thomas for many years because of references to it in church fathers and the like, but it was thought to have been lost centuries before. So it was quite a surprise when in working through these new codices, Gilles

Quispel first noticed this title, *The Gospel According to Thomas*. And so the Gospel of Thomas was back.

It is, as you can see, an unusual gospel. It is not a narrative gospel like the gospels we have in the New Testament. It is simply a list, really, a collection of sayings of Jesus, most of them introduced by a simple formula: "Jesus said." Many of the sayings that are found in the gospel of Thomas are similar to or virtually the same as sayings we find in the canonical synoptic gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke. But there are many other sayings in the Gospel of Thomas as well, not found in the canonical gospels. So it's a mixture of familiar things and unfamiliar things. The theology of the Gospel of Thomas has been debated for many years. Some think it's an Gnostic gospel; I don't think it is. I think it's something like a Platonic gospel. It uses Platonism in the way that Hellenistic Jews often use Platonism to interpret their religious traditions. But one of the questions about the Gospel of Thomas, and I suppose the thing we'll be focusing on tonight, is the role that it has playing in the quest for the historical Jesus and our search to understand, better the origins of Christianity.

The question is usually posed something like this: The Gospel of Thomas, a new gospel, should we incorporate it into the discussion of Christian beginnings or not? On the one hand, one group of scholars says: yes, we should because it is a gospel that presents very familiar material to us but in a way that is fundamentally independent from the sources that we already have - the synoptic gospels. That is, it is an access point to the oral tradition, if you will, or to primitive Jesus traditions. We should study it, therefore, for what it can tell us about the development of the Jesus tradition through the first few Christian generations (this is my particular interest), and also what it might tell us even about the historical Jesus. On the other hand, there is a group of scholars that says: no, it is not an early gospel; it is, in fact, dependent upon the synoptic gospels for that material it shares in common with them. That is, whoever created the Gospel of Thomas did so by extracting materials from the synoptic gospels, the canonical gospels. And therefore, it's a relatively late and derivative form of early Christianity and should be understood as a kind of spin-off and perhaps a heretical branching off of the main trunk-line, if you will, of early Christianity. Among the things that Craig and I will be talking about tonight are the three topics that I was given for the evening: Is it early? Is it independent? And is it a valuable witness? And in what sense is it a valuable witness to the Jesus tradition? So, that's what we'll be talking about. With that, I'll turn now to my prepared remarks.

Perhaps we should begin with a basic description of what we have, that is the extant remains of the Gospel of Thomas, because this will

highlight several problems that have to be reckoned with when we're dealing with this unusual text. Thomas is a list, as I said a moment ago, it's not a narrative. It's a list for which we have four extant witnesses, but really only one complete version and that a Coptic translation I was reading from an English translation of the Coptic translation a moment ago, a Coptic translation of, presumably, a Greek original. There are Greek fragments of the Gospel of Thomas from the famous archaeological find at Oxyrhynchus, but these fragments are indeed very fragmentary and often must be constructed on the basis of the Coptic text. They give us meaningful textual witness to between ten and twenty sayings of the Gospel of Thomas, depending on what you count as meaningful. That is far less than 20% of the whole, maybe as little as 10 to 15% of the whole. So we do not have the text in its original language, and we are limited, for the most part, to just one exemplar of this ancient gospel. This exemplar, the Coptic text from which I was reading, can be dated to the mid-fourth century based on dateable material in the cartonnage of Nag Hammadi Codex II, where it was found.

What do we know about the Coptic text? Well, the presence of scores of Greek loan words and untranslated Greek grammatical or syntactical elements indicate that it derives from a Greek text of Thomas. It is, however, at least three times removed from that Greek *Vorlage*, if you will, by a process that included at minimum (and now you'll have to bear with me just a moment) a Subakhmimic phase, which is a dialect of Coptic, a mixed Subakhmimic and Sahidic phase, (another dialect of Coptic), and finally the copy that we have in our Nag Hammadi Codex II. This we know from analysis of the dialect of Thomas and the other tractates from Codex II where it was found. I'll spare you those details, but here's the larger point: we don't have anything like a critical edition of the Gospel of Thomas with which to work--nothing like a Nestle-Aland Greek text to work with. We have something more analogous to say a single Coptic manuscript of the Gospel of Matthew, which would be a manuscript in the Nestle-Aland world of textual criticism that you would scarcely even consult to reconstruct the text of Matthew. And yet, this is the text, this is all we have for most of what we know about the Gospel of Thomas.

The state of the manuscript evidence is important for every other aspect of the discussion. For example, how does one date a list? Lists are malleable, they are cumulative, they grow and shrink over time. Formal irregularities that manifest in our Gospel of Thomas are enough to show that its sayings come from a variety of provenances and probably from different time frames. Now, within the list there are sayings like Logion 54, for example, "Blessed are the poor for yours is the kingdom of heaven," that are as old as anything in the New Testament. But there are

also likely to be sayings that are quite late, added perhaps in the second century, the third century, or even as late as the fourth century. For example, consider Logion 7, which goes something like, “Blessed is the lion which the human will consume and the lion becomes human.” Where does that come from? What century? Probably not the first century and probably not Palestine or even Syria where we think the gospel is written. Maybe Egypt. Sorting all this out would be easier if we had several manuscripts of this gospel, as we do for Matthew and Mark or Luke or John, so that late editions or harmonizations and the like, could be culled out by collation. But we don’t, so we are left to guess and oftentimes to guess saying by saying. A similar problem arises with the question of Thomas’ relationship to the synoptic gospels with which it shares, as I said a moment ago, roughly half of its content. Did a scribe take material from the synoptic texts, and in this way create the Gospel of Thomas? Or, did its author draw these synoptic-paralleled sayings from the oral tradition independently of the canonical gospels? The best answer to this question is probably both. Our Coptic text of Thomas stands at the end of an extensive history of scribal transmission. In a handful of cases, one can find embedded in Thomas’ version of this or that saying an echo or phrase apparently borrowed from one or another of the synoptic gospels. Of course, in each case, one must decide whether this or that detail is evidence that is pertinent to the compositional question, that is, when Thomas was written, or a matter for textual criticism of the Gospel of Thomas, that is, talking about later editions and corruptions and the like. In a well known landmark study from the 1960s, Wolfgang Schrage demonstrated that the Coptic translator of this gospel occasionally consulted a Sahidic version of the gospels when reaching for the right word or phrase to render what he had before him. Schrage concluded, wrongly, that this phenomenon indicated that the Greek precursor of our Coptic Thomas was also dependent upon the Greek New Testament gospels. To the contrary, it showed that a Coptic scribe made use of a Coptic usually Sahidic New Testament when he was making his translation. Analysis of the dialect probably indicates why. Our present Coptic text represents, how shall I say, an attempt to render a kind of back-woody Subakhmimic text of Thomas into a more clean, ecclesiastically more acceptable Sahidic version. Somebody was trying to clean it up for public use, and in so doing that translator probably occasionally consulted a Sahidic version of Matthew, Mark, or Luke to help him get the right expression, or vocalization, or what have you. With episodes like this, in the transmission history of the document, one has to be cautious; you just have to be cautious when you’re dealing with this text. Once again, I can only stress, we don’t have anything like

an original Gospel of Thomas that we can use to compare with our Nestle version of canonical gospels.

So what can one reasonably say or what might one reasonably say about the relative independence of the Gospel of Thomas and its traditions? Now, again understand that this is a big question in Thomas studies. If the text is independent, then it gives us another point of access to the oral traditions about Jesus, and something we can use then to study both the history of the Jesus tradition and perhaps even Jesus himself. So what can we say? Numbers might be helpful. There are roughly 95 parallels between the Gospel of Thomas and our canonical synoptic gospels, give or take a few depending on how you count. Among them, there are by my count, seven instances where one might detect influence from the synoptic gospels in the text of Thomas, and four instances where the order in Thomas seems to have been influenced by the synoptic text. The British scholar Christopher Tuckett would add another five instances, some of them from the Oxyrhynchus fragments, which, for the sake of argument, I will simply stipulate tonight. So that is, out of 95 parallels there are possibly sixteen instances of cross influence from the synoptic tradition, usually in the form of a single word or phrase and sometimes just the order. Put otherwise, out of 95 Thomas synoptic parallels 79 betray no sign of synoptic influence whatsoever. Now my assessment of this evidence is as follows: if Thomas were the product of systematic excerpting from the synoptic text, the incidence of cross influence would be much greater. The relative small number is better explained, I think, by incidental cross influence, some at the point of Coptic translation, but others later or earlier perhaps even at the point of composition say through secondary orality as the Finnish scholar Risto Uro has lately argued. The Thomas folk were not isolated from others devoted to the Jesus tradition, and the text of Thomas was not transmitted in a vacuum. There is no true independence among early Christian texts. But there is in the case of Thomas evidence for what I would call *autonomy*. That is, the Gospel of Thomas represents an autonomous interpretation of the Jesus tradition that is not dependent upon the canonical text. It apparently drew from other oral and written sources.

Now as to date, and I want to underscore this next statement: there is no reliable way to date the Gospel of Thomas. There's no reliable way to date this gospel. The problem lies in the nature of the genre, the list. Lists are not like narratives; the parts are not woven intricately into a narrative whole. Lists hold discrete items. Over the course of time, items may be added or sloughed off as no longer relevant. The consequence of this is that one might reasonably propose a time frame for individual sayings, but this would not necessarily indicate a date for the whole list or

collection. An ancient saying like Thomas 54, “Blessed are the poor” does not indicate that the collection dates from the time of Jesus himself. But neither does Logion 7, “Blessed is the lion” indicate that Thomas is a second or third century Egyptian text, allowing Howard Jackson’s analysis of that odd saying. So, is there anything that we can say about the date? Perhaps, but it will of necessity be on the nature of educated speculation. And so, I speculate. My view is that the relative lack of influence from the synoptic text and the relative simplicity of many of its forms suggest that a core of this list probably existed very early on. And when I say “simplicity of the forms”, I mean that many times in the Gospel of Thomas you have a saying that has a synoptic parallel or canonical parallel and the Thomas form will appear to be simpler. For example, where a parable is allegorized in the canonical tradition, in Thomas it’s simply presented as a kind of simple story. So in form-critical terms, many of these sayings are very, very simple in form and simpler than their synoptic counterparts. This indicates to me that some core of this list probably existed very early on. Logion 12 embeds in the collection a reference to the authority of James the brother of Jesus, one of the leaders of the Jerusalem church. This is perhaps evidence that some early form of the collection was associated with James’ authority, and thus perhaps was used by Judean followers of Jesus. However, I can see no reliable way of identifying the precise parameters of that early collection. I think it is very likely that there was an early version of this collection that circulated under the authority of James. But there is no way to identify what sayings in the collection actually belong to that early, early list. There just are not markers in the text to help us make those kinds of identifications. The incipit, or the first line of the Gospel of Thomas which I read to you a moment ago, identifies the collection with Judas Thomas, an association perhaps seen again in Logion 13, which champions the authority of a certain Thomas. The strong association of this figure, Judas Thomas, with Edessene Christianity suggests that a version of the collection existed then later in eastern Syria. Edessa was a town, a little caravan town east of the Euphrates river, the first stop on the caravan routes going east out of Antioch; after you cross the Euphrates river, you come to Edessa. It was the center of an early form of Christianity that is unusual in many respects, and the Gospel of Thomas appears to be one of the earliest texts we have from that area of Christian influence. This squares well with the Platonizing tendency of many sayings in the collection, a theological trait that is shared with other Edessene Christians, some of whom you know - Tatian, for example, the author of the Diatessaron; Bardaisan, a more obscure figure; and the Acts of Thomas and the Book of Thomas, also texts that come from this same Syrian provenance. But if it was used in

Edessa, when? It is tempting to think that the authority of James in saying 12 was of necessity augmented with that of Thomas in saying 13. That's a very interesting thing in the Gospel of Thomas, you have in saying 12, authority being given to James the brother of Jesus and then right after it in saying 13, authority is given to Thomas. It may be that this shift in authority, if you will, was necessitated when James was martyred in 64 CE and the group would have then perhaps fled east with other refugees at the outbreak of the Jewish revolt. That's simply a guess, but I think it's a reasonable guess. A reflection on the results of the Jewish revolt can perhaps be seen in Thomas' adaptation of an early beatitude of Jesus that goes like this, "Blessed are you whenever they hate and persecute you." You will recognize that from the Sermon on the Mount. But then the Thomas version continues, "But no place will be found there where they have persecuted you," which may perhaps refer to the destruction of Jerusalem or the desecration of the temple at the end of the Jewish revolt. Thus, a reasonable guess might be that the collection received considerable expansion and editing in the decades following the Jewish revolt or perhaps in the early second century. But we should also imagine that this collection circulated in eastern Syria, and as it circulated here, sayings would have been added or sloughed off, or others modified through the years. Thomas 52 might be a good illustration. Here it is possible perhaps to hear something of Marcion's teacher, Cerdo, who associated the prophets of the Hebrew Bible with the platonic creator God, the Demiurge, but not the true living God. That saying goes as follows: "24 prophets spoke in Israel and they all spoke through you. And Jesus replies, "You have only spoken of the dead and not of the living one in your presence." The remnants of this eastern Syrian period may also be seen in several Aramaisms or Syriacisms still to be detected in the texts, details first noticed long ago by Gilles Quispel. The bilingual nature of early Syriac Christianity and Edessa in general (that is, both Greek and Syriac were spoken there and virtually all of our texts from Syriac Christianity exist in both Greek and Syriac forms) explains these odd details, but it also makes it difficult to settle the issue of the original language of the Gospel of Thomas. We don't know if this gospel was composed originally in Greek or in Syriac.

The final phase that we know about was in Egypt. Exactly when the gospel was brought to Egypt is impossible to know. Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1, one of the Greek fragments of the Gospel of Thomas, gives us only a terminus anti quem (that is, a latest possible date) at the beginning of the third century. What changes were wrought as it began to circulate in Egypt sometime in the second century can only be guessed at.

If my remarks on these issues sound at all reasonable, then what is there to be found in Thomas that might be of interest to the student of Christian origins? There is, of course, the use of Thomas in the quest of the historical Jesus, where the independence and relative early date for Thomas are very very important issues, especially in the wake of John Dominic Crossan's work, whose method relies heavily on date and independent attestation. And before proceeding, let me say that I am highly sympathetic to Crossan's work and his use of Thomas in traditional historical analysis, even though his confidence in an early date for the later phase of Thomas is, I think, too strong. Again, it bears repeating that it is impossible to date the Gospel of Thomas with any degree of confidence early, late, or otherwise; it just isn't possible.

But this is not the only issue upon which the Gospel of Thomas might shed new light. I've become intrigued lately with the way in which Thomas fits into the picture of early Christianity in eastern Syria. All of the distinctive features of this text turn out to be common among early Christians in that part of the world. They are, for the most part, Jewish Christians, hardly distinguishable from their Jewish neighbors. They show little interest in Jesus' suffering and death, his resurrection, or any of the themes traditionally associated with martyrdom in general. Instead, they are drawn to Platonism as a way of interpreting the Jesus tradition. They engage in a measured asceticism and cultivate a certain aloofness over against the world. In many ways, they are Hellenistic Jews who are drawn to the Jesus tradition for its potential in cultivating a certain kind of wisdom theology. Thomas fits theologically very well in Edessa. The implications of this may be obvious but they are seldom stated. Consider: in the past many have inquired about why the Gospel of Thomas shows so little interest in Jesus' death and resurrection. One answer lay ready to hand in Thomas itself, salvation is not to be found in Jesus' atoning death in this gospel, but as you have just heard, in the interpretation of his words. This seems clear enough. But none of our early sources for Christianity east of the Euphrates River show much interest in the themes of suffering and martyrdom so prevalent in the west. Instead they are drawn to Plato. Why? Part of the answer is to be found, perhaps, in political geography. Until the early third century, the Euphrates marked the eastern frontier of the Roman Empire. Trajan tried briefly to annex large parts of this territory, but he could not hold it, and the much wiser and experienced Hadrian, his successor (he was governor in Syria before he became Caesar so he knew this area very well) did not try to hold this territory and let it go. So until Caracalla finally succeeded in making it a Roman colony in 214, Edessa and the other cities that lay along the ancient trade routes east were independent city states. Consequently, the life that met early Christians there was much different

from the life of those who lived further west in Imperial lands. While Ignatius was living the life of a dissident and preparing for martyrdom with Jesus as his model, just a few hundred kilometers east Thomas Christians were living peacefully, more or less, among their fellow Jews in a multi-cultural city. A generation later we might place in similar contrast, Tatian of Edessa and his teacher Justin Martyr. Could this be the reason for their theological differences? In the west, under Roman rule, Jesus' followers could expect to be punished as dissidents, perhaps even killed. So, martyrdom and the story of Jesus' martyrdom as told in the canonical gospels became very relevant to them. They favored this interpretation of Jesus because it helped them interpret their lives and those of their martyred heroes. In the east, however, this was not the case. Stories of Jesus' martyrdom held little interest for Edessene Christians because they were in no danger of martyrdom themselves. While Ignatius was preparing for death, the Thomas Christians were preparing for life, life in a caravan town. How might one live wisely among all the hustle and flow of that commercial crossroads, where the delights of east and west met and mingled? For these Jesus followers, the key to life lay in Jesus' wise words. Their focus became the counter-cultural wisdom of Jesus, not his death on the cross.

Of what significance is all of this? For me, it raises interesting questions. Christianity as we know it in the west was born and grew up in the crucible of the Roman Empire. Did the dissident status of Christians in the empire affect the form their new religion took? They focused on Jesus' death. Was this simply the nature of Christianity or did their own concerns about martyrdom lead them to search for meaning in this aspect of Jesus' life and fate? Thomas and the course of Edessene Christianity shows that the potential to find meaning in the Jesus tradition was not exhausted by the focus on his death. When the issue was not death, but life, the Jesus tradition also provided resources - the wise, though counter-cultural sayings of Jesus. Like other Jews living in the Diaspora, the Thomas Christians found concurrence between their sage and the great sages of old, especially Plato. As such, Thomas probably represents one of the earliest chapters in Christianity's long affair with Platonism and anticipates what Clement, Origen, and ultimately Augustine would make a permanent part of Christian theology. It is striking that among our four gospels, not a single one presupposes what most Christian believers take for granted today - the existence of the human soul. Thomas, that odd, non-canonical outsider to the family of early Christian gospels, does. This should give us pause. Thomas might after all play a crucial role in an important chapter in the history of Christian theology. Thank you.

EVANS – I want to begin by thanking Professor Patterson for the clarity of his presentation. It was very clear and, I think, very accessible. I also want to begin by saying that, though I didn't have a calculator and I didn't add it up, I probably agreed with most of his points. I certainly agreed with what was said about Syria. And so we have common ground; Professor Patterson's openness to the possibility that the original Thomas was composed in Syriac, which actually was the first language of Syria at that time, with Greek as the second language. There are many things to be said; and I'm delighted that he was willing to be here so that we can air the issues surrounding Thomas. The other thing that needs to be said too—I think it was implied a few times in Professor Patterson's remarks that it is the nature of the work that we do, that there are always gaps in our knowledge. So invariably we find it necessary to speculate. I agree, we must speculate. That is the nature of this kind of work and you will hear me use similar words. So do not think that is a weakness or that something is being swept under the rug. It is just the way it is; there are gaps in our knowledge. I will also say that everything you have heard, including those important concluding remarks, that is, the last page or two of his comments, theoretically are possible, and so could be right. If so, this means that Thomas then becomes an important fifth gospel, another access to some of Jesus' thinking, his ethics, his worldview, data perhaps not clearly present in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, or perhaps not there at all. But I do have some reservations and I want to go over these. Here I shall review the slides on the screen quickly, which summarize theories of antiquity, and I don't need to repeat anything that Professor Patterson said. There are different theories and one of the most radical—at least as I understand it—has been offered by April DeConick, who thinks she has identified four stages in the development of the Gospel of Thomas. The first stage is very early. You will notice in your handout as well as up on the screen it is dated to the 30s and 40s, or 30 to 50. That is very early. DeConick thinks that is when a "kernel gospel" took shape. Of course it just continues to snowball and develop. Professor Patterson mentioned a couple of times that Thomas is a "list." You can subtract sayings from it, you can add sayings to it, and so there is an evolution over the course of time. Elaine Pagels has an interesting take on the history of Thomas. She dates Thomas a bit later; she has Thomas no earlier than the 90s, basically a contemporary of the Gospel of John. She hypothesizes a relationship between John and Thomas, a competitive relationship.

I have doubts about the great age of Thomas, although I do second the comments that Professor Patterson made about how it is hard to determine the date of a document that is in essence a list. This is because there can be sayings that are very old, there can be sayings that are not

very old. He has given some good examples of that. It is something I face in the nature of my own work. I often look at Targumic literature, which is the Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible. With the exception of the Targum fragments found at Qumran, among the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Targumic literature is post-New Testament and always presents a chronological challenge. This is true with early rabbinic literature, including the Mishnah, and other literature. How can we derive anything from literature that dates to the third, fourth, fifth centuries, and later that might have relevance for a pre-70s setting in the life of Jesus? That is a challenge. And yet, I believe there are some sayings here and there in this later literature, whose antiquity is sometimes supported from scrolls and other writings that we know predated Jesus, that are early. So in theory, again, I agree with that point that was made. I'm not going to argue this slide at length. Professor Patterson would certainly acknowledge that.

At this point I will present what I think is compelling evidence that Thomas was produced in Syria in the second half of the second century and probably not before the year 180.

The name Judas Thomas unmistakably points to the Syrian context where other writings of the second century in Syria were composed and where the famous doubting disciple is called Judas Thomas. I want you to see (as noted in the slide) there are other texts where he is identified that way, including the Syriac Gospel of John (but not the Greek Gospel of John).

There is an esoteric quality of Thomas, and that is consistent with or coherent with Syrian Christianity of the second century. Thomas' ascetic perspective, I think, reflects second century Syrian Christianity. I want to note these three successive Logia – 63, 64, and 65. The one that is labeled 65 is the parable of the vineyard tenants, which is found in Mark 12, Matthew 21, and Luke 20. There is a debate as to whose form of this parable is the earliest, the most original. I think most regard the parable as genuine and as reaching back to Jesus. Do we have the original form and the original setting in Mark? Or perhaps we should look at the form that is in Thomas. My own view is that Thomas gives us Luke's version, which has simplified Mark, primarily by omitting the allusions to Isaiah 5. Thomas presents the parable in this 63–65 cluster, which is reflective of ascetic or anti-commercial, anti-materialism, anti-wealth perspectives. Notice saying 63, “there was a rich man who had a lot of money. That night he died.” Or saying 64, “buyers and merchants will not enter the places of my father.” We see this also in saying 65, Thomas' version of the parable of the Vineyard, where a money lender, a *chrestes*—not a *chrestos*, a “good man,” as misread by some at one time, but a “money lender,” or a “money man”—owned a vineyard and leased it to some

farmers. In Thomas this parable is presented in a completely new perspective. I see here an editorial orientation in Thomas that reflects a new perspective that is consistent with what we know of second century Syrian Christianity. This includes renouncing the world, vegetarianism, as seen in statements such as “If you do not fast,” “Wretched is the body that depends on a body,” “Woe to the soul that depends on flesh,” and teaching regarding celibacy. All of this is consistent with second century Syriac Christianity.

For evidence of late second century vegetarianism, I refer to the already mentioned Tatian. He was a disciple of Justin Martyr for many years in Italy and then returned to his native land we think around 170 or 171 A.D. In short order, perhaps in a year maybe two years, he produced the *Diatessaron*, a blending, or harmony of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. That’s why it’s called a *Diatessaron*, “through four,” the story of Jesus combined and told in one continuous narrative. A few years later, not long before he died, Tatian also produced the work *Oratio* (“Oration”). We find these distinctive ideas (asceticism, vegetarianism, radical celibacy) in his work. Some of his views we know second-hand because other church fathers refer to him in passing. For example, Jerome says Tatian “condemns and rejects meat, which God has created for use” (*Adv. Jovin.* 1.3). Jerome describes Tatian as “the chief of the Encratites,” who “asserts that wine is not to be drunk” (*Comm. Amos*). Marriage also is condemned by Tatian, saying, for example, “He sows to the flesh who is joined to a woman” (*Comm. Gal.* on 6:8). Tatian, we are told by Irenaeus—and Irenaeus was writing not long after Tatian’s death, writing in the early 180s—“denounced marriage as defilement and fornication” (*Adv. Haer.* 1.28). With respect to asceticism, Tatian declares that “the rich lack many things, the poor man more easily obtains his purpose. Die to the world, repudiating the madness in it” (Tatian, *Oratio* 11).

Another thing that worries me about accepting the idea that a discrete portion of Thomas, however edited and pruned, can be dated to the first century, is Thomas knows more than one half of the New Testament writings. There is a work that tabulates these parallels (C. A. Evans, R. L. Webb, and R. A. Wiebe, *Nag Hammadi Texts and the Bible* [Brill, 1993] 88–144). I find it extraordinary that a work written at the end of the first century or beginning of the second century would know that many books. What other writing from the late first century (if that is when Thomas was actually written) knows that many books, books that would in time become part of the New Testament? Of course, nobody was talking about a New Testament as a canon in this period of time.

These are observations that give me pause. They lead me to conclude that Thomas is probably late, not early. When I was at Claremont in the

1970s I was part of the Nag Hammadi Seminar at Claremont. I studied Coptic, the language of the Nag Hammadi books, of which Thomas is one. Charles Carlston, a visiting professor from Andover Newton, James Butts, and I were the three Coptic students taught by Charlie Hedrick. I heard over and over again: “Thomas is a late first century gospel” and I accepted that. I saw no reason why not; everyone says that, so perhaps it is. In some of my earliest publications, I refer to Thomas that way without too much critical thought and simply assumed everybody knew that. In the passage of time, as I became more engaged in historical Jesus research, I became more and more troubled with Thomas. There are too many things about Thomas that strike me as late.

Here is an example. I compare Mark 4:22 with the parallel in Luke 8:17 and Thomas 5 (as preserved in P.Oxy. 655):

- Mark 4:22     “for there is nothing hid, unless it be revealed”  
 Luke 8:17     “for there is nothing hid that will not be revealed”  
 P.Oxy. 655    “for there is nothing hid that will not be revealed”

The form in Thomas agrees exactly with the smoother Greek of the form found in the Gospel of Luke. Almost all Gospel scholars agree that Luke has improved upon Mark’s less polished form of Greek, that Luke’s form is not the oldest form of the saying. The agreement between Thomas and Luke suggests that Thomas is acquainted with Luke, not an older, independent form of Jesus’ teaching.

Now, of course, this observation is probably one of the examples that Professor Patterson referred to when he cited sixteen points where out of the 95 points of agreement or parallels between Thomas and the synoptic gospels, there is evidence of interference or direct linkage somehow with the synoptic form.

Another aspect of Thomas that I find troubling is its knowledge of Tatian’s *Diatessaron*. Tatian had been in Italy under the tutelage of Justin Martyr. He returned to Syria, as best as we can reconstruct through our historical sources and the comments and references to him, around 171 or so. By 172 or 173 he has written the *Diatessaron*. The rub is that we find agreements between the *Diatessaron* and Thomas. This is what makes me think that the Gospel of Thomas that we have was produced after this period of time. Let me give a few examples. “I have not come to bring peace but a sword” Jesus says in Matthew 10:35. The Syriac *Recognitions* says “I have not come that I might cast peace *on the earth* but rather *war*” (2.26.6). And then we have in the Gospel of Thomas, “they do not know that it is dissention which I’ve come to cast *upon the earth*: fire, *sword*, and *war*.” I put in italics the points of agreement. It strikes me that what we have in Thomas is a version of Matthew 10:35

refracted through Syriac ways of saying things. Look at the next example, and this one's an interesting one because John Dominic Crossan, whose name has been mentioned, uses this as his prime example for the independence of Thomas from the Synoptic Gospels. By the way, I'm actually going to agree with an important point that Professor Patterson made. I don't think the Gospel of Thomas is directly dependent on Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I think those who have argued for Thomas as being secondary and late are mistaken at that point. So that is a very important point that he has made. Matthew 5:3, the well known beatitude, reads "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Both parts of this beatitude are in the third person. Luke, however, gives it in the second person: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God." Of course in the Gospel of Thomas saying 54 we find "Blessed are the poor"—that is third person—"for yours is the kingdom of heaven"—that is second person. Crossan attaches great importance to this strange mixture. He can't imagine why anyone would mix second person and third person forms. Why would the author of this saying, if he has Matthew in front of him and he has Luke in front of him, pick a third person from one source and the second person from the other? That is a good way of putting it. I don't think that is what happened. I think someone has harmonized materials, and in harmonizing materials, blending together two, three, four gospels as Tatian did all four of them, one in effect creates new forms of sayings. The harmonizer sometimes has to compromise. What do I do? It is third person in Matthew 5, second person in Luke 6; "I'll take one from each," he decides. So we end up with this combination. And this is just what we see in Syriac tradition. In the Syriac version of Matthew 5:3 we read "Blessed are the poor in spirit [third person], for yours is the kingdom of heaven [second person]." This mixed Syriac form likely originated with Tatian, but we can't be certain, because this verse is not fully preserved in the *Diatessaron*. In any case, the mixed form in Thomas is no mystery and hardly provides support for the contention that Thomas contains a form of a saying that predates or is independent of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke.

When is Thomas explicitly mentioned? Thomas is referred to by Hippolytus in his *Refutation of Heresies* that we think should be dated around 220 A.D. Origen about ten years later in his *Homilies on Luke* refers to the Gospel of Thomas. Thomas is not quoted by anyone in the first and second centuries. Contrast this observation, this non-usage, with the citations of, allusions to, and explicit discussion of the four New Testament gospels. Clement, writing at the end of 95, knows the Synoptic Gospel tradition. But I will focus mostly on Papias, who wrote around 110. Papias talks about the four gospels. He knows the Gospel of

Mark. For the sake of discussion let us say Mark was written in 70. I actually think it is earlier than that. In any case, Mark is written in 70, and John in about 90, and Matthew and Luke in between. So in this 20-year period of time, we have the four New Testament gospels. And within forty years of Mark, Papias is talking about Mark, or within 20 years of John, Papias is talking about John. Papias doesn't talk about Thomas. If Thomas was produced in the 70s, how is this omission to be explained? If we accept April DeConick's reconstruction, and assume a "kernel" of Thomas already as early as the 40s or 50s, how is this to be explained? Papias is very interested in Apostolic tradition. If there is a core of material that is supposed to represent Jesus' teaching, and it is treasured by a group that rallies around the name of either James or later Thomas, how is this omission to be explained? Now, it's possible Papias simply didn't know and it got by him maybe because of the eastern origin and circulation of Thomas. But I have to wonder, how does this continue? Ignatius, writing around 180 and very concerned with gospels and gospel-like writings, doesn't know of Thomas. Around 150 Justin Martyr harmonizes the three synoptics, not the "four" Synoptics. That is, he doesn't harmonize Thomas. The author of papyrus Egerton, which I date to the middle of the second century, is, I believe, a harmony. We have Synoptic and Johannine elements combined. I reject the theory that it's a mid-first century document that in its original form predates the New Testament gospels before their bifurcation into distinctive Johannine and Synoptic streams. So we have another second century harmony. Where's Thomas? Why hasn't Thomas material been incorporated into these gospel harmonies? We have Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John harmonized by Tatian, but not Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Thomas harmonized by Tatian. And this is what troubles me. I am especially troubled by Irenaeus who at length insists there are only four early, apostolic Gospels, and who mentions the other gospels produced by other groups, including the *Gospel of Judas*, much talked about in the public press three years ago. Yet Irenaeus doesn't know of Thomas. How does Thomas stay under the radar for 150 years, from 70, let us say, to 220? Is it possible? Sure, lots of things are possible. It is just hard to explain that.

Are there stages of Thomas? That's an interesting idea. Does the list expand, does the list contract? What do we actually have? It has already been mentioned that we have the three manuscripts from Oxyrhynchus. They are numbered the way they are just because of the luck of the find and the priorities of the British papyrologist who unearthed them in Egypt at an ancient site called Oxyrhynchus in a city dump, buried under dry sand, sometimes running 30 feet deep; thousands of papyri documents were recovered. So the very first one published in the series

in 1898, P. Oxy. 1 is a fragment, as it turns out, of a manuscript of the Gospel of Thomas. And then a couple of volumes later, documents numbers 654 and 655 are published, and we have two more fragments of Thomas—though the editors at that time did not know that it is Thomas. As Professor Patterson remarked, it wasn't really until the Nag Hammadi discovery shortly after World War II, when the thirteen leather-bound Coptic codices were discovered. Not all the contents of these codices, of course, are Gnostic. I agree with him, I don't think Thomas started out as a Gnostic writing, even though Thomas was found in what we call codex number two, as the second tractate. Then we realized that the three Greek fragments discovered earlier belonged to it.

Because of these four manuscript finds (three Greek mss. and one Coptic ms.) We actually can test this idea of lists growing and shrinking. So we have three Greek manuscripts dating the earliest, perhaps 210 or 220; the latest not much beyond 250 or 260; and we have a Coptic document that could be as early as 320, at least no later than 340. So we have about 100 years of manuscript history. What we find is that the manuscripts are essentially the same. Not identical; one saying is noticeably out of place, and some sayings are a little longer or a little shorter, but there is no cluster of new sayings that have been added or deleted. Now I realize with the Greek manuscripts we only have about 20 percent or so of the whole document. So perhaps in the 80 percent that we don't have maybe there was some evolutionary change. However, what we actually have provides no indication of a history of expansion and/or deletion. The evidence suggests a stable textual tradition. This is something that concerns me when we speak of various stages in the growth of the Gospel of Thomas and use this hypothesis as a major part of the justification for dating Thomas as early as the 70s. When dealing with evidence, even when we know it is incomplete, we must respect what we have. Speculating about hypothetical evidence, in order to justify a theory that otherwise lacks evidence, strikes me as special pleading and as very risky.

Some things need to be said about the question of the original language of Thomas. It was acknowledged that perhaps the original language was Syriac. I think that is a very good suggestion. Nicholas Perrin in his work, *Thomas and Tatian*, has put that to the test. Catchwords help us memorize strings or lists of sayings. We find catch words in the book of Proverbs, for example. Catchwords help us memorize strings of sayings. If you have the word "door," for example, "I am the door of the sheep fold," and then your next saying has the word "door" in it, that helps you. Simply saying the first saying helps you remember the next one that comes, and the next one that comes may have another word that links with the saying after it. These are called

catchwords. Catchwords don't disappear when you go from one language to another. "Door" would be the same in Greek, it would be the same in German, it would be the same in English. Some of these catch words - you can see them in English translation. However, some catch words work a little differently. Sound alike words, such as synonyms, homonyms are not always just a simple thing like "door." So when you move from the original language of a text to another language you start losing some of the catch words. It is interesting that when Perrin retroverts Coptic and Greek Thomas into Syriac—and Syriac remember is the first language of Syria and Edessa, the city that has been rightly mentioned and emphasized—there are just under 600 catchwords in Syriac, but in the Coptic about 250, in the Greek about 250. Many of the catchwords survived in the Greek and Coptic translations, but fewer than half. Perrin thinks that this is pretty good evidence that Syriac was the original language. The other thing too is that sometimes there are clumsy sayings in the Coptic; we think there's something wrong here, something lost in translation. Again this would point to translation. Often it is the Syriac that explains the clumsiness of the Coptic reading or clumsiness, awkwardness, or illogic in the Greek. The Syriac then explains this is where the translator went wrong. The other interesting thing is that the presence of so many catchwords argues against the idea of stages in the evolution of Thomas, because catchwords make the addition or deletion of chunks of material difficult not impossible, but it's like a chain; if you tear out the links, you have broken the chain. So the presence of catchwords suggests that Thomas was composed in Syriac, pretty much as we have found it, partially in Greek and fully in Coptic.

Let me illustrate the problem of ascertaining the original language of an ancient document by an appeal to an old Jewish work called the *Testament of Moses*, a writing that is included in the loose collection scholars call the Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Many of these writings, which are important for understanding the first century, survive in translation and not in their original language. For example, we have the entire book of *Enoch* in Ethiopic. We have big chunks of it in Greek translation, but thanks to the Dead Sea Scrolls, we now have a good portion of *Enoch* in its original Aramaic. Of the *Testament of Moses* all we have is a Latin translation of a portion. We are confident that this Latin was based on a Greek text. What we are not sure about was whether there was a Hebrew or Aramaic original behind the Greek, which the Latin translated. You can see how complicated it is.

We have another important example of this problem in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint. Comparing the Greek translation with the original Hebrew and Aramaic text has given scholars a lot of practice in this field of study. We often can tell when a Greek or

Latin text is in reality a translation of a Hebrew or Aramaic text. This expertise comes into play when we consider the Gospel of Thomas. The suggestion that Thomas was written in Syriac, the native tongue of Syria, is not wild speculation. And if in Syriac it presents us with just under 600 catchwords, as opposed to some 250 for Coptic and for Greek, then it encourages us to see Thomas as a Syriac production. If so, this helps explain its connection to Tatian's *Diatessaron*, which was very likely originally composed in Syriac as well.

In response to what Professor Patterson said a few minutes ago: No, I do not think the Gospel of Thomas is directly dependent upon Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I think it is dependent upon Tatian's *Diatessaron* and other Syriac traditions, which helps us understand why there are so many distinctive readings in Thomas, helps explain the other 79 points of contact between Thomas and Matthew, Mark, and Luke and why several of them are different. Many of those 79 parallels that contain differences agree with Tatian and other Syriac traditions, which we date in most cases with confidence to the second half of the second century in Syria. So what I'm finding is there is not a lot of room left for a Thomas that exists in the first century, a Thomas that somehow stayed under the radar with no explicit comment until the third century.

But here is another point that I don't see very often in the discussion. I call it Thomas and the lack of verisimilitude. Do we really have pre-70 Palestine reflected in Thomas? Now I realize it is not a narrative gospel; it is a collection of sayings and so that fact will reduce the possibility and degree of verisimilitude. But if you look at the material that Matthew and Luke have in common, often called Q, Jesus' teaching, which almost entirely lacks narrative, we still find traces of verisimilitude to the way life really was, as we know from other historical sources, as we know from archaeology, the way life was in Palestine pre-70. It is not there in Thomas. Why? The Gospel of Thomas provides no help to archaeologists and historians of pre-70 Jewish Palestine. Jewish and Christian archaeologists and historians make extensive use of the four New Testament gospels and the book of Acts and sometimes Paul's letters. If Thomas is early, or at least some chunk of it is early, and accesses authentic Jesus tradition — where Jesus really lived, what he really talked about — why the absence of verisimilitude? Here is a quotation that appeared just last week in *Biblical Archaeology Review* by Ron Hendel, who is a professor of Hebrew Bible. He comments "Biblical archaeology involves the rigorous correlation of textual data from the Bible and material evidence from archaeology." He is right. Historians and archaeologists can find no correlation between Thomas and the material evidence of archaeology. I'm referring to pre-70 Palestine, not necessarily late second century Syria. Where is the correlation between

Thomas and the world of Jesus and his disciples? This is why I say Thomas lacks verisimilitude. The world of Thomas is not the world of Jesus and his followers. Should we prefer the distinctive forms of material in Thomas? And that's what we are really talking about; we are not talking about all the parallels where Thomas says essentially the same thing that we find in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We are talking about those instances where Thomas is distinctive with either a familiar saying given a new look or a completely unfamiliar saying. Should we prefer the distinctive forms of material in Thomas, forms that stand in tension with the four gospels themselves, which everyone agrees are first century and other writings known to have been produced in the first century, but do not stand in tension with distinctives that developed in Syria in the second century?

I conclude: (1) Both Greek and Coptic Thomas betray the presence of Matthean and especially Lukan content and editing. (2) Thomas knows more than one half of the New Testament. (3) Thomas reflects second century Syrian traditions and it may have been originally composed in Syriac with Greek and Coptic later translations. (4) Thomas is unknown until the beginning of the third century. (5) Thomas probably contains little or no early or authentic material beyond what is preserved in the New Testament gospels themselves. On what factual basis can one or should one argue for a first century date for Thomas? Allow me to appeal to Occam's Razor, but in its more original Missouri form: If it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, it probably is a duck. This is not to say that it is impossible or we should never think that there is any chance to find an authentic saying in Thomas, even if everything I have said is accepted. For me, Thomas is never pushed off the desk and never looked at. Of course not. So when I am talking about the historical Jesus and what Jesus most likely said, what he most likely meant, and what he did, and so on, Thomas is still born in mind. There is a chance, just as surely as the targum may preserve something that authentically reflects how a given passage was interpreted in the first century, just as surely as the Mishnah may retain an understanding of law that was applied and understood in Jesus' time, so may Thomas somehow, however in one way or another, retain a form of a saying that is closer to the way Jesus said it. Or a saying that did not survive in Matthew, Mark, or Luke, but Thomas preserved it. But on the whole, I find the evidence wanting that Thomas as a document in any form existed in the first century or existed in the first half of the second century. The evidence taken as a whole points to the second half of the second century. Or another way of putting it: which theory rests most comfortably with the evidence that we have. I think the theory that Thomas was probably written around 180 and then within 40 years or so is cited and discussed. Likewise, Mark

was written in 70 and within 40 years is cited and talked about. Thank you very much.

PATTERSON – Let's do some back and forth and clarify in the next few minutes and then as soon as possible we'll open up to questions from the audience. Again, let me complement Professor Evans on, as he has said of me, being a model of clarity; your arguments are very well stated, Craig.

I'm just going to look at the conclusions that you've ended with here, Craig. There's a lot of material here so I won't belabor it all. Both Greek and Coptic Thomas betray the presence of Matthean and especially Lukan redaction and special material. I don't dispute that at all. The question is, what do the numbers mean. My position has always been that there are instances where, I think, you can say that the synoptic texts have influenced Thomas, but when the numbers are small, what does it mean? And when we have just one exemplar of Thomas, which is relatively late, and when we know from analysis of the Coptic that the Coptic scribe was taking a look at the Coptic New Testament--this is what Schrage shows. There's going to be some influence. My position is that the influence is so small, or relatively small, that I can't really imagine those numbers if Thomas was actually taking things out of the New Testament as a compositional technique. The numbers I gave you, 16 instances in 95 tries was based on all synoptic parallels. But it's really interesting to run those numbers again just with parallels in Mark, Matthew, and Luke, because in those cases you can actually trace redaction very clearly from Mark to Luke, or from Mark to Matthew. How many parallels are there between Thomas and Mark, where Matthew and Luke also have a redacted version of Mark? Twenty-six. Now, of those parallels, how many times does Thomas reproduce clear redaction from Matthew or Luke, that is, their changes to a Markan passage? The answer is two - possibly three times if you take one of Chris Tuckett's instances. There are two or three times out of twenty-six tries where we can really control the evidence. We may simply disagree on this, but for me that just means that it probably was not a case of Thomas drawing on the New Testament at the basic compositional level. So, the numbers are kind of important, I think, and we should talk about that.

That Thomas knows more than half of the New Testament; I'm not convinced that Thomas knows any of the New Testament beyond those instances that I've just referred to. So I have to look at the essay. If it were clearly evident that Thomas knows half of the writings of the New Testament, then this debate would be over. I don't think any other author from the second century could be said to know that many of the New

Testament writings, if verbatim quotation or something very close to it is the standard of proof. So I would have to see those details, and form an opinion about each one of them, but I don't think that Thomas knows any of the writings of the New Testament.

Then there is the argument that Thomas reflects second century Syrian traditions – like the Diatessaron – that may have been originally composed in Syriac, with later Greek and Coptic translations. The problem with those arguments is they must always go from the Coptic back to an hypothetical Syriac original. Han Drivers and Gilles Quispel originally made some of these arguments, showing how an odd turn of phrase in Coptic could be explained if you could presuppose a Syriac original rather than a Greek original. The problem, of course, is that the Coptic we have is actually a translation of a Greek *Vorlage* and not a Syriac *Vorlage*. We are fairly certain of that. That doesn't mean that Thomas was composed in Greek. It could well have been composed in Syriac, but to get to our Coptic text, you have to go from the Syriac to the Greek and then through at least two iterations of the Coptic to get to the text we have today. A Subakhmimic version, a mixed Subakhmimic Sahidic version, and then what we have now. There are just too many steps in that process for me to put a whole lot of confidence in those arguments.

Thomas is unknown until the beginning of the third century: perhaps. But you may recall that Second Clement (12:1-2) quotes a piece from some gospel, and it's almost word for word out of the Gospel of Thomas, saying 22. Now, historically, students of that text have attributed it to the Gospel of the Egyptians because Jerome attributes that saying to the Gospel of the Egyptians, and so typically in our versions of the Apostolic Fathers there'll be a note: this comes from the Gospel of the Egyptians, but it could just as easily have come from the Gospel of Thomas, which would make it one of the earliest cited gospel texts. I won't mention also of course the saying that Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 2:7, which could be a quotation of a version of Thomas 17—the provenance of this saying is much disputed. There may be at least some versions of Thomas sayings floating around early, and I think we should take that into consideration.

Finally, the business with Tatian. Nicholas Perrin argues this way -- Simon Gathercole argues in this way in his work on Thomas also--namely that Thomas shares certain ideas with Tatian (and Bardaisan, another important figure we need to bring into the conversation --and the Acts of Thomas, the Book of Thomas—all these works share certain theological concepts and predilections). I agree with that. The question is what do these common features mean? How do you explain those things historically? You could say that Tatian introduces asceticism to Syrian Christianity and therefore the asceticism of Thomas presupposes Tatian--

that's what Nick Perrin argues. But you could just as easily say Thomas represents asceticism, Tatian comes back to Syria from Rome, becomes an ascetic, and therefore Thomas is the source of Tatian's asceticism. I don't know a way to solve that problem, to tell you the truth. I do think that Thomas makes sense in a Syrian milieu. It has all those marks. One thing I will say though is that Thomas has a lot of Platonism in it. But when I compare Bardaisan or Tatian and their use of Plato, Thomas is relatively unsophisticated. Tatian in his Oration to the Greeks almost quotes from the Timaeus. It's very close--and Bardaisan does also. But in Thomas you don't have that kind of sophistication. It's something more like cocktail party Platonism; that is, I think the author knows as much about Plato as say I would know about Freud. I could throw around a few terms like *id* and *ego* and such, but there's no sophisticated knowledge there. Now, of course, does that necessarily mean that Thomas represents an early phase of the appropriation of Platonism, when it hasn't sunk in very well yet, or is he just an ignoramus? Could be either way, I don't know. But I do think that it could mean that Thomas represents a relatively early attempt to incorporate Platonism.

One last thing, where else do we find this cluster of ideas? They're all in Thomas: the idea of secret wisdom associated with words, logia, baptism as a kind of entry point to that secret wisdom, asceticism, an interest in androgyny, neither male nor female, an interest in Plato, an interest in realized eschatology. I would argue that all of those elements are also constitutive of the position of the opponents in 1 Corinthians often associated with Apollos or some such figure from Alexandria. Here also you find the idea that what is important is secret wisdom, that you get access to it through special baptism; that you should be an ascetic like Paul is an ascetic (chapter seven of the epistle), that you should try for something that's neither male nor female (referring of course to chapter 11 in the prayer and prophecy section of that chapter) and then realized eschatology in chapter 15. Even vegetarianism could be up for discussion in chapters 8-10 of 1 Corinthians. I think that what we're seeing in the Gospel of Thomas is not so late as it is hidden in early Christianity. It's hidden in the opponents of Paul in 1 Corinthians whose voice we don't hear, but I think that when we put the pieces together, it's pretty close to what we have in the Gospel of Thomas. Now that's not to say that they were reading the Gospel of Thomas or something like that; I don't suppose that's true. But I think this interpretation of the Jesus tradition - a kind of Hellenistic wisdom interpretation that draws heavily on Plato - it's possibly very very early, and probably is evidenced in 1 Corinthians itself. Just some things to think about, talk about back and forth. What do you think?

EVANS – Hang on to those last few words, especially the parallels that were suggested with respect to the Corinthian correspondence, 1 Corinthians particularly. I would probably take that same approach if we knew Thomas existed in the first century. Let us suppose Papias talked about Thomas. What is the backdrop to a first-century Thomas? Professor Patterson’s proposed Corinthian parallels could explain a lot. Maybe Thomas is wrestling with some of these issues, with which Paul wrestles in 1 Corinthians. That would be a very plausible approach—if we possessed less ambiguous evidence that suggested that a form of Thomas may well have circulated as early as the 70s. In my view, the problem is that there is significant evidence of the lateness of Thomas and no evidence of “early” forms of Thomas that could have been composed in the first century. Part of this evidence is seen in the large number of parallels between Thomas and about one half of the writings that in time became the New Testament. I again refer Professor Patterson and the audience to the already mentioned list of parallels that my colleagues Bob Webb, Rick Wiebe, and I compiled. In this work we went through the Nag Hammadi library looking for every possible parallel without any suggestion about which direction it goes, through the entire Nag Hammadi library and produced this fairly lengthy volume. We printed the text of Thomas and the biblical parallels side by side. These parallels suggest that half the books of the New Testament appear to be known to the author of Thomas. Now one could always reverse it and say: “No, all these other writings are echoing Thomasine traditions or they are all echoing some common tradition one way or the other.” But I do not find this suggestion plausible.

In the end I ask myself which theory — an early composition of Thomas, or a late composition of Thomas — rests the most comfortably with the evidence that we have and requires the least amount of speculation or special pleading. I have concluded that the theory that best fits the evidence sees Thomas produced in Syria in the late second century, a Thomas that knows of and is influenced by Tatian and his *Diatessaron* and ideas expressed in his *Oratio*.

The conclusion that Thomas is a late second century product accounts for *all of the evidence that we have*: Greek and Coptic manuscripts ranging in date from 220–340 that suggest a document with a stable textual history, a document probably originally composed in the Syriac language, as the great number of catchwords in that language indicate. The conclusion of a late Syriac Thomas coheres with the numerous parallels between Thomas and Syria traditions, some of which are distinctive to Syriac Christianity and its literature, as we see in the *Diatessaron*, the *Oratio*, the *Recognitions*, and other sources. Professor Patterson drew our attention to 2 *Clement* 12:2, which reads “When the

two shall be one, and the outside like the inside, and the male with the female, neither male nor female,” which closely parallels saying 22 in the Gospel of Thomas. He wonders if 2 *Clement* has quoted Thomas and, if so, is this evidence for an early date of Thomas? Scholars have suggested that 2 *Clement*, which is more of a sermon than a letter, could date as early as 100–120 or as late as 170. Helmut Koester thinks the work dates before the middle of the second century. Accordingly, if 2 *Clement* has quoted the Gospel of Thomas, this is then the earliest citation of the work and suggests that Thomas should not be dated later than the first half of the second century. However, Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), writing shortly before 200, says the saying in question derives from the Gospel of the Egyptians (cf. *Stromata* 3.13.92), a work scholars think was composed sometime in 120–140. I think we should accept Clement’s testimony, given that he lived in Alexandria, Egypt, the region that also produced the Gospel of the Egyptians. If he says the saying comes from this work, then unless we find compelling contradictory evidence, we should accept what he says. Accordingly, the one distinctive Thomasine saying that we find in a second century source may not be from Thomas at all. This means that we have no firm evidence of the existence of Thomas until it is mentioned by Hippolytus and Origen in the third century. Given the eclectic nature of Thomas, a work that draws upon a host of other writings, the appearance of a saying from the Gospel of the Egyptians, along with materials from perhaps as many as one half of the writings of the New Testament should occasion no surprise.

Finally, I want to return to the point concerning verisimilitude. Three years ago, in 2006, *Jesus and Archaeology* edited by James Charlesworth was published. It is a large book, with 31 contributors, comprising some 750 pages. Several of the contributors are archaeologists, some are Jewish. In the index to Scripture and ancient literature I count more than 1,000 references to Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. There are only twelve references to Thomas, all of them by one author, Bruce Chilton, all of them in reference to a literary portrait of Jesus, nothing to do with archaeology or history. The other thirty authors talking about Jesus and archaeology and history in the pre-70 setting saw no point in citing Thomas. Now, maybe they are wrong and they need to go back and restudy Thomas. But I don’t think so. Why is their neglect of Thomas justified? It is justified because Thomas provides no information about the realities of pre-70 Israel, the world in which Jesus and his disciples lived. These historians and archaeologists make use of whatever materials aid their research. They make use of Josephus, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the New Testament writings. They make no use of Thomas. I think that is a very telling point.

If Thomas has been in circulation since 70, maybe earlier, how does it stay under the radar? Nobody talks about Thomas explicitly until 220. If Thomas is as old as the New Testament Gospels, why does it not reflect the world of Jesus and his contemporaries? Why do Jewish archaeologists and Jewish historians neglect Thomas? Surely theological interests and commitments to a revered New Testament canon plays no part in their thinking. Jewish scholars, as my friend Hershel Shanks would say, “have no dog in this fight.”

Archaeologists and historians ignore Thomas because Thomas doesn't help them. Does Thomas lack historical and cultural verisimilitude because it's mostly sayings? One could argue this, but not persuasively. The sayings material that Matthew and Luke have in common, what is usually called Q, reflects the world of Jesus. So the fact that Thomas is comprised of sayings and not narrative does not account for its lack of verisimilitude. It lacks verisimilitude with first century Israel because it was composed in second century Syria. It is with second century Syria that we find verisimilitude.

Ideologically and critically I wouldn't have any problem with a more positive assessment of Thomas. If Thomas has material that goes back to Jesus that we do not have in other sources, it needs to be taken into account in historical Jesus research. So methodologically, I am perfectly open to that possibility. I worry that historical Jesus research, as undertaken by some, skews the portrait of Jesus by giving too much credit to Thomas as an early and independent document. Thank you.

ROBERTS – Thank you. Alright we have some time for questions and answers.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #1 – This is for both of you really. Given the lack of manuscript tradition for the Gospel of Thomas, what does this say about the early Christian church view of the Gospel of Thomas and what bearings does this have on the discussion?

PATTERSON – Well I think that speaks for itself. After the fourth century, the Gospel of Thomas was associated with Manichaeism and became part of a kind of heretical cluster of ideas. Although, the Manichaean Gospel of Thomas the testimonia refer to is a lot longer than the Thomas we have (supposedly 1300 verses), so I'm not sure if it's the same text at all, but it's clear that in the history of Christianity, the Gospel of Thomas does not enjoy the same status as the canonical gospels that we have. I think the last time it is referred to as one of the Manichaean gospels that circulates is in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, after that it

disappears altogether. But it just isn't part of the growing canonical tradition, so it disappears.

EVANS – Let me add something. Let me actually run to Thomas' defense on that question. There are three pieces – pieces of three Greek versions found at Oxyrhynchus. That is two more copies than have been found of Mark. That kind of evidence can cut in a lot of ways. The Christians at Oxyrhynchus read a very interesting library; they were very eclectic. So Thomas, in fact, does not fair badly in Oxyrhynchus when it comes to Christian reading lists.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #2 – My question is more for information. You say there are 95 parallels between the Gospel of Thomas and the synoptic gospels. And of those, 7 or maybe as many as 16 show influences from the gospels. My question is what criteria are you using to determine if something is influenced as opposed to being a parallel?

PATTERSON – Well, that's a great question; it goes right to the heart of method. The debate usually goes something like this. In order to show that text A is dependent on text B, you have to find editorial spurs from text B in text A. Now, most of this work presupposes the two source hypothesis. So you take Mark as the source for Matthew and Luke, and then you study how Matthew and Luke have rendered a particular saying in Mark, that is, how they have editorialized the saying. Then you look at the Gospel of Thomas and ask "Does Thomas pick up any of the editorial fingerprint that Matthew or Luke left on the originally Markan text?" If Thomas does, then you can say that Thomas is clearly being influenced by Matthew or Luke. Now, in the case of those texts where you have a Markan parallel, with Matthew and Luke editing Mark, or sometimes just Matthew and sometimes just Luke—if in these cases you ask: how many times does Thomas actually hit a Matthean or Lukan editorial spur? Out of twenty-six times, it's three. Now some scholars will argue that this shows that Thomas is dependent on the canonical gospels. Others, like me, will say: Well, no it doesn't because that's just not enough to suggest dependence at the compositional level. I think you can account for those small numbers through textual corruption of one sort or another. Nicholas Perrin I think rightly asks in his recent book on this: for Patterson, how many *would* be enough? I never say, and I guess I don't know, but it would have to be more than three, because I know that in the fourth century when the scribe who created our text was making a translation into Coptic, he had a Sahidic New Testament over here and he was consulting it. When he got to a place he didn't know how to vocalize something right, or he did not know how exactly to express a

phrase, he took a look; maybe the way you translate Greek sometimes, right? So I know that he's looking at those texts and getting help. If that was the case, then we don't have to suppose that Thomas was drawing on the synoptic gospels at the compositional level back in the second century or first century or whenever it was written. If the synoptic texts were in fact a major source of material for the original author of the Gospel of Thomas, it would be very hard for me to understand why out of 95 parallels, 79 of them have no trace of the synoptic editorial work at all. Why is that? Is it as some will say: Well, Thomas was erasing what was in the editorial work of the synoptic. That's possible but I just don't find it very probable. But anything is possible, I mean, this is history. Strange things happen. I just don't think it is the most probable way of accounting for the data.

EVANS – I'd like to add to those comments. Dr. Patterson is right. What has complicated things is that Christians in the first and second centuries often quoted from memory. They did not always have documents in front of them. Justin Martyr is a great example of this. He does have the gospels and yet when he writes, he often quotes from memory. He will say, "Here is the word of the Lord," and he makes it sound like as a single saying and yet he has blended together sayings from two or more gospels. Justin harmonizes often, even when he is not consciously thinking of himself as producing a harmony. You see this in his *Dialogue with Trypho* and in his *Apology*. And so this is what obscures the data somewhat. So we ask if this is a distinctive Matthean form for a distinctive Lukan form. It is difficult to determine because of these harmonizing tendencies. If I may return to the Syriac language and the gospels. If one could only read and speak Syriac, say in the year 175, then one would not have access to the gospels, except as they are harmonized in Tatian's *Diatessaron*. We do not know, apart from the few quotations, if the gospels were available in Syriac prior to Tatian. There is no evidence of Syriac gospels prior to the third century. So one's only access to the dominical tradition, that is, the teaching of Jesus and his story, is through the *Diatessaron* until, of course, the Greek gospels eventually were translated into Syriac as individual gospels in the third century. So in other words, I am arguing the evidence suggests that the author of Thomas is accessing a blended, harmonized Syriac gospel tradition. That would explain why there are so many distinctive elements in Thomas that cohere with Syriac forms of the sayings of Jesus.

PATTERSON – Craig, would you suppose then that in Syrian Christianity there was no gospel until the *Diatessaron*?

EVANS – Yes, I think so; unless there is some work we do not know about. I am sure Christians knew stories and were told things. Some of these things were written down, but we do not know of the gospels translated in full, in the Syriac language until the *Diatessaron*. If one could read Greek, one would have access to the Greek gospels. But Christians who only read and spoke Syriac did not have the gospels until the *Diatessaron* was produced.

PATTERSON – But any gospel?

EVANS – Or any gospel, that's right.

PATTERSON – That kind of strikes me as implausible: that a highly literate place like Edessa would get on for 70, 80 years without any kind of written gospel text.

EVANS – There were no written gospel texts, so far as we know, in Syriac. Written gospels were circulating in Greek.

PATTERSON – Thomas would fill that gap. Possibly... it's speculation.

EVANS – I'm just going by what evidence we have. That's all.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #3 – My question is for either scholar on the stage. As to the specific type of genre given to this writing of Thomas, it's being called a gospel. I know that we have one gospel according to Matthew, according to Mark, and according to Luke, and according to John. This is one gospel that is according to four different writers, and in order for this type of genre to be considered even a gospel it must constitute the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ, and especially his death, his burial, and his resurrection - resurrection from the dead. And the gospel of Thomas is wanting of those requirements even if you read the epistles of Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, he reminds the reader of the gospel - what constitutes a gospel? It is the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and Thomas is lacking these elements. Why not call the Gospel of Thomas the "Proverbs of Jesus according to Thomas?" Why not call it "101 things that Thomas said about Jesus?" Why do we call it a gospel because for it to be called a gospel, it must talk about those things, the death of Jesus and that he rose from the dead. Thomas lacks these ideas.

EVANS – Well, I will say very briefly I think it's a confusion of the content of the Christian message. That's what Paul is summarizing in 1 Corinthians 15. The gospel, the good news of what God has accomplished in Christ, who died and was buried, all of this according to the scriptures, and on the third day was raised up. And then he goes on and makes his argument about how important the resurrection is. But as a genre, I'm not sure when it occurred, but probably not until the second century is there an actual genre that we call gospel. Perhaps it is because Mark uses the word *euangelion* in its opening verse. Perhaps there was another factor. But in any case, whenever Thomas was written, Thomas calls itself a gospel. The Greek loan word, even though it's the Coptic translation, the Greek loan word *euangelion* is used. Your question is an interesting one and it would require a long an extended discussion of the issue, but I think that is part of the answer. It's just two things: there is content, and eventually this summary of the content, the message of the gospel becomes the name of a genre, namely a story about Jesus. Want to add to that Steve?

PATTERSON – No, I would only say that we call it the Gospel of Thomas because the text we have comes with an actual title. It says the Gospel of Thomas.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #4 – Is there any evidence that the church fathers were aware of the Gospel of Thomas at the time the canon of scripture was determined?

EVANS – The difficulty of course is saying when the canon of scripture was determined. If you as early as the late second century say: Irenaeus has it all figured out in 180-182, but he does not know of Thomas. He mentions Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Four, no more, this is it, and gives his reasons why, and some of his reasons are quite curious as to why it must just be these four. And then he talks about other gospels, some by name and sometimes he refers to groups, but Thomas is not mentioned or quoted by Irenaeus. So, I don't know. By the time you get to the great councils in the fourth and fifth centuries, of course Thomas is known by then.

PATTERSON – One of the problems is that the Gospel of Thomas is probably an eastern gospel. It's a Syrian, or eastern Syrian gospel, and so it did not circulate widely in the west, and I think that is because the theology of the Gospel of Thomas would have been lacking for people who lived in the Roman Empire, as I said in my final remarks. That is, our canon is a western canon and it's a canon that grew up and developed

as relevant for Christians in the Roman Empire, and it makes a lot of the death of Jesus and martyrdom and those themes because early Christians living in the Roman Empire as dissidents related very strongly to that aspect of Jesus' life and faith. In the east, in eastern Syria that was not the case, not until the third century. In the second century you don't find any interest in Jesus' death, resurrection, or martyrdom. And so Thomas, whether it was composed at the beginning of the second century or the later part of the second century, just wasn't a text that was relevant for Christians in the west and so it didn't gain currency in the west. I think the reason it's not in our canon is largely that our canon is a western canon and shaped very strongly by that experience of being a dissident of the empire.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #5 – This is for Dr. Evans. Forgive me if you've already answered this or clarified. What convinces you that Thomas knows more than half of the New Testament specifically?

EVANS – It's partly a cumulative argument. I mean if it is simply an echo here and there, then one is on very thin ice. It is the number of clear quotations, allusions, and parallels that encourage us to recognize the less obvious allusions. I suppose I would have to invite you to look at the 60 pages or so of parallels that I and Bob Webb and Rick Wiebe assembled in the book mentioned earlier. We do that for the entire Nag Hammadi corpus. The book is not focused on Thomas. However, we noticed when we examined Thomas we found a great many parallels. And as I said we do not necessarily assume that a parallel points to Thomas being dependent on a particular source. And I want to reiterate, I'm not talking about Thomas directly dependent on Matthew, Mark, Luke, John or necessarily other sources. Thomas has knowledge of material we find in the writings that in time became the New Testament, however he acquired it. That is all that I am saying. I am not saying that the author of Thomas has read 14 or 15 New Testament books; he just has knowledge of them. And that suggests to me, Thomas was composed much later than the New Testament gospels. By the way, the death of Jesus is emphasized very early in Christian writings. Paul emphasizes it in his earliest writings as early as the late 40's into the 50's. Christians were not being killed then; they were persecuted in the synagogue or in Jerusalem, perhaps, but Rome was not rounding them up and persecuting them. So well before serious Roman Imperial persecutions, the death of Jesus is very important to the early Christian movement.

PATTERSON – I think it's an important point, at least to me it's important. I think the death of Jesus is important for Paul because he is

getting kicked around. And when he talks about the death of Jesus, it's almost always in a context where he's reflecting on his own career as someone who's been arrested and flogged and put in prison and these things. I think that there is a very close correlation between Paul's interest in the death of Jesus and his own experience as a dissident within the Empire. Now to be sure, there was no systematic persecution of Christians in the first century because they're simply still below the radar, but when they hit the radar, they take it in the chin. But Paul is certainly a good example of the fate enjoyed by earlier Christians living as dissidents in the empire.

EVANS – Would you not agree that what ignited the Christian church, what turned Jesus' movement into a rapidly expanding church is the resurrection? And in the telling of the resurrection the passion story must also be told. Or are we to think that somehow Jesus dies and then the church recovers, or his following recovers, and then the church then grows up, stimulated and comforted by his teaching, but with little interest in his death and resurrection? I find that highly implausible.

PATTERSON – I think that that is certainly true for the church in the west and certainly true for Paul. It's true for their canonical gospels, but I don't think it's true for Syrian Christianity. It certainly isn't true as reflected in the Gospel of Thomas. Tatian would be an interesting question because the oration of the Greeks has no reflection on that. Bardaisan also does not, I think, speak about the death and resurrection of Jesus either. And so I think it's interesting to consider the differences between Christianity east and west and where they choose to focus and why. Remember that Paul thinks the opponents in 1 Corinthians are wrong and deficient precisely because they don't take the cross seriously enough. And that is, I think, evidence that there's some difference or diversity about proper focus in early Christianity.

ROBERTS – May I add one comment here? I've been biting my tongue for most of the night. It seems like the reason that Paul did get kicked around was because he preached a crucified Jewish resurrected Messiah. That was the crux in the controversial point of his message. And I don't think the fact that he got kicked around was why he then preached the message. He preached the message first then he got kicked around. So that would be basically my response to his own thinking here.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #6 – Thank both of you gentlemen for being here tonight. A lot has been mentioned tonight about the evidence for or against the Gospel of Thomas, but then you made this interesting

statement that I wanted to pick up on. Essentially you said that you were sympathetic, that's the word, toward Crossan's preference for an early date for the authorship of the Gospel of Thomas. But then you said that establishing an early date was unwarranted specifically by any compelling proof. My question is: if the manuscript support for Thomas is not particularly compelling and if the evidence for an early date is not particularly compelling, then why would you as a historian be so optimistic about an early date and sympathetic to Crossan's view?

PATTERSON – I should clarify. I'm not sympathetic to Crossan's early date for Thomas. That is, I think I was clear. For me, the Gospel of Thomas as we know it probably came into existence in the late first century or early second century, sometime in that time frame. Crossan dates it considerably earlier and in part on the basis of some things that I said in my early work on the Gospel of Thomas. He and I have talked about that and I do not really support the firm date he makes for Thomas in the 60s or 70s. I am sympathetic to the way he works with Thomas in his work on the historical Jesus—very sympathetic. And more crucial for that point is the question of whether Thomas is dependent on the synoptic gospels or not. And as I said before, I think the evidence is compelling that it is not dependent on the synoptic gospels. That means that you should be able to use the Gospel of Thomas to do traditional historical work on the sayings of Jesus. That is, they can help you get a little critical purchase on the sayings as they developed over the first century. So you need not rely simply upon the Gospel of Mark or the canonical gospels to present the sayings of Jesus and then guess about what was the original. Thomas just gives us another critical tool to work with and I think that is very very important. Now, some have objected that this gives too much weight to the Gospel of Thomas, too much importance to Thomas in the discussion of the historical Jesus, and that may be true. But I should point out- and I believe Craig said something like this in his remarks--outside of the synoptic parallels in the Gospel of Thomas, scholars have been very reluctant to attribute anything else in the Gospel of Thomas to Jesus. There are a handful of sayings unique to Thomas that Jeremias thought could go back to Jesus, and Johannes Bauer thought a few more could go back to Jesus. But the Jesus seminar, for example did not vote red or pink any saying from the Gospel of Thomas that did not have a synoptic parallel. (Saying 42 and 98 are printed in pink, but behind that lie a number of votes, some of which were gray – we struggled back and forth with these.) What does that mean? I think it means that scholars still have a kind of canonical prejudice, to tell you the truth. But it probably also points to the

importance of multiple independent attestation in the whole debate about what goes back to Jesus.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #7 – This question is for Dr. Patterson mainly. You focus a lot of time demonstrating how the Gospel of Thomas fits within the context of Syrian Christianity especially in the context of Edessa. As Jesus and the first followers were Palestinian Jews, I am wondering what evidence you would have that would connect the Gospel of Thomas with a Palestinian Jewish perspective.

PATTERSON – Well there are 95 parallels, with Q and Mark mostly, in the Gospel of Thomas. Those are all sayings that I assume go back to a Palestinian milieu, or at least a western Syrian milieu, where Mark would have been written. Consider those overlaps. I have to argue that something like “Blessed are the poor for yours is the kingdom of heaven” or “Blessed are those who are hungry because you will be filled” - I think those go back to Jesus. Now, somewhere, somehow those sayings that Jesus spoke in Galilee in the first half of the first century were taken to other places, including Edessa, where they turn up in the Gospel of Thomas and other gospels. I think that the Gospel of Thomas gives us a plausible way of accounting for the transmission of the Jesus tradition into Edessa. The presence of so many synoptic-like sayings in Thomas, together with the presence of a lot of what I would call Platonizing or esoteric sayings, something more characteristic of eastern Syrian Christianity, gives us a kind of, I don’t know, I guess a fingerprint of both early Palestinian Christianity and then later Syrian Christianity. So there’s the evidence for the movement of this tradition from Palestine to eastern Syria. The other thing is that I think the sociology reflected in the Gospel of Thomas, that is, all these sayings also found in the synoptic gospels that talk about leaving family and home and becoming beggars and voluntary poverty, all those things that make up the socially radical sayings of Jesus in the synoptic tradition—they also indicate a connection to the earliest phase of the Jesus movement in the Galilee. This is what I argued years ago in my Claremont thesis. In Syrian Christianity, very interestingly, the prototypical apostolic figure is that ascetical, wandering sage—the Jesus imitator. I think that it’s reasonable to conclude from this that some people from the Jesus movement in fact went to Syria. They crossed the Euphrates and went on to live with Jews in Edessa and they preserved that early sense of the ideal apostle as someone who leaves house and home, lives without family, lives as a loner. They preserved that and it became a kind of ideal there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #8 – This was also a question for Dr. Patterson and actually it's more of a point of clarification to determine whether or not I actually have a question. I believe I misheard you but it sounded like you said at one point that you felt that in 1 Corinthians Paul seemed to be borrowing from some Thomas principles. Did I hear that correctly?

PATTERSON – Let me clarify. In 1 Corinthians, Paul is engaging a certain group of partisans in the community at Corinth with whom he has some serious disagreements. The argument he has with these partisans comprises the gist of the letter. Much effort, of course, has been expended trying to flesh out what that position was that he is arguing against. And my view is that the position of those partisans as described, say, by Birger Pearsen or Richard Horsley or any number of people, who would basically characterize them as Hellenistic Jewish wisdom theologians—I think that their description meshes very well with what I have said about Thomas Christianity. Now, I don't think that they were reading the Gospel of Thomas, but I do think that you see in Corinth the kind of understanding of Jesus that does emerge in the Gospel of Thomas, and this says to me that this understanding of Jesus was part of the early Christian debate, if you will. These ideas about Jesus did not arise for the first time in second century eastern Syria. We need to take cognizance of that when trying to understand the place of Thomas and its ideas in the early history of Christianity.

AUDIENCE MEMBER #8 – Then that means that I do have a question. Without actual archaeological evidence that gives us a solid date, like the Dead Sea Scrolls give us an early time line, without an actual archaeological date set to an early manuscript of the Gospel of Thomas, would it not be just as safe to assume that Thomas borrows from those ideas that Paul puts out in 1 Corinthians, that Paul does not in fact borrow a Thomasine idea, but rather Thomas or the author of the Gospel of Thomas borrows from 1 Corinthians to come up with those statements?

PATTERSON – I don't argue that Paul is borrowing from the Gospel of Thomas, and neither would I argue that Thomas is reading 1 Corinthians. I don't think that the parallels are there. The ideas are there but the textual parallels—namely, 1 Cor. 2:7—may be accounted for in other ways. I should add, however, that Simon Gathercole has recently argued just as you have suggested – that Thomas is quoting from Paul, not the other way around. He makes that argument to counter what he believes is my position, that Paul quotes Thomas. But that is not my position. Simon's arguments are well-stated, and I commend them to you; but I

am not persuaded. To your point about archaeology, I want to just remind us, and I think Craig would agree with this, that we don't have archaeological evidence for any of our gospels. All of our texts are late copies of copies of copies of copies. Archaeology just does not give us the kind of information that would help us establish exactly when and where any of our gospels were written—Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, or Thomas. We're really speculating on the date and place for all of these gospels—or making educated guesses. As you can see, sometimes we'll agree and sometimes we'll disagree.

EVANS – If I could just add one brief word on that. Paul deals with some issues and we see them reflected in 1 Corinthians. He's writing that in the 50s. Forty years later the issues are still percolating at Corinth and *I Clement* addresses them again. That is an interesting point. There were some issues in Corinth in the 50s; there were still issues in the 90s, how much later these issues continued I don't know. And as for when gospels are written, well at least we have a Papias, a dateable person from a dateable time who is talking about four gospels/evangelists by name. That is my point there. There is not much doubt about Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John dating to the first century. I like to hang my theories on pegs, and the pegs in this case are people who really lived and talked and tell us information, or documents that we find. People moved around, things moved around. I am talking about the document that was composed, as it is extant in three Greek fragments and one Coptic version. The evidence as we have it suggests that it is a late second-century composition. Thank you.

## Jesus, Abba, and the Seminar

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### Abstract

Ron Huggins takes another look at the Jesus Seminar. After giving a brief summary of the work and methods of the seminar, he examines the assumptions and presuppositions of its members. The article effectively demonstrates how the beliefs and past influences of the members color their choices with respect to the authenticity of Jesus' sayings in the Gospels.

Robert W. Funk is dead. Even as I report the fact a pun flutters near at hand begging me birth it in print. Out of respect for the dead and delicacy over the tender feelings of certain of my readers I resist to return once again to my original point: Robert W. Funk is dead.

But it wasn't always so.

Yes, I know: that goes without saying, since being dead implies you were once alive, as in the well known sepulchral epitaph: *sum quod eris, fui quod sis* (or as a memorial brass in St. Olave, Hart Street, London puts it: "as I am you shall be, As I was, so be ye").

For a long time during my scholarly transversions Funk seemed more than a little alive, indeed bigger than life, and at no time more evidently so than when he gave his opening remarks on "The Issue of Jesus," at the very first meeting of the once infamous and now sometimes recollected Jesus Seminar. His words, delivered in some auditorium or other in or around Berkeley, California, on that early spring day of 1985,<sup>1</sup> still retain some of their original pretentious grandeur, even now more than twenty years after they were given and even though we now know that what they promised so confidently would never come to pass. Was I right even back twenty years ago in imagining I detected a tinge of megalomania when first I read the following words from that address?

What we are about takes courage...We are probing what is most sacred to millions, and hence we will constantly boarder on blasphemy. We must be prepared to forebear the hostility we shall

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<sup>1</sup> The first meeting was held 21-24 March 1985.

provoke. At the same time, our work, if carefully and thoughtfully wrought, will spell liberty for other millions. It is for the latter that we labor.<sup>2</sup>

I never doubted that the Jesus Seminar would sell a lot of books. But there is more to “liberating millions” than selling books, and although we should always be in favor of liberation, providing of course it is liberation *from* something *bad* and *toward* something *good*, we still need to ask, do we not, what it was exactly that the Jesus Seminar wanted to liberate us from? And when we do the answer (or at least part of it) isn’t hard to discover: they wanted to free us from believing that the Lord’s Prayer, or the vast majority of it anyway, came from Jesus.

Those who remember the Jesus Seminar (actually they’re still around, just not as much in the news lately) will recall how they voted on the authenticity of the various sayings of Jesus. For any given saying each member would vote with a bead of one of four different colors, each of whose meanings one popular summary described as follows:

red: That’s Jesus!

pink: Sure sounds like Jesus

gray: Well, maybe.

black: There’s been some mistake. No way!<sup>3</sup>

Naturally this conclusion of the Seminar’s about the alleged inauthenticity of the Lord’s Prayer made good copy and was therefore widely noised about already long before the Seminar produced what is very likely to become the relic for which it is best remembered as a footnote to the history of biblical scholarship and of human heroism or folly (depending how you look at it): *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (1993).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Robert W. Funk, “The Issue of Jesus,” *Foundations & Facets Forum* 1.1 (March 1985): 8.

<sup>3</sup> Robert W. Funk, “The Emerging Jesus,” *The Fourth R* 2.6 (Nov 1989): 1. Essentially the same list (minus “No Way!” on the last one) appears in *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (trans. and ed. by Robert W. Funk, Roy Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar; A Polebridge Press Book; New York: Macmillan, 1993), 37.

<sup>4</sup> The original title was given by Teryne D. Bell as “A New Red-Letter Edition of Five Gospels” (Teryne D. Bell, “Will the REAL Jesus Please Stand Up?” *The New Westar Magazine* 1.1 [Feb 1987]: 9), and Marcus Borg as *The New Red-Letter Edition of the Five Gospels* (“What Did Jesus Really Say?” *Bible Review* [Oct 1989]: 19).

In 1988 an article appeared in the *New York Times* by Ari L. Goldman announcing in its title: “Lord's Prayer Isn't His, Panel of Scholars Says.”<sup>5</sup> The article reported that the “vote on the Lord's Prayer—which appears in somewhat different forms in the Gospel of Matthew (6:9-13) and the Gospel of Luke (11:2-4)—fell solidly in the grey area.” The same article further noted Jesus Seminar member Hal Taussig's, “predicting that the vote would be widely accepted by biblical scholars. The scholarly community will follow it.”

A year later, the *Bible Review* told a somewhat different and more detailed story: “According to the Jesus Seminar,” it said,

The first words of the Lord's Prayer, ‘Our father who art in heaven’ (Matthew 6:9a) are “almost certainly not” authentic, therefore, these words will be printed in black... (Luke's shorter introduction—“Father” [Luke 11:2]—will be printed in red; the seminar considers this wording to be authentic.)”<sup>6</sup>

When *The Five Gospels* finally arrived, however, things weren't presented in precisely the way the two earlier reports led us to expect. As predicted in *Bible Review* we do find that “Father” is the only word in Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer that is printed in red. However, contrary to earlier predictions, “Our Father” in Matthew's version is printed in red as well.<sup>7</sup> What is especially surprising about this is not that “Father” is printed in red—I might have expected that (see further below)—but that “Our,” is printed in red as well. In its discussion of that passage, *The Five Gospels* offers no justification of, nor indeed does it even mention, the red-letter status of “Our.” Given my own familiarity with the procedures and methodologies of the Jesus Seminar I felt sure that it was not the *Bible Review* that had gotten it wrong, but *The Five Gospels* itself, which I presumed must have printed “Our” in red by mistake.

Further research confirmed that suspicion. In reviewing the Jesus Seminar's own published accounts of that vote I found that everything points to the conclusion that at best only “Father” was to be printed in red.<sup>8</sup> The original vote took place at the 13-16 October 1988 meeting of

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<sup>5</sup> Ari L. Goldman, “RELIGION NOTES; Lord's Prayer Isn't His, Panel of Scholars Says,” *New York Times* (Sunday, October 23, 1988) <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/23/nyregion/religion-notes-lord-s-prayer-isn-t-his-panel-of-scholars-says.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Marcus Borg, “What Did Jesus Really Say?” *Bible Review* (Oct 1989): 22.

<sup>7</sup> Again, as the only thing in the prayer to be printed in red.

<sup>8</sup> The qualification “at best” will be explained further below.

the Jesus Seminar in Atlanta, Georgia. In a report dated 6 December 1988 and published the following month in the Jesus Seminar's magazine, *The Fourth R*, Funk informs us that the issues related to the Lord's Prayer had been set before the assembled Seminar members in a paper by Hal Taussig—then of Philadelphia's St. Joseph's University and Reading's Albright College and now a visiting professor at New York's Union Theological Seminary—and that "Most Fellows found Taussig's analysis convincing in its principal tenets."<sup>9</sup>

Taussig's original paper was also published in December 1988 in the Jesus Seminar's journal, *Foundation & Facets Forum*, and in it we do find that he clearly argued against printing "Our" in red in the first line of Matthew's Lord's Prayer, when he said that the "Our...in heaven"... is to be considered...as Matthean," that is to say, as originating with the author of Matthew not Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

That the Seminar confirmed Taussig's suggestion was revealed when the results of the actual Seminar vote were published in June 1989 in an article by Robert J. Miller. According to Miller the fellows voted that "Father" be printed in red, but that the rest of the line, "Our...who art in heaven," be printed in black.<sup>11</sup> Also, in confirmation of the *New York Times* article, he indicated as well that the prayer as a whole was given a gray vote.<sup>12</sup>

Curious about the discrepancy, I emailed Miller asking him if he knew why, contrary to his reported decision, *The Five Gospels* had printed "Our" in red. He kindly responded as follows:<sup>13</sup>

It is puzzling. Since my article was written a week or so after the seminar meeting where this was voted, I suspect that my report is accurate and the *Five Gospels* is in error. However, the book was printed several years after the meeting and it is possible that the seminar reconsidered the issue and had a new vote.

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<sup>9</sup> Robert W. Funk, "The Lord's Prayer: Does it Go Back to Jesus?" *The Fourth R* 2.1 (Jan 1989): 1. Funk says nothing about whether "Our" ought to be printed in red letters or not, although his methodological discussion implies that it should not.

<sup>10</sup> Hal Taussig, "The Lord's Prayer," *Foundations & Facets Forum* 4.4 (Dec 1988): 30.

<sup>11</sup> Robert J. Miller, "The Lord's Prayer and Other Items From the Sermon on the Mount," *Foundations & Facets Forum* 5.2 (June 1989): 185.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Email from Robert J. Miller to the author (1 May 2009).

Miller's suggestion of some further decision intrigued me. Was there any evidence that the Jesus Seminar had revisited its position between the publication of Miller's report in 1989 and the appearance of *The Five Gospels* in 1993? The question led me to seek additional evidence.

The first piece, which was relatively inconsequential in nature, was that the cover of the November 1992 *The Fourth R* featured an artistic rendering of the word "Abba," patterned after "an eighth century manuscript in the library of Durham Cathedral," which was intended to highlight an article in that issue by Funk in which he remarked upon how "a vast majority of the members of the Seminar are convinced that Jesus employed the intimate term "Abba" ("Father"), for God."<sup>14</sup>

More significant was a series of cumulative reports of the Jesus Seminar's voting record in the 1990-1991 *Foundations & Facets Forum*, sorted variously by gospels (chapter and verse),<sup>15</sup> weighted average,<sup>16</sup> gospels (weighted average),<sup>17</sup> clusters (weighted average),<sup>18</sup> and alphabetical titles,<sup>19</sup>

In each case it was indicated that the Seminar had voted that Matthew 6:9c, which was given the listing name "Lord's prayer: Father," was to be printed in black, and that the decision had been made at the 1988 Atlanta meeting. Up to that point then, there had been no new vote on the matter.<sup>20</sup> Apart from these items there was nothing of further significance reported prior to the 1993 appearance of *The Five Gospels*. Finally in the May-June 1998 *The Fourth R*, Hal Taussig published

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<sup>14</sup> Robert W. Funk, "The Jesus That Was," *The Fourth R* 5.6 (Nov 1992): 3. See the "On the Cover" note for that issue.

<sup>15</sup> *Foundations & Facets Forum* 6.1 (March 1990). On Matt 6:9c see, p. 35.

<sup>16</sup> *Foundations & Facets Forum* 6.2 (June 1990). On Matt 6:9c see, p. 168.

<sup>17</sup> *Foundations & Facets Forum* 6.3-4 (Dec. 1990). On Matt 6:9c see, p. 284.

<sup>18</sup> *Foundations & Facets Forum* 7.1-2 (March-June 1991). On Matt 6:9c see, p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> *Foundations & Facets Forum* 7.1-2 (March-June 1991). On Matt 6:9c see, p. 136.

<sup>20</sup> In an email to the author (29 April 2009) Hal Taussig commented on the problem being dealt with by saying that "it was not a printing question. It was a matter of what level of the text we decided we could differentiate in the color coded voting. At that stage in our work we did not allow ourselves to vote one color for an adjective or adverb and one color for a noun or verb. So we did not allow the option to vote on "Our." It was probably a mistake, and one that we later nuanced." Interestingly these later voting tallies do not specify the various differing votes for the various words in "Our Father who art in heaven." Perhaps this is what Taussig has in mind. It must be remembered however that at the time of the earlier reports of Miller it was already indicated that "Our" should be printed black but "Father" red.

another article on the Lord's Prayer in which he comments that the "Seminar voted against the historicity of the prayer text as an entirety, but voted red on the fragment prayer 'Abba/Father.'" <sup>21</sup> Conclusion: Robert J. Miller was right, his report was correct and *The Five Gospels* was in error.

This whole question as to whether "Our" was printed in red on purpose or by mistake represents a side issue to the main point of this study, namely the question of the Jesus Seminar's view of the Lord's use of "Abba" and its meaning in relation to his prayer. Still it represented an important side discussion as it cleared the ground to consider the word "Father" as the only word the Jesus Seminar intended to print in red.

### **Eighty Two Percent of Jesus' Sayings Not from Jesus?**

The introduction of *The Five Gospels* tells us that "Eighty-two percent of the words ascribed to Jesus in the gospels were not actually spoken by him." <sup>22</sup> Given that the Jesus Seminar voted so few passages red, we may wonder why they thought the word "Father" in the Lord's Prayer ought to be one of them. I ask the question on the assumption that the legitimacy of their methodology might be tested equally well by examining why they confidently affirm that one saying comes from Jesus as by examining why they confidently affirm that another saying does not.

Did Jesus use the term "Abba" when he taught his disciples the Lord's Prayer? According to *The Five Gospels*,

Jesus undoubtedly employed the term "Abba" (Aramaic for "Father") to address God. Among Judeans the name of God was sacred and was not to be pronounced (in the Dead Sea Scrolls community, a person was expelled from the group for pronouncing the name of God, even accidentally). Yet Jesus used a familiar form of address and then asked that the name be regarded as sacred—a paradox that seems characteristic of Jesus' teachings. <sup>23</sup>

The gist of the argument here is that it was so unusual for ancient Jews to use God's name (Yahweh) that it would have been even more unusual for them to use the more intimate and familiar term "Abba." Their argument in saying that Jesus did use "Abba," represents in part an

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<sup>21</sup> Hal Taussig, "Behind and Before the Lord's Prayer," *The Fourth R* (May-June 1998): 3.

<sup>22</sup> *The Five Gospels*, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 149.

appeal to a criterion of authenticity called *dissimilarity*. A classic definition of this criterion was given by Norman Perrin who formulated it as follows “the earliest form of a saying we can reach may be regarded as authentic if it can be shown to be dissimilar to characteristic emphases both of ancient Judaism and of the early Church.”<sup>24</sup> Because of its dual reference (ancient Judaism / early Church) this criterion is also sometimes referred to as *double dissimilarity*. Perrin considered it “the fundamental criterion for authenticity upon which all reconstructions of the teaching of Jesus must be built.”<sup>25</sup> Similarly Rudolf Bultmann’s eminent student Ernst Käsemann considered that only in the case of results arrived at by the application of this criterion do “we have more or less safe ground under our feet.”<sup>26</sup>

So then, was the use of “Abba” as rare among first century Jews as the Jesus Seminar suggests? Apparently not, or at least so says a number of Jewish scholars. Geza Vermes, a Jewish scholar who specializes in Historical Jesus studies, writes that “the representation of the Deity as ‘Father’ is a basic element of Old Testament theology. Ancient biblical names like Abiel (God is my Father), Abijah (Yah [Yahweh/Jehovah] is my Father), Eliab (My God is Father), etc., all testify to this concept. They proclaim a parental relationship between God and individual members of the Jewish people. ‘Is not he your father?’ asks Deuteronomy 32:6.”<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Jewish New Testament scholar Amy-Jill Levine writes:<sup>28</sup>

Still popular is the view that only Jesus would have dared to call God “Father” and that only Jesus would have done so with the daring use of the Aramaic term *Abba*, meaning “Daddy.” The claims are hopelessly flawed. In Jewish thought, the designation of the deity as “Father” develops substantially during the Second Temple period, that is, after the return from the Babylonian exile in 538 BCE. For example, Malachi 2:10 states: “Have we not all one

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<sup>24</sup> Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 39. <sup>25</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, revised version, (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company 1996) 135-137.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 37. See also Borg’s discussion of this criterion in connection with its use by the Jesus Seminar in “What Did Jesus Really Say?” p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> Geza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2004 [orig. 2003]), 223.

<sup>28</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, *The Misunderstood Jew* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 42-43.

father?" The Mishnah (*Berakhot* 5:1) states that the ancient holy ones (called Hasidim) spent an hour in preparation prior to prayer, "in order to direct their hearts toward their Father who is in heaven." This understanding of God as Father continues in synagogues today, where Jews speak of and to *Av ha-rachamim* ("merciful Father") as well as *Avinu malkenu* ("Our Father, our King") and proclaim, *Hu avinu* ("He is our Father")...Although it is better to think of *Abba* as a first-century Aramaic term than a Swedish rock band, the translation "Daddy" is incorrect. The term means "father," and it is not an expression associated primarily with little children. The New Testament writers themselves do not understand it to mean "Daddy" either, for in each of the three uses the Aramaic *Abba* is immediately glossed with the Greek vocative *o pater*, "Father." The only place in the Gospels Jesus himself is said to use the address *Abba* is Mark 14:36; in Gethsemane, he prays, "*Abba*, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want."

The assertion we have all, no doubt, heard in sermons—that "Abba" means "Daddy"—figures into our discussion here in that its use implies so great an intimacy and familiarity on the part of its user that presumably no Jew of Jesus' day would have dared to use "Abba" to refer to God. But again as Neusner and Green note "Some assert that 'Abba' is unique to Jesus and displays a special intimacy (i.e., daddy), but neither claim is supported by textual and philological evidence."<sup>29</sup>

Vermes gives us some sense of the range of usage for "Abba" in a story he relates from the Babylonian Talmud concerning Hanan, the grandson of the first-century Jewish wonder-worker, Honi the Circle-Maker:<sup>30</sup>

When the world was in need of rain, the rabbis used to send school-children to him, who seized the train of his cloak and said to him, *Abba, Abba*, give us rain! He said to God: Lord of the universe, render a service to those who cannot distinguish between the *Abba* who gives rain and the *Abba* who does not.

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<sup>29</sup> "Abba," *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period 450 B.C.E. to 600 C.E.* (2 vols. in 1; ed. by Jacob Neusner & Scott Green (Peabody Mass; Hendrickson 1999 [orig. edition: New York: Macmillan, 1996]), 2.

<sup>30</sup> Babylonian Talmud, *Taanit* 23b, quoted in Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 211. For a more complete discussion on the question of *Abba* meaning daddy, see James Barr, "Abba isn't 'Daddy'," *JTS* 39.1 (April 1988): 28-47.

It seems difficult to imagine how the Jesus Seminar got this so wrong. Yet it appears that they indeed made the very elementary mistake of assuming that since ancient Jews avoided pronouncing the divine name, they would also have avoided calling God “Abba.” Not so apparently. This becomes even more interesting when we consider the fact that even Rudolf Bultmann, in many ways the spiritual father of the Jesus Seminar, and the actual teacher of Jesus Seminar members Helmut Koester and James M. Robinson,<sup>31</sup> had noted in his 1934 work *Jesus and the Word*, that “Jesus does not intend to teach any new conception of God and does not announce the fact of man’s sonship to God as a new and unheard-of truth. The view of God as Father was in fact current in Judaism, and God was addressed as Father both by the praying congregation and by individuals.”<sup>32</sup>

### Other Evidence?

Given the fact that the appeal to dissimilarity with Judaism does not in the end provide the kind of confidence we see reflected in the red-letter status of the word “Father” in *The Five Gospels*, we may ask further whether the Seminar offered any *further* significant arguments or evidence in support of its red-letter decision for “Father.” And as a matter of fact, as we examine the scholarly paper trail underpinning the decision we do find the Seminar appealing to a second line of evidence described, for example, in Funk’s original summary of the Seminar’s vote:<sup>33</sup>

That Jesus addressed God as “Father” is taken to be a very strong link with the actual words of Jesus, since the New Testament preserves the Aramaic term “Abba” elsewhere (Mark 14:36, Jesus in Gethsemane; Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6).

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<sup>31</sup> “Both authors studied under Rudolf Bultmann. Both are involved in the current indigenization of the Bultmann tradition on American soil” (James M. Robinson, “Introduction: The Dismantling and Reassembling of the Categories of New Testament Scholarship,” in James M. Robinson & Helmut Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971], 1).

<sup>32</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (trans. by Louise Pettibone Smith & Erminie Huntress Lantero; New York: Scribner’s, 1934), 191.

<sup>33</sup> Robert W. Funk, “The Lord’s Prayer: Does it Go Back to Jesus?” *The Fourth R* 2.1 (Jan 1989): 5-6.

Such an argument may be meaningful in a world where a modicum of confidence exists regarding the integrity of early Christian reports about Jesus. It is hard to regard it as meaningful however within the world, or perhaps better yet within the language game, of the Jesus Seminar, where the Jesus of early Christian reportage is as much the product of some ecclesiastical committee's imagination (or lack of imagination) as of real historical accounts of what Jesus actually did and taught. Hence for them the quest has to do as much with using their critical methods to get at the truth that ostensibly lies *behind* the evidence as it does with attending to what lies *on the face* of it.

The difficulty with this procedure is that our confidence in what the Jesus Seminar allegedly "discovers" and puts forward as its "assured results," can rise no higher than our trust on the one hand in the validity of their methodologies and on the other in their ability to effectively apply them. Beyond this there is no way for us to know whether the very interesting Jesus *supposedly* invented by an ancient committee is simply being replaced for us by the comparatively uninteresting Jesus *actually* invented by a latter-day committee.

Ultimately this second line of evidence also falls short of being persuasive. In the first place, Funk's comment about "Abba" being preserved "elsewhere" in the New Testament, might cause us to forget that it is not *actually present* in either version of the Lord's Prayer. It may be that it stood behind the Greek word *Pater* there, but *how can we be sure?*

Secondly although it is true that we find Jesus using the word Abba in Gethsemane in Mark 14:36, Funk's appeal to it would ultimately be nullified when the Seminar later voted the particular saying containing it off the lips of Jesus, as Philip Sellew explained in *Foundations and Facets Forum*: "The narrational setting makes a pre-Markan origin implausible, despite what some see as typical Jesus language (*abba*)."<sup>34</sup> Hence when Jesus prays in Mark 14:36 to his "Abba," saying to him, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will," *The Five Gospels* prints it in black, indicating, as the reader will recall, that "There's been some mistake. No way!" i.e., there is no way its Jesus; or again, in the more formal statement of the significance of sayings printed in black: "Jesus did not say this; it represents the perspective or content of a later or different tradition."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Philip Sellew, "Aphorisms of Jesus in Mark: A Statigraphic Analysis" *Foundations & Facets Forum* 8.1-2 (March-June 1992): 157.

<sup>35</sup> *The Five Gospels*, p. 36.

This same decision to print in black was followed as well in the earlier Jesus Seminar publication *The Gospel of Mark: Red Letter Edition*.<sup>36</sup>

The reason given in both the *Mark: Red Letter Edition* and *The Five Gospels* for the black-letter-status of Mark 14:36 is the fact that nobody could have heard the Gethsemane prayer.<sup>37</sup> This relates to what Funk describes as one of the “rules designed to exclude” inauthentic material: “as a matter of principle, no words or thoughts ascribed to Jesus when no auditors were present to hear or remember them were accepted [by the Seminar] as authentic.”<sup>38</sup> As his exemplar of this principle Funk actually appeals to this same prayer of Jesus:<sup>39</sup>

His prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane, for example, went unheard except for God. His disciples had fallen asleep. The arrest and the flight of his friends followed immediately. How could the evangelist have known what he said on that occasion?”

Yet may we not wonder whether the principle as stated and exemplified here really reflects authentic critical rigor as claimed by the Jesus Seminar, or merely a basic lack of historical imagination? In the first place Funk tacitly admits a qualification to the principle, does he not, when he notes that the “arrest and the flight of his friends followed immediately.” In other words, there would have been no opportunity for Jesus to talk to his disciples about the burden on his mind in the garden or what he had prayed, unless of course we wanted to suggest that he talked about it after the resurrection, an idea that Funk and his colleagues would object to on other grounds.<sup>40</sup> Yet by the same token Funk’s remark implies that at other times Jesus might well have spoken about what he had said on occasions where there were no outside auditors. A classic example of this is the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, to

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<sup>36</sup> Robert W. Funk, with Mahlon H. Smith, *The Gospel of Mark: Red Letter Edition* (Sonoma, Cal.: Polebridge Press, 1991), 216.

<sup>37</sup> *The Five Gospels*, p. 120, and Funk & Mahlon, *Mark: Red Letter Edition*, p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus: Jesus for a New Millennium* (A Polebridge Book; HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 138-139.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 139.

<sup>40</sup> See the tenth of Funk’s 21 theses: “The resurrection of Jesus did not involve the resuscitation of a corpse. Jesus did not rise from the dead, except perhaps in some metaphorical sense” (Robert W. Funk, “Twenty One Theses,” *The Fourth R* 11.4 (July-Aug 1998): 8. See then rule of evidence N4 in Funk & Mahlon’s *Mark: Red Letter Edition*, p. 49: “Statements attributed to the risen Jesus are not admissible as evidence for the historical Jesus.”

which we find the principle of no-auditors again applied in the discussion of the passage in *The Five Gospels*.<sup>41</sup>

Nobody other than the devil and Jesus were present, to be sure, which means that the report cannot be verified. The Fellows were unanimous in the view that all of the sayings in this narrative were created by the author of Q.

But again is the Seminar here displaying its critical acumen or its lack of imagination? There is no doubt that its anti-supernaturalistic disposition would have disinclined it from regarding Jesus' encounter with the devil seriously as a real event in history, no matter what context they happened to find it in or how well attested it was from the point of view of the criteria of authenticity.<sup>42</sup> Yet that same disposition intermixed with a healthy dash of historical imagination ought to have suggested other plausible life settings for the story. In one of his books, Jesus Seminar member and Episcopal bishop John Shelby Spong said: "In the world that I inhabit, miracles do not occur."<sup>43</sup> Having read his books, and to some degree followed his career, I believe that here the bishop speaks nothing but the unvarnished truth! (even though I don't personally happen to inhabit that world). In the same context, Spong goes on to say that "supposed supernatural invasions to break the laws by which the universe operates are sheer delusion." And yet even if Spong and his colleagues in the Seminar believe they inhabit a world in which there are no devils, still he/they would still have to admit that there continue to be people who are so benighted (take myself for example) as to believe in devils, and sometimes even suspect they have actually encountered demonic activities on one level or another during the course of their daily lives. My own sympathies on this score runs on parallel lines to those of Malcolm Muggeridge when he said: "Personally, I have found the Devil easier to believe in than God; for one thing, alas, I have had more to do with him. It seems to me quite extraordinary that anyone should have failed to notice, especially during the last half century, a diabolical presence in the world."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *The Five Gospels*, p. 278.

<sup>42</sup> The Jesus Seminar devoted the entire May 1992 issue of *The Fourth R* to the issue of demons.

<sup>43</sup> John Shelby Spong, *Jesus for the Non-Religious: Discovering the Divine at the Heart of the Human* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2007), 67.

<sup>44</sup> Malcolm Muggeridge, *Jesus: The Man Who Lives* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 51.

Now to be sure Rudolf Bultmann while I was yet only a child had already once and for all established, in his view no doubt irrefutably, that the likes of Muggeridge and I simply could not exist—"It is impossible," he said, "to use electric light and the wireless and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time to believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles,"<sup>45</sup>—and yet here we both were, availing ourselves of modern technologies, switching on and off electric lights, and whistling along to the "wireless" (that quaint olden-days word for what we now call the radio), and all the while believing in "the New Testament world of spirits and miracles." Hopefully by now Bultmann's spiritual children in the Jesus Seminar have come to face what for them might seem a difficult fact, namely that the electric light, the radio, and surgery, have not banished belief in spirits and miracle, but rather have allowed people to live longer, to see and hear better, and to stay up later cultivating such beliefs via increased access to books, television, radio, and—what Bultmann never dreamed of—the internet.

In any case, given current belief in the demonic realm, how much more should we expect to find such beliefs embraced during the first century.<sup>46</sup> Might not Jesus, as a first century person, have interpreted certain difficulties in his life as rooted in a struggle between himself and the devil? Throughout the Gospels we see him casting out devils. He speaks of Satan being sometimes operative in visiting sickness on people (Luke 13:16), and, in the parable of the sower, of attempting to keep people from receiving the message of the gospel (Mark 4:15). He also hears the voice of Satan behind Peter's voice, when the latter attempts to dissuade him from fulfilling his divine mission (Mark 8:38). He speaks familiarly of what Satan's bad intentions with regard to Peter were, implying that he himself could, as it were, see what was going on behind the scenes (Luke 22:31). And on one occasion he even has the audacity to assert: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Interestingly this last remark by Jesus even rose to the level of being printed in pink in *The Five Gospels* ("Sure sounds like Jesus"). So then if Jesus might have said a thing like that, if he was ready to assert that he had actually seen Satan falling from heaven, then surely he was capable of describing seeing him and arguing with him in the wilderness.

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<sup>45</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, "New Testament and Mythology," in *Kerygma and Myth* (ed. by Hans Werner Bartsch; trans. Reginald H. Fuller; New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 5.

<sup>46</sup> Not helped along in the belief by the electric light and radio programs, they were at least not discouraged from it by a pervasive uncritically held dogmatic secularism.

So then in the case of Jesus' prayer in the garden we are again confronted with a troubling lack of historical imagination. Even granting that the three disciples (identified as Peter, James, and John) fell asleep while Jesus prayed, that scarcely means they heard nothing of his prayer. Nor does it rule out the possibility that some other inquisitive auditor might have borne witness to Jesus praying, such as, for example, the mysterious youth mentioned in Mark 14:31, who "fled naked" from the garden after the soldiers had gotten hold of his linen garment, which was the only thing he'd been wearing. Many through history have supposed that youth to have been none other than the author of the gospel of Mark. If that be the case, the report of Jesus calling God "Abba" in prayer in the garden of Gethsemane is based on eyewitness testimony! And from that perspective it is entirely proper to ask what Jesus' use of Abba there might mean when thinking about his use of *Pater* in the Lord's Prayer. However the Jesus Seminar were not looking at the issue from that perspective, nor were they able to arrive at that perspective pursuing the question in the way they did. Either they lacked the imaginative power, or their methods lacked the explanatory power to negotiate the issue adequately. Still granting their own decision on the in-authenticity of Mark 14:36, we must insist that they ought to have taken that into account before using that passage as evidence for the authenticity of Jesus' use of *Pater* in the Lord's Prayer.

### **On the Importance of Being Aramaic**

A key idea to note in the Jesus Seminar decision here is the fact that the supposed link between the word "Father" in the Lord's Prayer and "Abba" in other parts of the New Testament really did need to figure significantly in the decision to print "Father" in red. This due to the fact that the supposition brought into play another supposed criterion of authenticity, namely that since Jesus spoke Aramaic, a saying in which Aramaic either directly appears or reflects in Semiticized Greek, it is deemed more likely to be authentic, to go back to Jesus. Those who would rely on this criterion however need always to keep in mind that just because a particular saying goes back to an early Aramaic speaking community, it doesn't necessarily mean it goes back to Jesus. By the same token, just because a saying has been translated into good Greek doesn't mean it doesn't go back to Jesus. When there is no confidence in the integrity of the early Christian tradition as a reliable witness to Jesus, if the early Church promiscuously read its own teaching back onto the lips of Jesus, then the mere appearance of an Aramaic word here and there proves nothing beyond the fact that some early Christians (or perhaps only one Christian) knew Aramaic. For those who see integrity

in the early record, the fact that Paul uses Abba twice (Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:6) is significant. For those who do not, such as the Jesus Seminar, the fact that Paul uses it may even imply that Mark—written says Funk and Mahlon, by “an anonymous author...shortly after the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E.—may be indebted to him for it.<sup>47</sup> Given the dating, Paul would have long since gone on to his reward by the time the author of Mark took up his pen. According to Funk and Mahlon, further, “Paul’s gospel was in general circulation when Mark composed his story of Jesus.”<sup>48</sup> So then if the anonymous author of the gospel of Mark read Paul’s gospel back onto Jesus’ lips (as Funk and Mahlon go on to say he did at Mark 8:31, 9:31, and 10:33-34), then why shouldn’t we think that Mark’s anonymous author might just as easily have transferred “Abba” from the lips of Paul’s to the lips of Jesus’?

### Conclusion

What then may we say in conclusion of our side trip down a rather poorly paved byway of interpretive history? Well, it has at least been a journey of discovery. We have learned that in at least for the instance we have been looking at:

- (1) That the colors assigned to the sayings of Jesus do not match those actually decided upon through the voting of the Seminar (i.e., by the printing of “Our” as well as “Father” in red at Matthew 6:9).
- (2) That decisions based on earlier votes have not been updated on the basis of the results of later votes (i.e., the original appeal to the “Abba” in Mark 14:36 when arguing that Lord’s Prayer’s “Father” ought to be printed in red, was undercut when the seminar voted Mark 14:36 inauthentic)
- (3) The criteria of authenticity adhered to by the Jesus Seminar actually tends to blunt historical sensitivity and imagination (i.e., as in the case the unimaginative adherence to the no-auditor criteria in the instance of both Jesus temptation in the wilderness and his prayer in the garden.
- (4) That in printing the word “Father” in red, the Jesus Seminar was being far more confident than their arguments and justifications for doing so warranted (i.e., after the difficulties we have discussed can the Jesus Seminar, given the

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<sup>47</sup> Funk & Mahlon, *Mark: Red Letter Edition*, p. 8.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

perspective they start from justify printing “Father” in pink, or even gray?)

We have seen the Jesus Seminar being too optimistic in declaring a certain saying of Jesus authentic. We have also seen them being too pessimistic in declaring others inauthentic. Why did the Jesus Seminar print “Father” in red when given their own methods they had no solid justification for doing so? Was it because they loved their methods so much that they became blind to their weaknesses? Or was it that they somehow wanted to think that Jesus called God “Abba” whether they had good reasons for thinking it or not? Did the long shadow of Jeremias’s insistence that “*there is as yet no evidence in the literature of ancient Palestinian Judaism that ‘my Father’ is used as a personal address to God*”<sup>49</sup> fall across the voting box that fateful October day? Or was there perhaps an impossible but not entirely unwelcome ectoplasmic visitation from a bespectacled ghost with bushy eyebrows and mustaches, a haunting, that is to say, from no less important a spectral worthy than that lugubrious old academic Adolph von Harnack himself, whispering authoritatively into the ears of their subconscious minds as they were getting ready to cast their colored beads: “Es giebt nichts in den Evangelien, was uns sicherer sagt, was Evangelium ist...als das “Vater-Unser”... Nach diesem Gebet ist das Evangelium Gotteskindschaft, ausgedehnt über das ganze Leben.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (trans. by John Bowden, Christoph Burchard & John Reumann; London: SCM Press, 1967), 29 (italics Jeremias’s).

<sup>50</sup> Adolf Harnack, *Das Wesen Christentums* (Leipzig: J. C. Heinrichs, 1902), 42; ET: “There is nothing in the Gospels that tells us more certainly what the Gospel is...than the Lord’s Prayer...It shows the Gospel to be the Fatherhood of God applied to the whole of life” (Adolf von Harnack, *What Is Christianity?* [trans. by Thomas Bailey Saunders; intro by Rudolf Bultmann; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 65]).

## **Radical Feminism as a New Religious Movement**

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### **Abstract**

Radical feminism is recognized as a distinct movement within history. The self-stated goal of this movement is the empowerment of women so that they might share some semblance of equality with men. Alan Branch argues that this goal is wedded with distinct philosophical and religious ideas. He traces this marriage through three stages of development in radical feminism and demonstrates how radical feminism has become a unique religious system in its own right. The article concludes with a critique of this new religious feministic worldview.

Popular singer Helen Reddy achieved worldwide fame in 1972 when her feminist anthem *I Am Woman* became a chart-topping hit in the United States. Close on the heels of sexual revolution of the 1960's, the song's chorus echoed a triumphant note for the emerging Feminist movement and said,

I am strong (strong)  
I am invincible (invincible)  
I am woman!

Reddy received even more notoriety when *I Am Woman* received a Grammy Award for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance. When she accepted the award, Reddy thanked God, and then added, "Because *She* (God) makes everything possible." Reddy's song and her reference to God in the feminine signaled to the broader public the initial phase of what I contend is a New Religious Movement: Radical Feminist Theology (RFT).

The feminist movement of the 1960's quickly influenced theological discussions. Beginning as a protest movement within mainline Christian denominations, feminist theology has expanded into a broad and expansive set of ideas that are counter-Christian. My thesis for this paper is that RFT exhibits characteristics of other new religious movements

and should be treated as a new religious movement in its own right. In order to prove this thesis, I will begin by a brief outline of the three phases of feminism over the last two hundred years, then I will delimit the term Radical Feminism to distinguish it from other worldviews within Feminism. I will identify significant Radical Feminist Theologians, summarize the core myth of the movement, then summarize their theology and ethics, and conclude with a brief critique and some prospects for the future of Radical Feminist Theology.

### **I. The Three Phases of Feminism**

In my discussion of Radical Feminist Theology, I will assume that Feminism can be divided into three distinct stages. A brief summary of these three stages will show a trajectory away from historic Christian orthodoxy towards the emergence of a new religious movement.<sup>1</sup> These three phases are: Phase 1 – Slavery, Alcohol, and the Right to Vote; Phase 2 – Secular Feminism; Phase 3 – Radical Feminism.

#### *A. Phase One: 1850 – 1920 -- Slavery, Alcohol, and the Right to Vote*

The significant issues in Phase One Feminism were opposition to slavery, alcohol and the corresponding struggle for suffrage. The basic worldview of most women involved was Christian and Evangelical. Frances Willard (1839-1898) represents the majority of women involved in Phase One Feminism. Willard was a woman of Evangelical convictions who worked with D.L. Moody on occasion. In 1879 she became the leader of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the first major organization for women in the United States. Willard and the WCTU based their moral opposition to alcohol on Scripture and a deep concern for women born from evangelical passion. The WCTU was a trans-denominational organization with a presuppositional commitment to orthodoxy. While Willard and the WCTU represented the doctrinal orthodoxy of most Nineteenth Century American women, a small and vocal minority of women advocated divergent theologies. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815 – 1902) became convinced in her latter years that the next great struggle

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Elizabeth Köstenberger offers a similar description of three waves of feminism: The First Wave (1830's) – Racial and social justice; The Second Wave (1960's) – Gender equality; The Third Wave (1990's) – Radical Pursuit of Feminine Realization. *Jesus and the Feminists: Who Do They Say that He Is?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 18.

for women would not be with the state, but with the churches.<sup>2</sup> Phase One came to a conclusion with the ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919 (Prohibition) and the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 (Women's Suffrage). In this era, women of largely evangelical conviction served as the moral conscience to the nation. After they achieved the right to vote, most Evangelical women moved in other directions and directed their energies elsewhere.

### *B. Phase Two: 1920 – 1963 -- Secular Feminism*

While Phase One Feminism had a distinctively Evangelical tone, the leading thinkers of Phase Two Feminism were basically secular in their worldview. Simone De Beauvoir (1908-1986) is representative of feminist thought for Stage Two. The long-time companion of existentialist Jean-Paul Sarte, Beauvoir's most well known work is *Le Deuxieme Sexe (The Second Sex)*, published in 1949. In this work, she distinguished between biological femaleness (sex) and socialized femininity (gender). She argued that women can become free by "transcending" biological sexual identity and the imposed identity of motherhood.<sup>3</sup> In this work Beauvoir made the now famous statement, "One is not born but becomes a woman."<sup>4</sup> In this way, her thought helped lay the groundwork for the current idea that gender is a social construction, not an innate characteristic.<sup>5</sup>

### *C. Phase Three: 1963 – Present -- Radical Feminism*

I mark the beginning of Phase Three Feminism at 1963 because this is the year Betty Friedan (1921 – 2006) published her landmark work, *The Feminine Mystique*. In many ways, Friedan serves as a bridge between the non-religious worldview of Simone de Beauvoir and the pantheistic ideas common in modern feminism. Utilizing components of Marxist

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<sup>2</sup> Ann D. Gordon, "Elizabeth Cady Stanton," in *American National Biography*, John A. Garraty and Mark C. Carnes, eds. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), 565.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Neiburg Terkel and R. Shannon Duval, eds., *Facts on File Encyclopedia of Ethics*, s.v., "Beauvoir, Simone De" (New York: Facts on File, 1999), 19.

<sup>4</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, H. M. Parshley, trans. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Press, 1985; 1953) 267.

<sup>5</sup> Susan Brison says, "[Beauvoir's] analysis of what has become known as the sex/gender distinction set the stage for all subsequent discussion." Susan J. Brison, s.v., "Beauvoir, Simone De," in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2006), 515.

critiques of industrial society, Friedan contended the concept of a “housewife” was a post-WWII / Cold War construction. In particular, she heaped disdain on the idea that it is noble for a woman to work at home as a mom and raise a family (be a housewife). Friedan’s work, coming at the leading edge of the sexual revolution, fueled the burgeoning feminist movement.

It was during the era following publication of *The Feminine Mystique* that many women who were raised within Christian faith traditions began to explore non-orthodox theological ideas which had been latent within feminism. While some feminists maintained a non-religious worldview, others have moved in the opposite direction by embracing a pagan worldview. In fact, a distinctive mark of Phase Three Feminism is a move from a secular to a pagan and pantheistic approach. “Goddess” religion and spirituality are celebrated as central to further liberation of women. Phase Three Feminism is characterized by widely divergent but complementary strands of thought. While these different strands often adhere to widely different worldviews, they consider each other to be friendly co-combatants against the oppression of women by the forces of patriarchy. The result is a highly complex movement which expresses itself in a multitude of worldview expressions.

At the risk of oversimplification, I would like to suggest that there are at least four worldview strands within modern feminism in the United States. First, many feminists are secular in their worldview. By this, I mean that they accept some form of atheism or agnosticism as the true and correct way to view the world. A second worldview expression within modern feminism is purely pagan. These are feminists who, while not atheists, have completely rejected any notion of a Christian worldview and instead self-identify with a pagan religion, most commonly Wicca. I identify a third group as “neo-Gnostics.” These are academics who have a strong interest in feminist issues and who advocate a return to ancient Gnosticism as central to the liberation of women. Finally, a fourth group can be identified as radical feminist theologians. Typically, these are theologians with some historic tie to Christian theology, but who have moved progressively farther and farther away from historic Christian orthodoxy. While these theologians still utilize the Bible, they do so in a way more akin to literary deconstruction as opposed to traditional hermeneutical approaches based on grammatical study and historical backgrounds. As a general rule, these groups do not see themselves in competition with each other and there is extensive cross-pollenization of ideas between the groups. All four groups share a general unwillingness to condemn each other along with a common loathing for “patriarchy.” The cross-pollenization among the four groups results in a broad movement I call Radical Feminist

Theology. It is this broad group which I believe should be addressed as a New Religious Movement in and of itself. I admit that my four categories are not exhaustive of all feminist worldviews. In the broadest sense, feminism is an almost infinitely diverse movement with multiple subsets such as lesbian feminists, African-American feminists, Latino feminists and so on. My four suggested worldview categories within feminism reflect the paradox that there is both one feminism and many feminisms.<sup>6</sup>

My analysis will be limited by four factors. First, I will focus on Radical Feminist Theology in the United States. Second, I will not address the egalitarian / complementarian debate within modern evangelicalism. It is beyond my purposes here to explore the degree to which Evangelical egalitarians have or have not been influenced by Radical Feminist Theologians. My third limitation is that I will attempt to focus most of my discussion on the fourth group I identified within modern feminism: radical feminist theologians. However, since there is so much fluidity within modern feminism, at points I will reference secular feminists, neo-Pagan feminists, or neo-Gnostic feminists. My final limitation is simply the acknowledgement that the neo-pagan religion Wicca should be studied as a New Religious Movement in its own right. Furthermore, some feminists insist that women should embrace Dianic Wicca, a particularly feminized expression of neo-Paganism. The interplay and exchange of ideas between Wicca and Radical Feminist Theology is so extensive, it is very difficult at times to maintain the distinction.

### **III. Major Contributors to Radical Feminist Theology and Key Events**

For most new religious movements, a prophet or prophetess speaks with an authority that replaces Biblical authority. While Radical Feminist Theology does not have “one” prophet/prophetess who functions in the way Muhammad does for Islam or Joseph Smith does for Mormonism, there are several voices which are considered somewhat authoritative. These voices attempt to demonstrate the way in which historic Christian orthodoxy has been wrong and to offer the supposed correction needed. I will summarize six significant voices within radical feminist theology: Mary Daly, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Letty Russell, Eleanor Leacock, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, and Carol Christ.

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<sup>6</sup> My language here is borrowed from John Hoffman, “Blind Alley: Defining Feminism,” *Politics* 21.3 (September 2001): 193.

*A. Mary Daly (b. 1926)*

Mary Daly was raised a Roman Catholic and spent most of her professional life teaching at a Boston College, a Roman Catholic (Jesuit) School, and initially she seemed to be a liberal reform voice within Roman Catholicism. Of her many works, *Beyond God as Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* is her most influential work and considered a seminal source for Radical Feminist Theology. In one of the most frequently quoted statements within feminism, Daly claims patriarchy perpetuates male dominance: "I have already suggested that if God is male, then the male is God."<sup>7</sup> In the decades since *Beyond God as Father*, Daly has left any connection to historic orthodoxy and now self-identifies as a "positively revolting hag."<sup>8</sup> Her most recent work reflects her disdain for any vestige of orthodox belief and is titled, *Amazon Grace: Recalling the Courage to Sin Big* (2006).

*B. Rosemary Radford Ruether (b. 1936)*

Rosemary Radford Ruether was the Georgia Harkness Professor of Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary (a United Methodist School) in Evanston, IL from 1976 to 2000. She is currently the visiting professor of Theology at Claremont School of Theology and Claremont Graduate University. Unlike Daly, Ruether still self-identifies as Roman Catholic and is an advocate of Liberation Theology. Her works reflect several major ideas associated with Liberation Theology: People in authority are always oppressors, special rights must be created to compensate for the oppressed, and traditional categories of theological or moral reflection within the Christian tradition must be uprooted since historic orthodoxy contributes to oppression.

Radford-Ruether's *Women-Church* (1985) is a good example of her theology. *Women-Church* is actually a book of feminist liturgies intended for use in a church. Common themes in the liturgies are the oppression of women and a celebration pantheism. These two themes are clearly seen in a "Birthing Preparation Liturgy," of which Radford-Ruether devised for pregnant women. This particular liturgy begins with the father reading a long section in which he apologizes for all evil brought into the world by men. Then, the pregnant woman is supposed to "squat in the birthing position, while all the others gather round her and uphold her on

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<sup>7</sup>Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward of Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978; new reintroduction, 1985), 19.

<sup>8</sup> See Daly's webpage at [www.marydaly.net](http://www.marydaly.net). Electronic resource accessed June 16, 2009.

all sides” while they chant: “Let the primal Mother-Spirit empower you. Let her great birthing energy flow through you. Bring forth with victory and joy the promised child.”<sup>9</sup>

*C. Letty Russell (1929-2007)*

Letty Russell was ordained in the United Presbyterian Church and pastored the Presbyterian Church of the Ascension in New York for ten years. She eventually joined the faculty of Yale Divinity School in 1974. Russell was married for several years to Hans Hoekendijk, also a professor and who preceded her in death in 1975. In 2005, Russell was joined to her lesbian partner in a civil commitment ceremony.

Much like Radford Ruether, Russell was strongly devoted to liberation theology. Russell’s most significant work was *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective* (1974). Her Christology reflects the influence of liberation theology and she complains that it is difficult for some women to follow Jesus since he was male. Russell looks favorably upon several proposals to solve this “problem” and said:

For women the scandal is seen not just in Jesus’ Jewishness or his obscurity in the world of the first century, but most importantly in his *maleness*. . . . How is it possible for this male to be the bearer of God’s togetherness with women and men when he represents only one half of the human race in this respect? One possibility in approaching this question is to get rid of the scandal by looking for a further incarnation in the form of a woman. Another is to say that Jesus was just a “good person” and not uniquely the “representative of the new humanity.” As such his particularity is of no great importance to the question of salvation, and women are free to look farther for more meaningful, feminine role models such as those of the Mother Goddess in ancient religions.<sup>10</sup>

Russell rejects traditional Christology and says women should replace traditional Christological formulations with worship of a mother goddess.

*D. Eleanor Leacock (1922 – 1987)*

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<sup>9</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 202.

<sup>10</sup> Letty Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective – A Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1974), 137 – 138. Emphasis in the original.

Eleanor Leacock was not a theologian but an anthropologist and a Marxist- Feminist. Though she operated from a non-religious perspective, her ideas about gender roles have been widely influential within in broader feminism. In 1972 she became chair of the Department of Anthropology at the City University of New York, a position she maintained until her death in 1987.

During 1950-51 Leacock did anthropological field work with the Montagnais-Naskapi people, a sub-arctic group of Native Americans in Canada. She claimed that the Montagnais-Naskapi people had a non-status structured society.<sup>11</sup> In the years following her research, Leacock began to make inferences about gender roles in general based on her interpretation of the Montagnais-Naskapi culture. Specifically, she claimed the Montagnais-Naskapi people had a non-patriarchal society prior to their interaction with European culture via the fur trade and Christian missionaries. Based on this research and her Marxist understanding of class conflicts, Leacock concluded that the subordination of women was/is linked to the hierarchical nature of Western society. Leacock's position can be differentiated from other Marxist influenced feminists, such as Freidan, who believed that structures rooted in the family were the main cause for the subordination of women. For Leacock, the struggle between genders was seen through the Marxist grid of class conflict, and in this way she argued that capitalism contributed to female subordination.

#### *E. Virginia Ramey Mollenkott*

While Daly and Radford-Ruether represent radical feminist theologians with roots in Roman Catholicism, Virginia Ramey Mollenkott (b. 1932) represents someone from a fundamentalist background who has embraced radical feminism. Mollenkott was raised in the Plymouth Brethren Church and earned her undergraduate degree at Bob Jones University in 1953. She then earned a masters degree from Temple University and a doctorate from New York University. Though married for seventeen years, she now self-identifies as a lesbian and lives with her partner in New Jersey.

In the 1970's Mollenkott maintained that she was still an evangelical, but stated in 1976 that "there are flat contradictions between some of

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<sup>11</sup> See Eleanor Leacock, "Status Among the Montagnais-Naskapi of Labrador," *Ethnohistory* 5.3 (Summer 1958): 200 – 209.

[Paul's] theological arguments and his own doctrines and behavior."<sup>12</sup> She moved to a progressively more feminist position throughout her career and has been on a trajectory away from theological orthodoxy to a Christian-pagan synthesis. In *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (1994), Mollenkott argues for goddess worship and says, "The pursuit of holy peace within and the pursuit of peace on earth are perhaps the best of all reasons for lifting up the biblical image of God as the One Mother of us all."<sup>13</sup>

#### *F. Carol Christ*

Carol Christ (b. 1945) holds a Ph.D. from Yale University and is director of the Adriadne Institute for the Study of Myth and Ritual located in Greece where she lives on the Island of Lesbos. Some of her more important works include *Laughter of Aphrodite: Reflections on a Journey to the Goddess* (1987), *Odyssey With the Goddess* (1995), *Rebirth of the Goddess* (1998), and *She Who Changes* (2003). Christ is particularly devoted to the idea that a peaceful and kind matriarchal religion of the goddess flowered in antiquity, only later to be replaced by hierarchical and patriarchal religions.

As with many other New Religious Movements, there are several landmark events in the development of Radical Feminist Theology. One significant early event was a 1974 consultation sponsored by the World Council of Churches in West Berlin. The consultation was called "Sexism in the 1970's" and its purpose was to consider the role of Christian women in the struggle for women's liberation around the world. But perhaps no single event did more to bring Radical Feminist Theology into public view than the "Re-Imagining '93 Conference" in Minneapolis, MN in 1993. The conference was designed to coincide with The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, a movement advocated by the World Council of Churches beginning in 1988. Attended by nearly 2,000 delegates, the attendees prayed to the goddess Sophia, celebrated lesbianism, and worshipped their own inner divinity. This conference was particularly noteworthy because it was funded by Methodist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran denominations. Subsequent conferences have been held in the years since.

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<sup>12</sup> Virginia Mollenkott, "A Conversation with Virginia Mollenkott," *The Other Side* (May-June, 1976): 22; cited in Ronald Nash, *Great Divides* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), 43, n. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Virginia Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female* (New York: Crossroads, 1994), 19.

#### IV. The Myth of a Primal Goddess

A common characteristic of New Religious Movements is the introduction of a new myth which provides a meta-narrative for understanding the world. For example, Latter Day Saint theology posits a myth of a Judeo-Christian culture in pre-Columbian Central America. Radical Feminist Theology too has a core myth which provides a meta-narrative: the myth of a primal and peace-loving goddess religion. The myth of the primal goddess religion possibly has reached its widest audience in the work of the neo-pagan witch Starhawk in her book, *The Spiral Dance*. The myth says that an ancient and peaceful goddess religion dominated primitive humanity, only to be replaced by hierarchical warrior “gods.”

Though Starhawk has popularized the myth, its origins actually should be traced to Marija Gimbutas (1921 – 1994), a Lithuanian-born archeologist who taught at the University of Southern California. After excavating Neolithic sites in Bosnia during 1967 and 1968, Gimbutas published her ideas in *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe* (1974). Gimbutas said that prior to interaction with warlike tribes from the east, “Old Europe” was “matrifocal” and “probably matrilinear.” According to Gimbutas:

[Old Europe was] agricultural and sedentary, egalitarian and peaceful . . . [and was] characterized by a dominance of women in society and worship of a Goddess incarnating the creative principle as Source and Giver of All. In this culture the male element . . . represented spontaneous and life-stimulating, but not life generating, powers.<sup>14</sup>

According to the myth, this peaceful and goddess-worshipping society was dismembered sometime between 4500 and 2500 BC by male dominated and war-like invading cultures from the east.<sup>15</sup>

Constance Eichenlaub critiques Gimbutas’ methodology and says, “Gimbutas’s capacity to envision an Old European Great Goddess came

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<sup>14</sup> Marija Gimbutas, *Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1974), 9. When she released a revised edition of this work in 1983, Gimbutas renamed it *Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe* in order to put more emphasis on the goddess.

<sup>15</sup> The primal-goddess myth is reinforced by the controversial claims of archaeologist James Mellaart who excavated a Neolithic village in Turkey between 1961 and 1965, claiming that the village was a center for a type of goddess worship similar to that suggested by Gimbutas.

with a tendency to interpret all Neolithic symbols as religious and gynocentric. . . Rather than present the views of her detractors, or defend her methodology, Gimbutas's style was to reiterate and amplify the evidence as she saw it (with an occasional attack on those who offended her).<sup>16</sup> To put it another way, Gimbutas tended to read archaeological finds through the grid of her "myth" as opposed to allowing the archaeological evidence to shape the way she viewed ancient myths. Nonetheless, the myth of an ancient, pristine goddess religion replaced by a warlike male religion is appealing to many people involved in Radical Feminist Theology.

## V. Theological Summary of Radical Feminism

As stated earlier, my thesis for this paper is that Radical Feminist Theology exhibits characteristics of other new religious movements and should be treated as a new religious movement in its own right. I will now attempt to demonstrate that it is a New Religious Movement by identifying its hermeneutics, worldview, doctrine of God, Christology, and soteriology.

### A. *The Hermeneutics of Radical Feminist Theology*

While one usually begins a description of a religious movement by discussing its doctrine of God or source of authority, I believe the correct place to begin describing Radical Feminist Theology is by discussing its hermeneutics. This is because so much of the movement is actually a protest against the general Christian consensus concerning the main meaning of Scripture. Most Evangelicals adhere to some form of Grammatical-Historical Interpretation. We understand the meanings of words and sentences in the Bible according to the way they were normally used by the speakers of the language in their historical context. In contrast, Radical Feminist Theology is strongly influenced by literary deconstruction, a hopelessly flawed approach to reading a text which denies the existence or importance of authorial intent. Furthermore, and more dangerously, the existence of objective and universal truth that can be known is denied.<sup>17</sup> Deconstruction is a literary-philosophical movement which is an attempt to open the text to a wide range of

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<sup>16</sup> Constance Eichenlaub, "Marija Gimbutas and the Future of a Legacy," *The European Legacy* 5.5 (2000): 733.

<sup>17</sup> Jacques Derrida (1930 – 2004), an Algerian-born / French philosopher, is widely considered the father of literary "deconstruction."

meanings. The result is authorial intent is no longer important. Deconstruction is also known as “reader-centered” interpretation.

Mary Daly represents the type of deconstruction common in Radical Feminist Theology when she says, “We do not use words; we Muse words. . . . Thus liberation is the work of Wicked Grammar, which is our basic elemental instrument, our witches’ Hammer.”<sup>18</sup> Radical Feminist Theologians often state that we need to “re-read” texts, a way of saying that ancient religious texts need to be deconstructed. For example, Mary Wakeman laments the fact that the biblical tradition has too often had the effect of limiting diversity. However, she gleefully states, “An affirmation of diversity is rooted in biblical tradition, if that tradition is read as an account of cultural transformation—from kingship to peoplehood to personhood.”<sup>19</sup>

Radical Feminist Theologians feel free to play with the text of Scripture because they believe the Bible is a culturally conditioned product of pre-modern societies based on male patriarchy. In a blend of literary deconstruction and liberation theology, Radical Feminists insist that the language of Scripture becomes a source of oppression because it reflects the experience of men and not of women. Therefore, the only way to liberate women is to destroy the traditional language of Scripture. Some Radical Feminist Theologians go even further and simply reject the Bible as hopelessly patriarchal and unredeemable. Pamela J. Milne of the University of Windsor states,

We can either accept the patriarchal biblical text as sacred and content ourselves with exposing its patriarchy . . . or we can expose its patriarchy and reject it as sacred and authoritative. But if we are looking for a sacred scripture that is not patriarchal, that does not construct woman as “other” and that does not support patriarchal interpretations based on this otherness, we are not likely to find it or recover it in texts such as Genesis 2-3. If we want an authoritative sacred scripture that does not make it possible to believe that women are secondary and inferior humans, it appears that we need to make new wine to fill our wineskins.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, xxv. Note that this statement comes from the 1985 reintroduction.

<sup>19</sup> Mary K. Wakeman, “Affirming Diversity and Biblical Tradition,” *Women’s Spirit Bonding*, Janet Kalven and Mary I. Buckley, eds. (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1984), 267.

<sup>20</sup> Pamela J. Milne, “The Patriarchal Stamp of Scripture: The Implications of Structuralist Analyses for Feminist Hermeneutics,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5.2 (Fall 1989): 34.

We see here the advocacy of a form of literary deconstruction along with a corresponding rejection of biblical authority. By overturning biblical language, Radical Feminist Theology posits a defective worldview and doctrine of God.

*B. The Worldview of Radical Feminist Theology and Their Doctrine of God*

I will address the worldview of Radical Feminist Theology and their doctrine of God as one topic because their revisionist theology is the foundation of a non-Christian worldview. Mary Daly reflects the disdain for traditional doctrinal statements concerning God and states in *Beyond God the Father*, “The biblical and popular image of God as a great patriarch in heaven, rewarding and punishing according to his mysterious and seemingly arbitrary will, has dominated the imagination of millions over thousands of years.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore Daly claims patriarchal religion perpetuates male dominance and fosters the exploitation of women and, as noted earlier, says, “I have already suggested that if God is male, then the male is God.”<sup>22</sup> Less one miss her point, Daly compares the God of Scripture with Vito Corleone and says, “The character of Vito Corleone in *The Godfather* is a vivid illustration of the marriage of tenderness and violence so intricately blended in the patriarchal ideal.”<sup>23</sup> Daly argues that women should abandon the masculine noun “God” when referring to the ultimate spiritual reality and should instead refer to the Deity as “Being,” a verb.

In fact, many committed devotees of Radical Feminist Theology would be offended that I am using the noun “God” in my discussion here. Instead, Radical Feminist Theology asserts that we should worship the “Goddess,” sometimes using the term “Thealogy” to distinguish goddess studies from the patriarchal study of “theology.” The ideas that language becomes a tool of the oppressor and that texts need to be “re-read” intersect in the thought of Carol Christ, who says, “Religions centered on the worship of a male God create “moods” and “motivations” that keep women in a state of psychological dependency on men and male authority, while at the same legitimizing the *political* and *social* authority of fathers and sons in the institutions of society.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 13.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Carol Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess,” in *Womanspirit Rising: A Feminist Reader in Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), 275.

Carol Christ then strongly argues that women should embrace the “goddess.” By this she means far more than merely referring to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as mother. Instead, she argues for a goddess of female power: “The simplest and most basic meaning of the symbol of the Goddess is the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of female power as a beneficent and independent power.”<sup>25</sup> Starhawk insists on the same point and says, “The symbolism of the Goddess is not a parallel structure to the symbolism of God the Father. The Goddess does not rule the world; She is the world.”<sup>26</sup> Virginia Ramey Mollenkott also echoes the same idea in her book, *Goddess: Human Responsibility and the Bible* and says, “I am a manifestation of God. God Herself! God Himself! God Itself! Above all. Through all. And in us all.”<sup>27</sup>

Radical Feminist Theology shares with Wicca and other neo-pagan religions a common commitment to a pantheistic worldview. In fact, many feminists argue forcefully that certain feminine experiences lead to a pantheistic worldview. Specifically, feminist theologians suggest that women are more in tune with a pantheistic deity because of their menstrual cycle. I will quote Carol Christ at length on this point:

In the ancient world and among modern women, the Goddess symbol represents the birth, death, and rebirth processes of the natural and human worlds. The female body is viewed as the direct incarnation of waxing and waning, life and death, cycles in the universe. This is sometimes expressed through the symbolic connection between the twenty-eight day cycles of menstruation and the twenty-eight-day cycles of the moon. Moreover, the Goddess is celebrated in the triple aspect of youth, maturity, and age, or maiden, mother, and crone.<sup>28</sup>

Rosemary Radford Ruether suggests a similar idea in her book of Feminist liturgy titled *Women-Church*. In a “Reclaiming Menstruation” ritual, Radford-Ruether suggests that women in the service tie themselves together with red yarn while the leader says, “We are the circle of mothers, the life-bearers. This yarn is the stream of power that unites us with each other, with all women, and with all the powers of life

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.

<sup>26</sup> Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: A Rebirth of the Ancient Religion of the Goddess* (New York: Harper Collins, 1999), 33.

<sup>27</sup> Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Goddess: Human Responsibility and the Bible* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1988), 6.

<sup>28</sup> Carol Christ, “Why Women Need the Goddess,” 281.

in the universe. This is our power, and yet it is more than our power.”<sup>29</sup> For RFT, the creature-creator distinction advocated by Scripture is blurred if not obliterated. Instead, women find a life-force within themselves, a force they can sense and feel, at least partly, via their regular menstrual cycle.

Radical Feminist Theologians often refer to the goddess as “Sophia.” For example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (b. 1938) teaches at Harvard Divinity School and published *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (1984). Based on her Feminist reading of Luke 7:35, Fiorenza claims that *Sophia* was actually the God of Israel and “the Palestinian Jesus movement understood the mission of Jesus as that of the prophet and child of Sophia.”<sup>30</sup> In fact, it was the goddess Sophia who was celebrated at the “Re-Imagining ‘93 Conference.” As each speaker approached the podium, the crowd greeted them with the chant: “Bless Sophia, dream the vision, share the wisdom dwelling deep within.” They also used an incantation which included these words, “Our maker, Sophia, we are women in your image, with the hot blood of our wombs we give form to new life.”<sup>31</sup>

### C. The Christology of Radical Feminist Theology

As a rule, Radical Feminist Theology accepts the conclusions of liberal New Testament scholarship concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ, making a distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of Faith. Doctrinal battles within Christianity lead to the deification of the man Jesus during a period long after Jesus’ own lifetime. RFT claims the image of a “male” savior (Jesus) was used as a tool of patriarchy to keep women subjugated. The specific Christologies of various Radical Feminist Theologians can be quite varied. For example, in *Beyond God the Father*, Mary Daly says the idea of Jesus as a unique and divine savior is a myth, a myth she calls “Christolatry.”<sup>32</sup> Virginia Mollenkott, writing in 1983, at that time still affirmed the deity of Christ at some level, but then adds that Jesus becomes feminine, “The risen Christ, Jesus of Nazareth in a resurrection body that transcends human limitations, is no longer limited by human maleness. Instead, the risen Christ becomes

<sup>29</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice of Feminist Liturgical Communities* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 220.

<sup>30</sup> Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 135.

<sup>31</sup> Susan, Cyre, “Fallout Escalates Over ‘Goddess’ Sophia Worship,” *Christianity Today* 38 (April 4, 1994): 74.

<sup>32</sup> See Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 69 – 81.

One Body with us all. Christ the Bridegroom is also Christ the Bride, in a flesh-and-bones identification.”<sup>33</sup>

Some components of Radical Feminism borrow from the resurgent Gnosticism popular in the last half of the Twentieth-Century. For example, Elaine Pagels of Princeton University is a noted devotee of the Gospel of Thomas. Pagels’ devotion to Thomas is closely related to her affinity to the worldview of saying 70 of Thomas:

Jesus said: “If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will destroy you.”

Pagels adds her own commentary on this passage and says, “The strength of this saying is that it does not tell us what to believe but challenges us to discover what lies hidden within ourselves; and, with a shock of recognition, I realized that this perspective seemed to me self-evidently true.”<sup>34</sup> Pagels comments here suggest why at least some Radical Feminist Theologians find Gnosticism attractive: Gnosticism emphasizes individual spirituality as opposed to faith in the historical Jesus. In fact, The Gospel Thomas is *not* essentially a book about Jesus. Instead, the focus is on *spirituality*. Jesus is simply a vehicle for the Gnostic worldview. The spirituality of the gospel of Thomas is self-centered and focuses on one’s own self-development and self-identification with the holy. Pagels reiterates her point and says, “Yet what Christians have disparagingly called Gnostic and heretical sometimes turn out to be forms of Christian teaching that are merely unfamiliar to us – unfamiliar precisely because of the active and successful opposition of Christians such as John [the Apostle].”<sup>35</sup> Pagels’ emphasis on the “do-it-yourself”

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<sup>33</sup> Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 70 – 71.

<sup>34</sup> Elaine Pagels, *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003), 32. Considering the strong Gnostic tone of these statements, I am perplexed to read Stevan Davies say, “The Gospel of Thomas is quite frequently said to be a Gnostic document. But the Gospel of Thomas is *not* a Gnostic document.” Stevan Davies, “Thomas: The Fourth Synoptic Gospel,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 46:1 (Winter 1983): 6. I am aware that some claim the influence in Thomas is more Platonic than Gnostic, yet it is also the case that Gnosticism borrowed heavily from Platonism. Also, the only complete copy of Thomas ever found was found in what is indisputably a Gnostic library. It seems to me that those who do not want to admit Thomas is a Gnostic document engage in special pleading: they want us to treat Thomas differently than other pseudepigrapha.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

Christology of Gnosticism fits nicely with the rejection of historic orthodoxy by RFT.<sup>36</sup>

#### *D. The Soteriology of Radical Feminist Theology*

What does the idea of salvation mean within Radical Feminist Theology? First of all, it most certainly does not mean that humans are sinners who need to be rescued from a rebellious condition by God. For RFT, such a hierarchical view of redemption is viewed as part of the warp and woof of patriarchy that must be overthrown. Sin is not the problem; oppression is the problem. In fact, Radical Feminist Theologians almost universally cast aspersion on Genesis 3. For example, Mary Daly describes Genesis 3 as an exclusively male effort to justify the subjugation of women in a male-dominated society which succeeded primarily “in reflecting the defective social arrangements of the time.”<sup>37</sup> Daly claims Genesis 3 makes subjection of women justified because Eve had her origin in man and “was also the cause of his downfall and all of his miseries.”<sup>38</sup> With Genesis 3 relegated to the patriarchal ash heap, then the idea of substitutionary atonement becomes needless as well. At the Re-Imagining '93 Conference, Delores Williams of Union Theological Seminary said, “I don't think we need a theory of atonement at all. I think Jesus came for life and to show us something about life. . . . I don't think we need folks hanging on crosses and blood dripping and weird stuff.”<sup>39</sup>

For Radical Feminist Theology, salvation is essentially freedom from the oppressive structures of patriarchy. RFT has a doctrine of soteriology built almost exclusively on the hermeneutics of Liberation Theology. For example, Letty Russell asserts the goal of salvation is to achieve *shalom*, which she defines as “complete social and physical wholeness and harmony”<sup>40</sup> with the goal of “full human personhood in community with others.”<sup>41</sup> With this goal in mind, she suggests evangelism is an “attitude that looks at what is going on in situations of oppression, trying

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<sup>36</sup> C. Everett Ferguson rightly says, “Each Gnostic teacher supplied his own constructions and variations with the result that *Gnosticism* is now a general term that covers an almost bewildering variety of individual constructions.” C. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 247.

<sup>37</sup> Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 46.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>39</sup> Cited in *Presbyterian Layman* (Jan/Feb 1994) 10.

<sup>40</sup> Letty Russell, *Human Liberation*, 110.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

constantly to see the problems and to work out the way in which God's will of liberation can be done."<sup>42</sup> The idea of salvation in Radical Feminist Theology is a good segue into the ethical implications of the movement. Since salvation is about liberation from oppression, how does that "liberation" actually look?

## **VI. Ethical Implications of Radical Feminist Theology**

For Radical Feminist Theology, salvation occurs when women are free to enjoy life in a manner defined by Radical Feminist Theologians. The liberty envisioned by Radical Feminists encompasses several aspects of life, but I will focus on only five: The idea that gender is a social construction; Sexual liberty; Abortion Rights; Ecology; and finally, the role of government.

### *A. Gender as a Social Construction and the Corresponding Implications*

A central tenet of Radical Feminist Theology is the idea that gender is a social construction and that one's gender need not be identified with one's biological sex. Thus, RFT differentiates between one's sex and one's gender. One's "genetic" sex is determined by chromosomes and is seen as a matter of biology. This is reflected in obvious anatomical differences between the two sexes. In contrast, gender is seen as a complex mix of psychological and socio-cultural characteristics associated with our sex. Since gender is an arbitrary social construction, traditional gender roles for men and women are merely tools of oppression used by the structures of patriarchy to oppress women. Specifically, the gender assumptions and gender roles advocated by historic Christianity are seen as a form of systemic evil which must be opposed.

Radical Feminist Theology often places the traditional family in a very negative light. This is a trend common in broader feminism as well. For example, Nancy Chodorow is a feminist sociologist and psychoanalyst who spent most of her professional career teaching at Cal-Berkeley. One of Chodorow's presuppositions is that Freud was correct when he argued that each person is born bisexual and that the child's mother is the first sexual object. She claims that gender inegalitarian beliefs are absorbed during early childhood. In her very influential book

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 125.

*The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), Chodorow suggests that acceptance of the domestic ideal is central to women's oppression.<sup>43</sup>

Women who do not agree with the idea of gender as a social construction are seen as people to be pitied because they are blinded by the oppressive structures of patriarchy. For example, in *Gyn/Ecology* (1978), Mary Daly excoriates men as "lethal organs" of a "rapist society." Furthermore, men feed parasitically on female energy and invent evil technologies to compensate for their inability to bear children. Women who don't share her views are mocked as "honorary white males."<sup>44</sup> In particular, women who cling to traditional models of motherhood and family are suspect. Simone de Beauvoir stated her disdain for the traditional family and said, "No woman should be authorized to stay at home and raise her children. Society should be totally different. Women should not have that choice, precisely because if there is such a choice, too many women will make that one."<sup>45</sup> Thus, in the name of liberation, she suggests the *coercion* of women who disagree with her. It is this type of language that led Methodist author Thomas Oden to say in regards to feminists, "The liberal elites do not simply want women as representatives; they want ideologically consciousness-raised hyperfeminists, who are considered by insiders to be the only women capable of properly representing women."<sup>46</sup>

### *B. Radical Feminism and Sexual Liberty*

Just as Radical Feminist Theology argues that gender is a social construction, it also contends that traditional sexual morality is a socially constructed tool of patriarchy used to oppress women. Furthermore, RFT rejects the notion that homosexuality is a sin or that sex should be confined to marriage. In many ways, the sexual ethics of RFT have been influenced by homosexual thinkers and activists. Based on pro-homosexual arguments, RFT has challenged normative, static categories

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<sup>43</sup> For Chodorow's own summary of her life work, see Nancy J. Chodorow, "Psychoanalysis and Women: A Personal Thirty-Five Year Retrospect," *Annual of Psychoanalysis* 32 (2004): 101 – 129.

<sup>44</sup> Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978).

<sup>45</sup> Betty Friedan, "Sex, Society, and the Female Dilemma: An Interview with Simone de Beauvoir," *Saturday Review*, June 14, 1975, 18. The *Saturday Review* existed as a magazine from 1924 – 1986.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Oden, *Requiem: A Lament in Three Movements* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 90. One should note that Oden is more egalitarian than complementarian.

of sexuality and sometimes questions the preferred status of heterosexuality. In so doing, RFT claims to bring to light suppressed homoeroticism within religious traditions.<sup>47</sup> Radical Feminist Theology is tangent with Wicca at this point. Devoted Wiccan Amber Laine Fisher proclaims a view of sex without moral boundaries, a view that is directly related to her paganism: “Goddess religion and goddess spirituality endeavor to release us from the taboos of sex and sexuality, to untie our hands, freeing us from certain paradigms or ideals that we are taught to accept as normal.”<sup>48</sup>

### *C. Radical Feminism and Abortion Rights*

Radical Feminist Theology sees free access to abortion on demand as central to the liberation of women. For example, in “A Community Prayer for Choice,” Ruether expresses her conviction that abortion is a right women should have and they should make the choice whether or not to abort based on their own convictions. In this prayer, Ruether posits that abortion is a case of rights in conflict: the mother’s, society’s and the pre-born child. These conflicts make Ruether “sad” and “angry that we are faced with such choices.”<sup>49</sup> Echoing common abortion rights rhetoric, Ruether goes on to say:

We are surrounded by many children who came into the world without the most minimal opportunities for love and development. We do not want to create life in that way. We want to create life that is chosen, life that is cherished and can be sustained and nourished.<sup>50</sup>

In summary, Ruether believes children without certain unstated “minimal opportunities” should be aborted. In fact, the right to abortion is closely tied to the next ethical emphasis of Radical Feminist Theology: Ecological Concerns.

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<sup>47</sup> Drorah O’Donnell Setael, s.v. “Feminist Theology,” in *Contemporary American Religion*, vol. 1 (New York: MacMillan Reference, 2000), 258.

<sup>48</sup> Amber Laine Fisher, *The Philosophy of Wicca* (Toronto: ECW Press, 2002), 185.

<sup>49</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, “A Community Prayer for Choice,” Electronic Resource available at [www.syrf.org/syrf/sacredresource.htm](http://www.syrf.org/syrf/sacredresource.htm). Accessed 9/26/03. This prayer has been endorsed by the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

#### *D. Radical Feminism and Ecology*

A major term in Radical Feminist Theology is Ecofeminism, a word used to describe the combination of feminist concerns and ecological issues. For many feminist theologians, worshipping a goddess is seen as the first step towards saving the earth from environmental disaster. Radford Ruether's *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing*, (1992) makes this very point. This work is very important for understanding Radical Feminist Theology because it demonstrates the way in which radical feminists unite the issues of women's liberation and ecology. According to Radford Ruether, Patriarchy is committed to relationships characterized by domination. As a result, the reign of patriarchal religions has resulted in the exploitation and domination of the earth. Reversing this trend "will demand a fundamental restructuring of all these relations from systems of domination/exploitation to ones of biophilic mutuality."<sup>51</sup> Abortion can become an environmental issue for ecofeminists since an expanding population is viewed as a primary threat to the earth itself.

#### *E. Radical Feminism and Government*

As has been noted, certain thinkers within Radical Feminist Theology have distinct Marxist leanings while the movement itself utilizes the hermeneutics of Liberation Theology. This should not be surprising since, in many ways, Liberation Theology is merely a blend of Marxist and Christian Eschatology. With such a background, it is also not surprising that Radical Feminist Theology advocates a more intrusive and socialistic approach to government. In *Sexism and God Talk*, Ruether advocates socialism as means to achieve women's liberation: "But more, we seek a democratic socialist society that dismantles sexist and class hierarchies that restores ownership and management of work to the base communities of workers themselves, who then create networks of economic and political relationships."<sup>52</sup> Rebecca Whisnant rightly connects the relationship between the political and ethical philosophy of feminism and says, "This focus on power relationships and their effects on moral life means that the boundaries between feminist ethics and

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<sup>51</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 238.

<sup>52</sup> Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 231.

feminist social and political philosophy is often a fluid one.”<sup>53</sup> The result of this focus on “power relationships” is that RFT wants to marshal the power of government to destroy the structures of patriarchy. Involvement in feminist theology almost presupposes corresponding political involvement.

## VII. Conclusion, Critique and Prospects for the Future

### A. Conclusion

As I stated in my introduction, my thesis for this paper is that Radical Feminist Theology exhibits characteristics of other new religious movements and should be treated as a new religious movement in its own right. After surveying the movement I will now delineate seven ways that Radical Feminist Theology meets the criterion for consideration as a new religious movement, and not just an off-shoot of Christianity:

1. Radical Feminist Theology advocates a myth shared by the adherents, the myth of a primal goddess religion which was overthrown by patriarchal religion.<sup>54</sup> In some ways, this myth functions for Radical Feminist Theology in the same way that the myth of a Pre-Columbian Judeo-Christian culture in the Western Hemisphere functions for Latter Day Saint Theology.
2. Adherents of Radical Feminist Theology emphasize a shared experience of being ostracized. Much like an old time revival meeting, the theological meetings and inter-denominational gatherings of Radical Feminist Theology adherents encourage them to keep going in the faith even though they face much opposition.
3. Radical Feminist Theology gives its followers a sense of being inducted into a special group with a unique set of doctrinal ideas. These ideas have been hidden from the average Christian for

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<sup>53</sup> Rebecca Whisnant, s.v. “Feminist Ethics,” in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, vol. 3 (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2006), 579.

<sup>54</sup> One should note that even the most radical theologians, in their more sober moments, recognize problems with this myth. For example, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 149 -175. Ruether is still adamant that matriarchal religion is needed to save the world.

centuries, but have now been revealed through the enlightened theologians who are the leaders.

4. Radical Feminist Theology advocates ideas about God, Jesus, and Salvation which diverge from every major faith tradition. In this way, it is especially new.

5. Adherents of Radical Feminist Theology have an evangelistic zeal that rivals that of any Fundamentalist Baptist preacher. Those in the darkness of patriarchy must be compelled to come into the light.

6. Adherents of Radical Feminist Theology have a utopian goal which they hope to achieve: the overturning of all the oppressive structures of patriarchy. The goal of overturning patriarchy serves as the millennial ideal for which everyone strives.

7. Radical Feminist Theology insists that other Christians are wrong. They alone have the truth. Doctrines such as the Trinity, the Deity of Christ, and salvation via the cross are all tools of patriarchy. At this point, there is a striking bit of irony in Radical Feminist Theology: in the name of openness, the movement becomes as exclusive as any conservative denomination. To prove my point, try to imagine the leaders of the Re-Imagining Movement inviting a conservative theologian to give a “different voice” at their meeting by offering and exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:17–21. As is obvious, this would never happen.

As a new religious movement, Radical Feminist Theology is also different from other new religious movements or cults. It does not have a specific prophet or prophetess who claims to have a direct word from God. It does not have a new sacred text which it claims to have received from God. However, for some within the movement ancient Gnostic texts may in fact function as rediscovered revelation, so in that way they are “new.” It has no headquarters nor does it have a definite doctrinal statement of belief. Radical Feminist Theology is generally a pan-denominational movement from within churches that self-identify as Christian. In many ways, Radical Feminist Theology is a protest movement in the sense that most of the ideas they advocate have been developed in response to real or perceived inequities towards women within mainline denominations.

### *B. Critique*

Radical Feminist Theology is seriously flawed and irreconcilable with orthodox Christianity. I suggest that it appropriates a defective hermeneutic, an historically unverifiable core myth, a basic theology that is idolatrous and an ethic that actually leads to a devaluation of women, not their liberation.

Radical Feminist Theology's hermeneutic of deconstruction is in itself destructive to the movement. By this, I mean that if one takes seriously the idea that authorial intent is not important, then why should anyone care to discover the intended meaning of Rosemary Radford Ruether's or Mary Daly's books? I assume that Radical Feminist Theologians want Christians to take them seriously and accept their ideas as true. Yet, based on their hermeneutical approach, what is to keep a patriarchal male from reading them in a "different" light? Perhaps one could deconstruct Daly, for example, and arrive at the conclusion that *she* was suffering under the oppressive structures of patriarchy which prohibited her from embracing her true desire to live at peace in a patriarchal society! The goal of the interpreter would then be to peel away the layers of patriarchal belief and discover the true Daly. This is, of course, an absurd suggestion, but it points out the way in which a deep commitment to deconstruction inhibits serious attempts to arrive at consensus. The hermeneutical approach of Radical Feminist Theology is only successful at destroying ideas, but is wholly unable to offer sustainable and constructive conclusions.

Radical Feminist Theology is flawed because the core myth of the movement – the myth of a primal goddess religion characterized by peace—is not true. Closely related to this flaw, the movement is truncated because of a tendency to accept the core holdings of liberal New Testament scholarship in a rather uncritical way. In fact, there is more evidence that the canonical gospels fit the historical milieu of First Century Judaism than evidence for a primal goddess religion. This is important because the biblical record about Jesus Christ is grounded in historical reality, not wishful thinking such as Gimbutas's primal goddess theory. In fact, the canonical Gospels do not reflect the type of embellishment and fictionalized account of the life of Christ claimed by radical feminism. If one wants an embellished and fictionalized Christ-story, then one should examine the Gnostic Gospels.

Radical Feminist Theology is flatly wrong in its oft-repeated premise that Christianity deifies men. When Christians call God "Father," we are not making an anthropological claim that men are better than women: we are making a theological assertion based on Scripture and closely related to the distinction between creature and Creator.

By blurring the distinction between creature and Creator, Radical Feminist Theology encourages generational conflict, sexual chaos and violence. Paul makes clear the dangers of worshipping creation in Romans 1:18-32. Romans 1:25 in particular stresses the tragedy of nature worship: “For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.” As a result, sexual chaos followed (Romans 1:26-27) as well as intergenerational conflict (Romans 1:30) and violence (Romans 1:29). The thrust of Romans 1:18-32 is that pagan worldviews weaken people so they become less and not more capable of directing their own lives.<sup>55</sup> Radical Feminist Theology is flawed because it deifies the fallen human nature which Paul describes in Romans 1. In this way, RFT is idolatrous.

Closely related to Radical Feminist Theology’s worship of creation is its concomitant advocacy of goddess worship. As noted earlier, such goddess worship entails a pantheistic worldview. Yet, cultures built on a pantheistic worldview are less egalitarian and more prone to the exploitation of the weak and defenseless. For example, in the Hebrew prophets, departure from monotheistic devotion to Yahweh in favor of various forms of Canaanite religion was closely tied to the exploitation of others. This religious syncretism resulted in God’s judgment, as Zephaniah 1:4 says, “I will stretch out my hand against Judah and against all the residents of Jerusalem. I will cut off from this place every vestige of Baal, the names of the pagan priests along with the priests.” The religious syncretism present in pre-exilic Israel is very similar to the religious syncretism advocated by RFT, which therefore falls under the same condemnation. Ultimately, paganism devalues humans and leads to the exploitation of weak people. Thus, in a striking piece of irony, the worldview advocated by feminism actually perpetuates some of the evils that RFT purportedly wants to end.

Radical Feminist Theology also has a defective view of gender. RFT is partly right in the sense that when certain stereotypical messages about women are advocated, women do in fact become dehumanized. For example, pornography and music with sexually salacious lyrics both reinforce sinful messages to young men and lead to a shallow view of women as objects who exist for the sexual gratification of men. Radical Feminism is wrong when it says traditional gender roles are merely a social construction. Gender differentiation is a fundamental part of God’s creation. Our gender is a gift from God to be celebrated and affirmed. Genesis 1:27 states: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him, male and female He created them.” By

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<sup>55</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38a, *Romans* 1-8 (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 72.

emphasizing that God made a male and a female, this passage affirms that sexuality is not an accident of nature, nor is it simply a biological phenomenon. Instead, sexual identity and function are part of God's will for his image bearers.<sup>56</sup>

There are numerous other flaws associated with Radical Feminist Theology. One of the more annoying is their consistent unwillingness to acknowledge the countless millions of women from within orthodox traditions who have found their faith in Christ to be fulfilling and meaningful. If they mention such women at all, it is usually so they can be quickly dismissed as the uninitiated who are still under the bondage of patriarchy. In this way, Radical Feminist Theology offers a severely truncated view of the spiritual life of women.

### *C. Prospects for the Future*

As we have seen, some advocates of Radical Feminist Theology no longer claim to operate within a Christian worldview at any level and have become pagans (ex: Carol Christ). Others have such defective Christologies, it is impossible to identify them as Christian in any meaningful way. Since it was started as a protest movement, the anger which was the initial impetus to the movement has waned as the second generation moves into leadership. In many mainline denominations, references to the "goddess" are now common in liturgies and hymnals. Yet, the very mainline denominations in which Radical Feminist Theology has flourished have experienced significant loss in membership. The ideas advocated by Radical Feminist Theology will continue to be attractive to some women within Christianity.

The emphasis on ecological concerns is probably the area where Radical Feminist Theology will find a most receptive audience in the future. Wicca itself has positioned itself as a "girl-friendly" alternative to Christianity. The interaction between Wicca and RFT will continue, most likely resulting in new variations of a pagan-Christian synthesis.

The rise of the Metropolitan Community Church within the homosexual community in America may indicate in some way the future of Radical Feminist Theology. It may in fact be the case that a denomination or fellowship appears in the future which is based on the tenets of RFT. Such a denomination would likely be different from Wicca and use a remnant of Christian language. It may be that the autonomous individualism advocated by Radical Feminist Theology will appeal to some women who desire to be religious, but do not want to be

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<sup>56</sup> Victor Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Genesis 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1990), 139.

identified as neo-pagans. Since Radical Feminist Theology destroys the idea of the Bible as authoritative, it is likely that future generations of adherents will become either very secular or very pagan.

## **The Cross: New Religions, New Theologies and the Only Difference in a Pluralistic Society**

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### **Abstract**

Viola Larson points to the trend in religious movements, Christian and otherwise, of viewing Christ's sacrifice as simply an example of suffering for others. The article proceeds to outline the need for the doctrine of atonement and illustrates how this doctrine keeps Christianity orthodox. Larson demonstrates the doctrine of atonement from Scripture and engages several views on atonement from history. Ultimately, Larson contends that without a proper doctrine of the atonement of Christ on the cross, evil is allowed to run rampant in any religion, including Christianity.

Recently, in her address to the 2002 Covenant Conference,<sup>1</sup> Anna Case-Winters, Professor of Theology at McCormick Theological Seminary, suggests that for our atonement, "The incarnation' would be enough!" She also advocates for the theological position of Abelard, the medieval scholastic who held a position of atonement referred to as moral influence or example.<sup>2</sup> That is, the death of Christ on the cross becomes an example of the willingness to suffer for others and for that reason Jesus Christ is followed and loved. Other proponents of this view of the cross and salvation were Socinus, a sixteenth century theologian who also denied the Trinity,<sup>3</sup> and Friedrich Schleiermacher the father of nineteenth century liberal theology. Pelagius is seen as an early anticipation of this view, since he believed humanity capable of living up

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<sup>1</sup> The Covenant Network is an independent group within the Presbyterian Church USA whose members advocate for the ordination of homosexuals and for Progressive Theology.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Case-Winters, "Who Do You Say That I Am? Believing In Jesus Christ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," Address to the 2002 Covenant Conference, November 9, 2002, <http://www.covenantnetwork.org/sermon&papers/case-winters.html>.

<sup>3</sup> For information on Socinus see: I. Breward, "Socinus and Socinianism," *New Dictionary of Theology*, The Master Reference Collection, editors Sinclair B. Ferguson, et al, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press 1988) 649.

to God's requirements of holiness.<sup>4</sup> At present, some contemporary theologians are attempting to get rid of the meaning of the cross in far more radical ways. Delores S. Williams, Associate Professor of Theology and Culture at Union Theological Seminary, in her book, *Sisters in The Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, writes, "People do not have to attach sacred validation to a bloody cross in order to be redeemed or to be Christians."<sup>5</sup> Going further, Carter Heyward, Professor of Theology at Episcopal Divinity School, pictures atonement on the cross as a feature of a violent aspect of patriarchal Christianity. She writes:

The deity we must reject is the one whose power over us is imagined to be his love, the god who morally *can* destroy us. Such a concept of deity is evil—a betrayal itself of our power in mutual relation—in a world being torn to pieces by violence done in the names of gods who demand blood sacrifice. Such god-images feed twisted psychospiritualities that normalize sadistic and masochistic dynamics, rape and intimate violence, abuse of children, relationships of domination and control, violence against people and all creatures, and wars justified as holy.<sup>6</sup>

Contrary to these distorted views of the cross and atonement I wish to hold up the orthodox view and show how it is in reality the central difference in a world of diverse religions both old and new. My central theme is that Christ's atonement on the cross is the place where evil is expelled from religious belief; that where the cross is emphasized in its true biblical meaning there is true transformation. I also want to emphasize that all religions, including Christianity, hold within their traditions the seeds of evil. Where the cross loses its meaning there Christianity itself stands in danger of being overcome by the evil within humanity. I will begin by examining the biblical and historical views of atonement. I will look at the potential for evil in religion including Christianity and explain the importance of the cross in addressing the new religions and the new theologies of our time. This entails explaining how Christ's death on the cross is God's answer not only for our

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life: Systematic Theology: Volume Two*, First HarperCollins paperback edition, (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco 1992) 404.

<sup>5</sup> Delores s. Williams, *Sisters In The Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books 2001) 201.

<sup>6</sup> Carter Heyward, *Saving Jesus From Those Who Are Right: Rethinking What it means to be Christian*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1999) 175.

salvation but cuts through the violence of human attempts to connect with God. I will show how both ruthless violence and sloppy sentimentality in religion are answered by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

The biblical view of atonement begins in the Old Testament. The sacrifices of the Old Testament are looking forward to the coming of Christ and to the work of Christ on the cross. They are incomplete without Him. We find in the first part of chapter 10 of the book of Hebrews that the Old Testament sacrifices are a “shadow of the good things to come.” The author of Hebrews weaves the verses of Psalms 40:6, 7 into the picture of Jesus’ body as sacrifice.

“Therefore, when He comes into the world, He says, ‘Sacrifice and offering You have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold I have come (In the scroll of the book it is written of Me) to do Your will, O God.’” (Heb. 10:5-7).<sup>7</sup>

These verses, which seemingly deny the need for sacrifice as a means of salvation, really illustrate the need for the death of Jesus on the cross. F.F. Bruce, writing about these verses, sees the Old Testament sacrifices as requiring the “obedient heart” and Christ offers that “wholehearted obedience.” Quoting J. Denny’s *The Death of Christ*, Bruce writes, “Our author’s contrast is not between sacrifice and obedience, but between the involuntary sacrifice of dumb animals and ‘sacrifice into which obedience enters, the sacrifice of a rational and spiritual being, which is not passive in death, but in dying makes the will of God its own.’”<sup>8</sup> Bruce goes on to explain that while it was the Father’s will for Jesus to die, “it was also His own spontaneous choice.”<sup>9</sup> Elaborating further and once again quoting Denny, he writes:

“It is the atonement which explains the incarnation: the incarnation takes place in order that the sin of the world may be put away by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ.” The offering of His body is simply the offering of Himself; if here sanctification and access to God are made available through His body, in verses 19 and 29

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<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (Lockman Foundation, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> J. Denny, *The Death of Christ*, (London: 1951), p131, in F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to The Hebrews*, The New International Commentary On The New Testament, reprint, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing 1981) 234.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 235.

they are made available through His blood. Whether our author speaks of His body or His blood, it is His incarnate life that is meant, yielded to God in an obedience which was maintained even to death. So perfect a sacrifice was our Lord's presentation of His life to God that no repetition of it is either necessary or possible: it was offered "once for all."<sup>10</sup>

Bruce and Denny's commentary are important in light of the attacks occurring on the theology of atonement and in the context of religious evil. First, God's desires for Old Testament people are not different than His desires for New Testament people. His desire is that sacrifice be made with a willing heart; the desire to obey God was all-important. In the Old Testament the willing heart was bound-up with the sacrificial animal. However, only Jesus Christ could offer that perfect willing obedience. He made the perfect sacrifice and was the perfect sacrifice. To eliminate Jesus as sacrifice on the cross is also to destroy the theology of the Old Testament. Secondly, Christ's death on the cross was not just the Father's will it was the "spontaneous choice" of Jesus Christ. Atonement theology is infused with the doctrine of the Trinity. To redo or give up the meaning of the atonement tends to eliminate the Trinity.

Thirdly, the understanding that "the atonement explains the incarnation" clarifies the biblical understanding of God's purpose in the incarnation. If a theologian says that for our salvation the incarnation "would be enough," but fails to acknowledge the redemptive purpose of the cross they simply do not understand the biblical view of the incarnation. The biblical statements of the purposes of God concerning the incarnation are very clear. Peter's first sermon emphasizes the purpose and meaning of the incarnation in the death of Christ on the cross. "This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death." (Acts2:23) Furthermore, Paul writes to the Colossians:

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven. (Colossians1:19-20)

The final important note is that the sacrifice is "once for all." This also speaks about the God of the Old Testament, who is of course the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. Denny, *Death*, 131. and Bruce, *Hebrews*, 236.

compassionate God of the New Testament. His grace of redemption covers all of the scripture, both old and new. The scripture confirms all of this:

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled we shall be saved by His life. (Romans 5:8-10)

There have been several theories of atonement theology through more than a thousand years of Church history. Thomas Oden in his book *The Word Of Life* points out “four essential types of atonement exegesis.” He names “exemplar [moral Influence], governor, exchange, and victor motifs.” Oden believes that these are all incomplete without each other. He writes, “They are best viewed as complementary tendencies rather than as cohesive schools of thought represented by a single theorist.”<sup>11</sup> Although Oden explains each giving both their usefulness and problems, I want to look at the one connected to Abelard since that is the one which has gained popularity with those wishing to eliminate the atonement as the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross.<sup>12</sup> First, it is true that the death of Jesus Christ for sinners should cause us to want to follow Him and to live a life of self-giving. That is very biblical. However, most of the theologians attempting to use Abelard’s view wish to eliminate God’s part in this act. That is, they do not believe that it was necessary for God the Father to send His Son to die for our sins. Rather they believe Jesus

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Oden’s two chapters, “The death of Jesus,” and “In Our Place,” in his book *The Word of Life: Systematic theology: Volume Two*, is highly recommended for anyone wishing to understand the atonement. 403. Also for a Reformed view see, Louis Berkhof, *The History of Christian Doctrines*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House 1937) also, Andrew Purves, “The Ministry of the Priesthood of Jesus Christ: A Reformed View of the Atonement of Christ,” *Theology Matters* (Vol3 No 4. Jul/Aug 1997) and , J.S. Whale, *Christian Doctrine: Eight Lectures delivered in the University of Cambridge to Undergraduates of all Faculties*, reprint, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1984.)

<sup>12</sup> One author who sees the idea of atonement leading to violence does reject Abelard ideas. Speaking of Abelard’s position J. Denny Weaver writes, “The result [of removing the devil from the equation], is an atonement motif in which the Father has one of his children – the Son – killed in order to show love to the rest of the Father’s children, namely us sinners.” “Violence in Christian Theology,” *Cross Currents*, at [www.crosscurrents.org/weaver0701c.htm](http://www.crosscurrents.org/weaver0701c.htm). 4.

was killed for political reasons because He was friends of the poor and the outcasts of society. (This is of course, not an either/or situation; He was sent to die for our sins and he undoubtedly was killed partly because of His care for the poor and the outcast. It was not only the sins of the whole world that sent Him to the cross, it was also the particular sins of some Jewish and Roman leaders in Palestine two thousand years ago.) Those who call themselves progressive theologians see Jesus as someone to emulate and one who pictures how God works and moves within a human totally given over to Him. They totally reject the classical view that humanity is fallen and Jesus died for our sins.

Oden points out that, “The tradition of Abelard and Socinus, anticipated by Pelagius, is not a consensual tradition, but a distortion that reappears in heavier or lighter tones periodically.”<sup>13</sup> Abelard, in his *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, questions how God could forgive humanity for killing his Son if He was not able to forgive them before this event. He also questions the goodness of God if it was true that God demanded the death of His son for the sins of the world. He writes, “Indeed, how cruel and wicked it seems that anyone should demand the blood of an innocent person as the price for anything, or that it should please him that an innocent man should be slain—still less that God should consider the death of his Son so agreeable that by it he should be reconciled to the whole world!” Abelard concludes that we are justified, “in that his Son has taken upon himself our nature and persevered therein in teaching us by word and example even unto death”<sup>14</sup> At the instigation of Bernard of Clairvaux the Council of Sens condemned Abelard’s view.

Oden offers nine problems with Abelard’s theory. The first three deal very much with problems in contemporary theology. That Christ was simply a “noble martyr,” and therefore there is no transforming aide for the sinner is the first problem. As an answer to this problem, Oden writes, “Humanity does not need merely to be instructed but to have sins forgiven, not merely enlightened but redeemed from sin, for we are not only ignorant but corrupt, not merely finite but sinners, not merely those who feel guilty but who are guilty.”<sup>15</sup> Oden’s second problem with the exemplar theory is that it often “does not say enough about who the

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<sup>13</sup> Oden, *Word*, 404.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Abelard, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans*, in *Readings in the History of Christian Theology: From its Beginnings to the Eve of the Reformation*, vol.1, editor, William c. Placher, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press 1988) 150,151.

<sup>15</sup> Oden, *Word*, 406.

teacher was.”<sup>16</sup> This is very much in line with both the milder and more radical contemporary theological views that attempt to change or do away with Christ’s work on the cross. In Anna case-Winters’ speech referred to above, she not only questions orthodox views of the atonement she also attempts to say that there is more to Christ than Jesus thus separating the person of Jesus from Christ.<sup>17</sup> Delores S. Williams, (see above) places the incarnation, first in Mary, then in Jesus then in the Church. As she puts it, “Incarnation in a womanist understanding of it in the Christian testament, can be regarded as a continuum of the manifestation of divine spirit beginning with Mary, becoming an abundance in Jesus and later overflowing into the life of the church.”<sup>18</sup> Carter Heyward, (see above), totally dismisses the incarnation of Jesus Christ writing:

In making Jesus the sole proprietor of the title ‘Christ,’ we Christians not only have heaped violence upon those who are not Christians (Jews, Moslems, pagans, Buddhists, et al.), but also have disempowered ourselves as Daughters, Sons, People, and Friends of the Sacred, bearers together of the same sacred—Christic—power that Jesus experienced in relation to others in the Spirit that drew them together.<sup>19</sup>

Oden’s third problem with the exemplar theory is that its proponents have “too optimistically assumed that the will is not radically bound by sin and that no punishment for sin is required.” He adds that this is often linked to a “humanistic pantheism that views each individual soul as a spark of divinity.”<sup>20</sup> One can note that the above remarks by Heyward falls into this category. This expectation of the human ability to conform to the holiness of God without the gracious work of Christ is one of the areas that lead to the rise of evil in the religious experience of even Christianity. The desire for an encounter with God, without His provision of the door of encounter, means failure and can be disastrous. I have addressed the problem of evil in religion in a book review of *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and The Search For What Saves Us*. The two authors, Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, see Jesus death on the cross for our sins as child abuse. I point out in this

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Case-Winters, “Who Do You Say That I Am,” 4.

<sup>18</sup> Williams, *Wilderness*, 168.

<sup>19</sup> Heyward, *Saving*, 32.

<sup>20</sup> Oden, *Word*, 407.

paper the problem of evil inherent in any religion that minimizes the cross:

For some, Islam is an example, God is so transcendent, so other, that he would not become human nor could he enter into our suffering. For others, for example Paganism, God is so “us” or “nature” that to know humanity or nature, even with all its/our corruption is to know deity. For still others such as Zen Buddhism, God is all there is and yet a void or emptiness, entered into only with the loss of self-consciousness. The human propensity to do evil can be nurtured in very human attempts to connect with God by either trying to imitate God’s perfection, integrating the good and evil or seeing such dualities as good and evil as unreal. If God is totally other and does not enter into our world in an act of grace and atonement we are left to overcome evil with our own will. If we are deity then all of our nature is divine, the evil included. If God is that which is all and non-dualistic, in the end evil does not matter.

Humans do not have the ability to live by religious moral codes perfectly. In fact, for some the attempt toward perfection leads to the radicalization of their religious beliefs. That is, in an attempt to obey the laws of their religion as a means of connecting with God, they apply the moral code so stringently to themselves and society that they become authoritarian in nature. For instance, in radical Islam women become non-entities, hidden people, in order to prevent lust and adultery. Radical Islamic men reach for God through the suffering and humiliation of their women. In paganism, since God is seen as creation, the desire to embrace an ethic that honors and cares for nature often leads to nudity and sometimes sex is accepted as religious rite. Every human protection against vulnerability, including clothing, is removed in order to manifest and connect with the divine in humanity.

A God who comes down in love, who suffers for humanity, is lost in this religious maze. The God who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ removes the human effort to connect with God as well as any insistence that somehow evil is necessary or unreal. Jesus Christ’s death on the cross speaks to the awful truth of human sin while at the same time providing a way past humanity’s guilt. Individuals are set free to serve God knowing that it is the work of Christ rather than their own righteousness. Indeed, whenever Christianity moves away from the implicit meaning of the cross—

there evil begins to rear its head—whether that means selling indulgences, burning witches at the stake or replacing Jesus as the suffering savior with a Jesus of noble blood as a means of elevating war as the German Christians under Hitler did.<sup>21</sup>

At this point I will look at one example of a new religious group and how their misunderstanding or neglect of Jesus Christ's work on the cross caused irrefutable harm. In their very early beginnings in Sacramento, California, Aggressive Christianity, at first known as Free Love Ministries, began by putting more emphasis on demonology and a aberrant teaching known as "Manifested Sons of God," than on the scriptural teaching of salvation by grace because of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. According to Jim and Lila Green, founders of the group, the sins of humanity were in some ways caused by demon possession.<sup>22</sup> They also believed that a group of people more spiritual than the average Christian would arise in the last days to overcome God's enemies and death. This encapsulates the manifested Sons of God teaching. The Greens, of course, forgot that Christ has already done the work of overcoming enemies and death on the cross. We live in the already, not yet time, united to Him, waiting for our complete salvation. (Col. 2:13-15) Both of these teachings, Manifested Sons of God and demon possession, negate the grace of Christ's death on the cross. That is because both teachings use humans and techniques to rid humanity of sin and problems. For Aggressive Christianity righteousness comes by removing demons from bodies and by becoming more spiritual. They believe that any encounter with God happens through a deeper spirituality and knowledge that is arrived at by such religious techniques as praying in tongues for several hours and fasting for excessively long times.

In order to keep new converts to Aggressive Christianity purer and free from demons, they were encouraged to move into the group's commune and to not communicate with their families. Eventually several wives were branded as demon possessed and spiritually dead. They were made to live in a small shed and expected to do heavy labor. Their

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<sup>21</sup> Viola Larson, "A Book Review" on *Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering, and The Search For What Saves Us*, Rita Nakashima Brick and Rebecca Parker, (Beacon Press 2001) at Voices of Orthodox Women, <http://www.vow.org/Documents/Doc0005.aspx?type=1&name=Books%20%20Book%20Reviews>.

<sup>22</sup> For a paper refuting the idea of Christians being demon possessed see, Gunther Juncker, "Doctrines of Demons," at Naming the Grace, [www.naminggrace.org/id60.htm](http://www.naminggrace.org/id60.htm).

husbands were separated from them and encouraged to have nothing to do with them. One small boy was tied to his mother's leg while she worked since it was revealed that he also was demon possessed. Thankfully one of the women walked away and sued the group, which ended their time in Sacramento. This group divorced their concept of Christianity from any real work of grace.<sup>23</sup>

On the one hand, Aggressive Christianity began with strident and harsh concepts and methodologies devoid of the true meaning of the cross. And the outcome led to the abusive destruction of families. On the other hand, a kind of sloppy sentimentality, that divorced Christianity from the orthodox teaching of Christianity, helped to shape a far more violent ideology. Nineteenth century liberal theology in Germany developed a theology that was devoid of many orthodox Christian doctrines. To Friedrich Schleiermacher, (1768-1834) the father of liberal theology, human consciousness or experience led to knowing God. And that knowledge based on experience was intended to lead to an understanding that Christianity was the highest form of religion. The emphasis was on experience and the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of humanity; original sin and the need for a cross were eliminated. Adolf Harnack (1851-1930) insisted that "the whole Jesus' message may be reduced to these two heads—God as the Father, and the human soul so ennobled that it can and does unite with him."<sup>24</sup> Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) who William Placher describes as "the leading theologian of the 'history of religions,' posited a view of religion which insisted that various religions were shaped and held by differing national groups due to their religions dependence on "the intellectual, social, and national conditions among which it exists." He did not invalidate other religions but rather insisted that the various religions and civilizations connected the people to various experiences of God in different ways. Troeltsch saw European culture as a product of a "deorientalized Christianity."<sup>25</sup>

This easy theology, devoid of serious Christology, Atonement, or any other important Christian doctrine was a seedbed ready for the German

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<sup>23</sup> For information on Aggressive Christianity when they existed in Sacramento, see Viola Larson, "Aggressive Christianity Missions Training Corps," at [www.rickcross.com/references/aggressive/aggressive1.html](http://www.rickcross.com/references/aggressive/aggressive1.html). (Paper also on file at Naming the Grace) For an excellent update taken from El Paso Times see, [www.gospelcom.net/apologeticsindex/a14.html](http://www.gospelcom.net/apologeticsindex/a14.html).

<sup>24</sup> Adolf Harnack, *What is Christianity*, in Placher, *Readings*, 150.

<sup>25</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions," in Placher, *Readings*, 154,155.

Christians to spring from. Arthur C. Cochrane in his book, *The Church's Confession Under Hitler*, writes:

The "German Christians," regarded from the standpoint of Christian faith, were a *liberal*, nationalistic sect which, at the initiative of the National Socialist Party, formed a union of various schools and groups. These schools and groups, in spite of all differences, were united in their nationalistic tendencies and *liberal Christianity*.<sup>26</sup> (Emphasis mine)

In an attempt to make love and brotherhood the basic doctrines of a reconstituted Christianity, Liberal theologians and church leaders backed one of the most tyrannical rulers in history. Walking through a door that eliminated the holiness of God, the sinfulness of humanity and the cross of Jesus Christ, they had no way of comprehending the great evil that was on the other side. They joined forces with what some have seen as the greatest cultic movement in contemporary times. Interestingly enough the views of this liberal Christianity began with attempts to do apologetics with people involved in enlightenment thinking and then with the Romantic Movement. This serves as a warning that in contextualizing the gospel for a different or diverse culture one should proceed with great care. How do we proclaim the good news to the many diverse new and old theologies and religions in such a way that they will hear the message? How do we do this without leaving behind the truth of God's word?

So to push this question of contextualization deeper, how, for instance, does one go about offering the gospel to Delores Williams who believes "People do not have to attach sacred validation to a bloody cross in order to be redeemed or to be Christians." She is not asking the same questions that early Jews and Athenians were asking about God, nor is she seeking the same kind of answers the medieval scholastics were when they formulated their theories about atonement. We might start from her questions or even from her weaknesses. We would surely start from her position as one who is an advocate for the needs of Afro-American women, and as one who is concerned for those who are ancestors of slaves. Williams sees Afro-American women's survival in the present, as well as the survival of those who were slaves, rooted in their strengths. She believes the cross, understood as sacrifice, harms her position. So she needs to see the cross as neither advocating for slavery nor wimpishness on the part of women. Nevertheless she still needs to

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<sup>26</sup> Arthur C. Cochrane, *The Church's Confession Under Hitler*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1962), 74.

see the cross as Christ's great sacrifice for sinners. She needs a clear picture of God's holiness, humanity's sin, and God's redeeming love.

Paul the Apostle is an example of a Christian who proclaimed the Gospel contextually. In his preaching in Athens he appealed to his listeners using the words of some of their Greek poets. And he used the many gods they worshipped as an opener to speak of the gospel of Jesus Christ. (Acts 17:22-34) In 1 Corinthians 9 verses 19 through 22 Paul speaks of becoming as a Jew, becoming as a Gentile, (those without law) and becoming weak for the sake of the weak, that he, "may by all means save some." Paul, however, has not denied the Gospel here, he has not compromised the person of Jesus nor found fault with the atonement. Rather, he is avoiding offending their scruples that he might either bring them to Christ or if they are Christians "win them for greater strength."<sup>27</sup> But Paul is strong in his emphasis on the doctrines of the faith and in particular the cross of Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians he writes, "For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

Jesus Christ, the one who is fully God and human, who died for us, who carries our sin away on Himself, who stands before God the Father for us. This truth is the great offer to the religions and cultures of our day. We must come in a spirit of humbleness and empathy, shedding any of our cultural layers that are contrary to the gospel and harmful to Christ's message. But we cannot compromise the Gospel; we must preach only that good news which is scriptural, the crucified and resurrected Christ. Those in Christ stand before God robed in the righteousness of Christ enjoying and pleasing their Creator because of the death of Christ on the cross. Those in the religious world, including those who call themselves Christians, who deny the cross of Christ, stand without, striving to encounter God, and sometimes accepting a doorway toward evil rather than the One who is the Truth, the Life and the Way. (John 14:6)

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<sup>27</sup> Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, revised version, (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company 1996) 135-137.

## Back to the Basics or Back to Egypt: Emergent is Dying...is Origins the Answer?

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### Abstract

This paper explores the demise of the emerging church movement. Attention is given to key personalities that shaped the movement, their current view of the emergent movement, and a critique of the Origins Network, an *heir apparent* to emergent.

### Introduction

When I was 11, I was introduced to *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis. Over the next fifteen years, I read the series at least a dozen times. In 1987, as a student at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, it dawned on me that I had read and knew *The Chronicles* far better than God's word. As a result, I adopted the pattern of my grandparents, which was to read the Bible through each year. Twenty-two years later, with a growing familiarity with the God's Word, I am still taken aback by the number of times God's people sought to go "back to Egypt."<sup>1</sup>

Some sixty-two times, God declared his desire to take his people "out of Egypt" and yet, again and again one reads, "Let us go back to Egypt." From Numbers 14:4, when the people cried, "Let us appoint a leader and go back to Egypt," to Stephen's testimony, declaring in Acts 7:39 "Our forefathers were unwilling to obey him, but pushed him away, and in their hearts turned back to Egypt," Scripture recounts the siren's call Egypt had upon God's people.

The phrase *Back to Egypt* describes the fallen nature that shuns truth and replaces it with images of greener pastures, new beginnings and a false utopia. After only a year in the wilderness, the Israelites reminisced of days back in Egypt, when, "...we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted..." (Ex 16:3) and "We remember the free fish we ate in

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<sup>1</sup> Ex 14:11-12; 16:1f, 17:3; Num 11:4-5, 14:3-4, 20:5, 21:5, Deu 1:27, 16:17, 28:61; Neh 9:17; Isa 30:2, 31:1, Jer 2:18, 42:15-44:30; Hos 8:13, 9:3; Acts 7:39. All biblical quotations taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003) unless otherwise noted.

Egypt, along with the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic.” (Num 11:5)

Moving forward “three millennia and change,” Vince Lombardi was in his first year as head coach for the Green Bay Packers. “After five losses in a row, Lombardi pulled the team together for a stern talking-to. ‘You forget every basic fundamental about this game, he lectured. Then he picked up a ball and said: ‘Gentlemen, the basics. This is a football!’.”<sup>2</sup> Maybe something can be learned from Lombardi’s understanding of the importance of the basics.

Currently, several key pastors and church leaders who early-on embraced the Emerging Church, its ideologies, and practices, are now distancing themselves from emergent, emerging, and the various networks associated with the movement. This is happening at the very time the movement appears to be gaining mainstream acceptance.

For those who are abandoning the emergent movement, one possible heir apparent is the fledgling Origins Networks. This paper will explore the similarities, differences, and key personalities of Origins, and attempt to determine if this is another trip “back to Egypt,” or a true back to the basics return to the historical Christian faith.

### **The Emergent Movement**

In the early years of the Emerging Movement (EM), the *conversation* (a non-threatening term used to describe theological and practical issues) focused upon “returning to the basics.” Early conversations frequently centered on house churches, applauding the fact that they did not extract 70% of the budget for staff and buildings. Other conversations included churches that met in coffee houses and other non-threatening locations, and the importance of bi-vocational leaders who contributed more to the church than they received. Later conversations dealt with training—could it be decentralized? How could technology assist young leaders? More questions seemed to emerge than answers, yet the emerging church proponents promised the conversation would lead to solutions.

Part of the solution involved a wave of new churches that embraced winsome approaches to engaging the culture, often drawing upon ancient forms and symbols as well as contemporary technology. To a lesser degree, some existing churches attempted to transition into the emergent movement and mold. Researchers Eddie Gibbs and Ryan Bolger identified, to at least some extent, nine practices common to the

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<sup>2</sup> Donald T. Phillips, *Run to Win: Vince Lombardi on Coaching and Leadership*, (St. Martins: New York, 2002), 92.

emergent movement in their book, *Emerging Churches*. Emerging churches (1) identify with the life of Jesus, (2) transform the secular realm, (3) live highly communal lives, (4) welcome the stranger, (5) serve with generosity, (6) participate as producers, (7) create as creative beings, (8) lead as a body, and (9) take part in spiritual activities.<sup>3</sup>

No-one really knows when the Emerging/Emergent conversation started. In 1969, William Kalt and Ronald Wilkins, two Roman Catholic leaders, wrote a two-volume book entitled, *The Emerging Church*. However, it has only been in recent years that any reference or connection between this book and the Emergent Movement has been suggested. In 1998, Spencer Burke launched his website, The Ooze, which became the entry point into the conversation for thousands, and was the primary watering-hole for the emergent conversation for several years.

In 1999, the Emergent Village website was launched by Leadership Network, which later changed its name to Emergent. Around this time, the understanding that a movement was taking place was growing. At the time, I was a church planting missionary in California, and took part in many of these early so-called conversations. For many, 2009 marks the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Emerging Movement. However, even after a decade, it is hard to define the movement. Some see the Emerging Church as driven by the internet—placing technology over theology. Others attempt to define the EM by its theology or methodology, still others, especially those outside the movement, such as D.A. Carson, by protest.<sup>4</sup> In the past five years, some evangelicals, as a conciliatory gesture, have attempted to divide EM into two streams, Emergent (the liberal-moderate stream) and Emerging (the conservative stream).<sup>5</sup> Ed Stetzer went one step further, viewing the Emerging Church as having three streams, the Relevantists, the Reconstructionists and the Revisionists.<sup>6</sup> In 2007 Scot McKnight wrote about five streams to the

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<sup>3</sup> Eddie Gibbs and Ryan K. Bolger, *Emerging Churches: creating Christian community in postmodern cultures* (Baker Academic: Grand Rapids, MI, 2005), 44-45.

<sup>4</sup> D.A. Carson, *Modern Reformation Magazine*, "Faith a La Carte?" (July/August 2005 Issue, Vol. 14.4).

<sup>5</sup> Much has been written about the two terms, emerging and emergent. For example, Brian McLaren and D.A. Carson view the terms emergent and emerging as synonymous, whereas Mark Driscoll and Scot McKnight make a distinction between these terms.

<sup>6</sup> Ed Stetzer and David Putnum, *Breaking the Missional Code* (Broadman & Holman Publishers: Nashville, 2006) 188-190.

movement.”<sup>7</sup> What is clear is that, since 1999, countless websites, blogs, conferences, workshops, network meetings, books, and other forms of the conversation have caught the interest and attention of western Christianity in both the evangelical and mainstream traditions.

In 2004, I raised the following question to my church planting students. “Is the emergent conversation going anywhere?” At the heart of my question was the need to explore whether the EM movement was helping the church experience a radical rebirth of relevance or was this another case of leaders crying, “Let us go back to Egypt,” only to revisit the cultural bankruptcy of previous movements, such as Neo-Orthodoxy, Liberation Theology, and Christian existentialism.<sup>8</sup> Five years later, many of the early adapters and key leaders in the movement seem to be saying, “Get out of Egypt and back to the basics.”

In January 2009, *Christianity Today* published an article entitled, “Emergent’s Divergence.” Brandon O’Brian wrote, “Emergent Village’s board of directors move to eliminate its national coordinator position (thus, letting go Tony Jones) marked the latest sign that the movement is either decentralizing or disintegrating.”<sup>9</sup>

The *Christianity Today* article was only one of the recent signs that the emergent movement, or EM, is unraveling. However, it was unique in that it was the first widely read indicator, and it was a print version rather than emergent’s preferred electronic format. Among leading blog editors, however, the devaluation of the emerging church movement has been raging for over a year.

On August 8, 2008, Andrew Jones, whose Tall Skinny Kiwi website is considered by many to be one of the most influential emergent websites, wrote, “Emerging Church. Music to some and fingernails on blackboard to others. Should we use this term or not as we launch another project?”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Scot McNight, “Five Streams of the Emerging Church: Key elements of the most controversial and misunderstood movement in the church today,” *Christianity Today*, February 2007, Vol. 51, No. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Rodney A. Harrison, Lecture on the emerging church. Course: Strategies and Methods for Starting New Churches, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO, May 10, 2004.

<sup>9</sup> Brandon O’Brian, *Christianity Today*, “Emergent’s Divergence” January 2009, Volume 53, Number 1.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Jones, <http://tallskinnykiwi.typepad.com/tallskinnykiwi/2008/08/emerging-church.html>, “Emerging Church: Use the word or Dump it?” Posted August 8, 2008, accessed September 1, 2008.

A month later, Url Scaramanga posted a thread on the *Christianity Today* blog site entitled, “R.I.P. Emerging Church.” In his post, he notes several sources who suggest the Emerging Church will disappear.<sup>11</sup>

On December 30, 2008, Jonathan Brink, Managing Director of Thrive Ministries, expressed concern about the health of the Emergent Movement in a piece he wrote for Emergent Village. In this article, Brinks notes, “Dan Kimball and Scot McKnight started a new network, the (tentatively titled) *Origins Project*...perhaps it was inevitable. For many it felt like a splintering of sorts.”<sup>12</sup>

Ironically, as the captains of the good ship “HMS Emergent” are issuing an S.O.S., mainline denominations are just now coming on board. The Presbyterian Church USA has launched its Emerging Worship Initiative,<sup>13</sup> The United Methodists have set sail with *emergingumc*,<sup>14</sup> and the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC) of the Roman Catholic Church hosted the first-ever Catholic-Emergent conference in March 2009.<sup>15</sup> The Southern Baptist Convention entered the conversation at the Convergence Conference hosted by Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC, in September 2007.<sup>16</sup> Talk about rearranging the deck chairs on a sinking ship.

Returning to the January 2009 edition of *Christianity Today*, O’Brian continues, “...several thinkers once associated with emergent, including pastor Dan Kimball and professor Scot McKnight, have formed a new network provisionally called Origins, dedicated to friends, pioneers, innovators, and catalysts who want to dream and work for the gospel together...”<sup>17</sup>

These leaders are sensing that the original verve of the emerging movement is gone. Gone are the meaningful conversations that, at one

<sup>11</sup> Url Scaramanga, [http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2008/09/rip\\_emerging\\_ch.html](http://blog.christianitytoday.com/outofur/archives/2008/09/rip_emerging_ch.html), Christianity Today OutOfUR Blog, “R.I.P. Emerging Church,” Posted September 18, 2008, accessed March 1, 2009.

<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Brink, <http://www.emergentvillage.com/weblog/the-state-of-emergence>, “The State of Emergent,” Posted December 30, 2008, accessed February 28, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Emerging Worship Initiative, Office of Theology and Worship, <http://www.pcusa.org/theologyandworship/whatwedo/emerging.htm>, accessed March 10, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> *Emergingumc*, <http://emergingumc.blogspot.com/>, Posted January 30, 2006, accessed March 8, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> The Center for Action and Contemplation, <http://www.cacradicalgrace.org/conferences/emer/>, accessed February 28, 2009.

<sup>16</sup> Baptist Press, Conference Examines the Emerging Church, <http://www.baptistpress.org/bpnews.asp?id=26495>, Posted September 25, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Christianity Today, Vol 53:1

time, defined emergent. For example, web-traffic on the Emergentvillage.com, as of March 12, 2009, is down 44.9% from a year ago.<sup>18</sup> These once meaningful conversations have been replaced with bitter debates about what is, and is not, emergent. However, the desire to foster creative discussion and to network remains.

### A Critique of Origins

The earliest reference to the Origins Project was in 2004. At a church-sponsored conference, Erwin McManus, pastor of Mosaic Church in Los Angeles, shared his vision of a new missional network. One participant wrote, “Erwin was candid about his thoughts on current church movements, especially the emergent church. He felt like the emergent movement was a reaction to the traditional church and not necessarily a reaction to God’s call for mission.”<sup>19</sup> Since 2004, annual conferences under the Origins Project have been held. In 2008, the decision was made to launch a new network, and thus establish a new conversation. The Origins Update by Dan Kimball notes, “Origins is a network/community being birthed for those who are passionate about Jesus, Humanity and Innovation.”<sup>20</sup>

The first distinction of the Origins network to the Emergent Movement is its theological mooring. According to the Origins website the movement consists of “Leaders, entrepreneurs, pastors, misfits, and artists who share a high view of Scripture and a radical commitment to evangelism while being faithfully committed to what is expressed in the Lausanne Covenant.”<sup>21</sup> Unlike the Emerging Movement, which has fought hard to avoid absolutes—including faith statements—Origins embraces the Lausanne Covenant. Acts 29 is another network that with theological moorings—adhere to both the Apostle’s and Nicene Creeds. However, Acts 29 requires membership, dues, and a reformed

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<sup>18</sup> Web site analysis done by the author at Siteanalytics.com shows the unique visitors to Emergent Village was down 44.9% in the past 12 months. Source, <http://siteanalytics.compete.com/emergentvillage.com/?metric=uv>, accessed March 12, 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Brian Orme, An Uprising: Origins Conference, [http://www.the-next-wave.org/stories/storyReader\\$330](http://www.the-next-wave.org/stories/storyReader$330). Posted June 6, 2004, accessed February 10, 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Origins Update, <http://originsproject.org/?p=661>, “Origins blog.” Posted August 31, 2009, accessed September 3, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Origins, <http://theoriginsproject.org/>, “Origins home page.” Posted December 22, 2008, accessed March 11, 2009.

theological position.<sup>22</sup> Ironically, visitors to the Origins website are already posting their thoughts, some suggesting the Lausanne Covenant is too vague, while others argue that the Covenant is too constraining.

Another distinction can be observed from the key players in Origins. Dan Kimball, Dave Gibbons, Rick McKinley, Mark Batterson, and Erwin McManus pastor congregations that are theologically conservative and evangelical. So far, none of them have left the pastorate out of dissatisfaction with church or in order to devote “full-time” to the movement.<sup>23</sup> Other members of the team include Scot McNight, a conservative evangelical professor and Skye Jethani, blog editor for *Christianity Today*.

Nevertheless, Origins has much in common with the Emergent Movement. Using Gibbs’ nine practices, it could be said that Origins is promoting the emergent agenda. Origins invites “Missionally-minded people from different backgrounds who use different methods in different cultural contexts but share the same experimental passion and risk-taking heart for serving, loving, and helping people connect to God through Jesus.”<sup>24</sup> The openness to experimentation, risk-taking and different backgrounds, cultural contexts and the use of diverse methods is similar to the Emerging Church. As noted earlier, the network is open to “misfits, and artists...”

The primary communication media for Origins is the internet. Twitter, Facebook, and, to a lesser degree, websites, have brought Origins into the limelight, much as websites and messaging boards did for the Emergent Movement.

Another common theme is “cost.” The Origins Network is hosting a series of conferences called “Catalyst” at \$289 per registrant plus \$129 for the “Origins Labs.” Thus, the succession of conferences to explain, promote, and disseminate information continues in the spirit of the Purpose Driven and Seeker Sensitive conferences of the contemporary church and the Emergence conferences of the emerging church.

So, is the Origins Project helping leaders return to the basics of the Christian Faith or is it another example of God’s people wanting to return to the false utopia of Egypt? The key players would claim the former. I would argue for the latter.

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<sup>22</sup> Acts 29, <http://acts29network.org/plant-a-church/application-process/>, accessed March 11, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Several Emerging Church leaders have left the local church to pursue consulting emergent ministries, including Spencer Burke, Jonathan Campbell, and Brian McLaren.

<sup>24</sup> Origins, <http://theoriginsproject.org/>, accessed March 11, 2009.

In 2002, “What is wrong with Contemporary” was the focus Darren Rowse’s early (and popular) blog, LivingRoom.<sup>25</sup> Most of the reasons listed for Gen-X’s rebuff on the contemporary church (the movement having been institutionalized, having gone mainstream, becoming exegetically and theologically bankrupt, and baby-boom generation driven) could today be transposed upon the Emergent Movement by simply updating the generational tag. In the same way, I would postulate that in ten years (or less) another new movement will appear. In hindsight, these movements are often more evolutionary than they are revolutionary.

I applaud the fact that the leaders of the Origins movement have restored theological and evangelistic absolutes as essentials to the conversation. However, what I believe is ultimately needed is for pastors and church leaders to equip members with a sound ecclesiology that is rooted and grounded in Scripture. Knowledge of the cultural and historical events that have shaped, and sometimes deformed the church, are important backdrops, but can become superfluous to a biblical ecclesiology. Is embracing the latest and greatest network, movement or conversation really staying on the cutting edge? Or is it responding to the never ending call to return to Egypt? Is the church really in need of a new playbook? I believe is it time for pastors and teachers of the Word to prepare a good lecture that begins with, “Ladies and Gentlemen, the basics. This is a church.”

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<sup>25</sup> Darren Rowse, [http://www.livingroom.org.au/blog/archives/what\\_is\\_wrong\\_with\\_contemporary.php#comments](http://www.livingroom.org.au/blog/archives/what_is_wrong_with_contemporary.php#comments), “What’s Wrong with Contemporary Worship,” Posted December 9, 2002, accessed December 23, 2008.

## Book Reviews

*Taking Your Church to the Next Level: What Got You Here Won't Get You There.* By Gary L. McIntosh, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, September 2009, 215 pgs, \$16.99

How can you turn around a church that has stopped growing? That is the question raised by Gary McIntosh in his latest book. Based on national trends, this is also a question on the minds of pastors, denominational leaders and church members. Ed Stetzer, President of LifeWay Research, notes that 80-85% of churches in North America are plateaued or declining. Thus, the market for this book is significant. As president of the Church Growth Network and a professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership at Talbot School of Theology, McIntosh is well known in the church growth circles. But does his latest work deliver on its promise to help leaders take their church to the next level?

The first chapter challenges the reader to recognize what worked to get your church to where it is (or *was* in the case of a declining church) will not get you where you want to be in terms of growth. The next eight chapters deal with the congregational life cycles of various size churches. Appropriately, McIntosh tips his hat to those who have helped previous generations understand that churches, like people, are living organisms and as such, have predictable lifecycles. Several receive credit as pacesetters, including Robert Dale, whose book "To Dream Again" is still in print and Lyle Schaller, whose leadership books challenged a generation to seek a balance between servant hood and results-based leadership. These chapters are laid out in such a way that a pastor of a church of 15 or a church of 1500 can turn to the appropriate chapter and immediately find resources and insights that shed light on the unique challenges and opportunities of each growth phase.

To enhance the reading experience, McIntosh has chosen to use an on-going conversation between three pastors, Mike, Wes and Phil, who meet regularly at the Holy Grounds coffee shop. Each chapter continues the conversation, providing the reader with a light-hearted introduction to the weighty subject of non-growth.

So, should you read this book? Yes, in fact, I would recommend buying it simply for the diagrams, charts and indicators. The pastor or staff member will find these useful in the assessment process.

Pastors of small churches (those under 150) may embrace or bemoan McIntosh as he makes statements about the smaller church. For example, in contrast to commonly accepted wisdom that says a church can support a full-time pastor and provide for basic ministry programs with fifty or so people, McIntosh contends that churches with fewer than 150 worshipers

often find they must employ the services of a bi-vocational pastor or perhaps pay a pastor a lower than average wage. He also writes that a church needs at least fifty adults to have a public worship service that is celebrative and attractive to new people. For McIntosh, attendance of twenty adults or less is a strong indication the church should be closed.

A key to growth and transitioning through the life-phases of a church is to successfully navigate the *choice points* at each phase of the life-cycle. Choice points are those times when the church makes choices about its future. Unlike the human lifecycle, the church can have an effective and fruitful ministry that may be renewed by leadership to help the church strategically move through the choice points. *Taking Your Church to the Next Level* is a valuable tool for the pastor willing to pay the price to lead a church in growth.

Rodney A. Harrison  
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. Wide Margin Edition. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2007, lxxii + 1574 pp., \$69.95.

Before 1929 available texts of the Hebrew Bible were essentially reprints or edited versions of Jacob ben Hayyim's *Second Rabbinic Bible*, first published by Daniel Bomberg in Venice in 1524/25. Ben Hayyim based his work on late medieval manuscripts and other earlier printed editions. This text probably served as the *textus receptus* behind most early Old Testament translations, such as the King James Version.

Rudolf Kittel utilized the Ben Hayyim text as a base for the first two editions of his internationally acclaimed scholarly work known as the *Biblia Hebraica* (first published in 1906). But beginning in 1929, Kittel decided to jettison the medieval eclectic ben Hayyim text and adopt in its place a text rediscovered by Paul Kahle in 1926 in the Leningrad State Public Library (B 19<sup>A</sup>). According to its colophon, this forgotten codex was copied out in AD 1008. It remains the earliest complete text of the Hebrew Bible. The Aleppo codex is earlier in date, but incomplete. An excellent facsimile edition of the Leningrad codex (L) was published by Eerdmans and Brill in 1998 (*The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition*, D. N. Freedman et al., eds.).

Kittel died in 1929, but several years later Albrecht Alt and Otto Eissfeldt were able to revise and publish the completed fascicles as the third edition of the *Biblia Hebraica* (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibleanstalt, 1937). Although Kittel only edited five of the twenty-one fascicles, the work soon became known as Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica*

(BHK). BHK has often been criticized for its frequent willingness to correct and emend the B 19<sup>A</sup> text based on conjecture and theory. BHK had an important influence on the Revised Standard Version and other translations of the Old Testament of the same period.

A revision of BHK was undertaken from 1967-77 to reflect more faithfully the text of the Leningrad manuscript. Work on the fascicles of this fourth edition began in 1967. The revision was published in 1977 by the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft in Stuttgart as the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS). In 1997 the text of BHS was corrected and published as a fifth “emended edition.” This has been the last edition of BHS to be issued.

At the turn of the twenty-first century, the impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls on the study of the transmission of the text of the Hebrew Bible and the consequential shift in the understanding of the aims and limits of textual criticism made another revision of the *Biblia Hebraica* series desirable. As a result a version called *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (BHQ) was announced and started; five fascicles have now been released. (See for example, *Biblia Hebraica Quinta: General Introduction & Megilloth* [Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, 2004]). Technically, BHQ is to be the fifth “edition” of *Biblia Hebraica*; students must not confuse it with the fifth “emended edition” of BHS. BHQ will probably be published as a complete volume after 2014.

The BHS was initially published in a large easy to read format (9.4 x 6.5 in). This large format is now identified in the literature as the *Editio Maior*. A compact version (7.6 x 5.6 in) labeled *Editio Minor* first appeared in 1984. This small print edition was less expensive and consequently made BHS more accessible to a larger audience. However, the smaller print made a few accents, vowel signs, and some sigla and text of the critical apparatus more difficult to read with the unaided eye.

The smaller *Editio Minor* has proved to be very popular and has been reprinted in various formats. In 1994 it was bound together with the 27th revised Nestle-Aland New Testament Greek text in the somewhat expensive *Biblia Sacra Utriusque Testamenti Editio Hebraica et Graeca* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft). In 2007 an inexpensive paperback edition of the fifth edition of BHS was released. In my personal experience the bindings of both of these reprints have not stood the test of time very well.

Hendrickson Publishers offered the academic world a reprint of the fifth emended edition of the BHS text as a “wide margin edition” (9.4 x 7.1 in) in 2007. This is sometimes misleadingly referred to as a “large print edition.” But this is incorrect because Hendrickson reprinted the smaller *Editio Minor* text as the basis for its edition. The text is exactly the same, except that Hendrickson added 1½ to the outside of the page

and nearly 2½ to the bottom. The edition contains a number of welcome additional blank leaves at the beginning and the end of the volume. If they were able, I would have preferred a reprint of the larger *Edition Maior*, even if it meant a loss in the space available for notes.

Hendrickson also published a wide margin edition of the 27th Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament (2007). It is tempting to think that Hendrickson may have intended on publishing a complete Hebrew/Greek wide margin edition. Such a combined text would be very welcomed.

The quality of the binding in Hendrickson's wide margin edition of BHS is good and strong and reassuring as well. However, the weight of the paper is light and consequently thin. The average pen or highlighter bleeds right through the paper. This is somewhat disappointing in light of the fact that the intent was to give the user adequate space to add notes and comments on the side and bottom of the text. Gel pens bleed through quickly and ballpoints leave a tell tale heavy impression on the reverse side. Several writing implement manufacturers (like G. T. Luscombe and Zebra Pen Corp.) make pens and highlighters specifically designed for the thin papers used in Bibles published today. These work better on the Hendrickson reprint.

Hendrickson's wide margin edition remains a serious option for the student or pastor who desires to annotate the Hebrew text as they study. The price is reasonable and comparable to the hardcover *Editio Minor*. Despite the thin paper, I would prefer Hendrickson's wide margin edition to the *Editio Minor*. Nevertheless, there are a few other issues that students may want to consider before purchasing a Hebrew Bible.

It took Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft ten years from the beginning of publishing fascicles to complete the publication of BHS. Five fascicles of BHQ have now been published. If the same time schedule is maintained the final publication of BHQ could be accomplished by 2014 or thereafter. A less expensive version of BHS might do until BHQ arrives on the scene.

The wide margin edition might not appeal to all students. Bible software has made it easier to add notations and comments to the electronic text of the Hebrew Bible. This is true for a number of Bible texts as a whole. My students are more electronically connected, and some prefer reading and translating the Hebrew text right from the computer screen. In this case, hyperlinks are very productive on the computer, but not available in printed formats.

While Hendrickson had no control over the matter, the nature of the BHS text must also be considered before making a purchase. It is true that BHS is the only "critical" option that we now possess in the translation and study of the Hebrew text. But, depending on the needs and interests of the student, other texts may prove more fruitful.

BHS is not a perfect text; nor is it necessarily any better in bringing us closer to the autographs than the *textus receptus* of Ben Hayyim's *Second Rabbinical Bible*. There are small oddities in BHS. For example, the editors chose to place Chronicles as the end of the Writings just like Ben Hayyim's version. But in the Leningrad Codex B 19<sup>A</sup> Chronicles starts the Hagiographia. The editors also introduced sigla for *petuhot* and *setumot* where they were lacking in L.

Even more serious is the eclectic nature of G. E. Weil's edition of the Masorah included in BHS. The Masorah Parva in the margin of BHS is an edited version of the Masorah of L, and must be used with caution. The first apparatus under the text contains references to the Masorah Magna (MM) as collated by Weil in a separate volume. Unfortunately, this very helpful resource is hard to find and not available to most pastors, making it basically useless.

Finally, the text critical apparatus of BHS follows text critical methods essentially practiced before the last century. The editors of each fascicle gave only what they deemed important of the ancient texts and versions with their own preferred suggestions and conjectural readings. Little consideration is given to inter-textual errors and problems within a given version. In addition, BHS was published too early to take advantage of the full impact of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls on the discipline of textual criticism of the Bible.

Despite these problems, BHS is still the best academic text available. Consequently, Hendrickson's wide margin edition will appeal to students and scholars alike. Being aware of the peculiarities of BHS should alleviate for a period any mistaken conclusions concerning the Masorah and the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible. At least, this would be true while we wait for the publication of BHQ. But even then, there will be no guarantee that all our problems will be solved.

Stephen J. Andrews  
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

*Baptism: Three Views* by Sinclair Ferguson, Anthony N.S. Lane, and Bruce A. Ware, ed. David F. Wright. Downers Grove: IVP Press, 2009, 200 pp., \$16.00

In the book *Baptism: Three Views* Dr. Bruce Ware, Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, and Dr. Anthony Lane spar with each other over the issue of baptism, but specifically infant versus believer's baptism. A side match that takes place during the course of the book is the issue of immersion versus some other form of baptism. In the introduction to the book the

editor David Wright lets the reader know both the importance of this book and the reason behind why just these three views have been selected. For many in our Western culture the issue of baptism seems like a fairly minor dispute in and of itself, and this is often true even among evangelical believers. Wright, however, makes it clear that the issue of baptism is often an extremely important issue in other cultures. For many around the world, it is the act of baptism that sets a person apart from the surrounding culture and it is this act that causes one's friends and relatives to distance themselves from the one baptized. Baptism does not cost us much in our culture and for that reason it is often not given much thought, but it is definitely an area in which we need to think deeply, if for no other reason than to help support our brothers and sisters in the faith around the world who put their life on the line when they step into the baptismal waters.

As to the reason for just these three views, Wright informs the reader that the book is aimed at the mainstream evangelical market and that the three views presented are the most common in that market. It is an interesting combination that has been put together for the book. We have the believer's baptism position supported by Ware, the infant/believer's baptism position supported by Ferguson and then a hybrid position support by Lane in which both views are acceptable. It is Lane's third position that is probably most often held by the average church member, not because they have studied the subject and come to this conclusion as Lane has done, but because they see the issue of baptism as insignificant and they therefore see no reason to invest much energy into determining the how and the why of baptism. The path of least resistance is to then conclude "to each his own." While Lane does come to a conclusion that says to each his own, he does not come to it as a path of least resistance, but based upon his "seismological" reading of the history of baptism in the first five centuries of the church. We will come back to Lane later in this review.

As is the case in all multiple view books, each author presents his position and then the other authors reply to that position. A nice feature of *Three Views* is that after the two replies from the other writers the author of the chapter under consideration is given an opportunity to respond to the critiques about his work. Since the book only deals with three views the format is practical and does not cause the book to swell to an inordinate size. By reducing the number of perspectives to cover the book is able to cover the chosen topics in a deeper manner than is normally given in this type of format. Haven given a quick overview of the structure of the book, a look will now be given to the three views in the book.

Dr. Ware presents the position for believer's baptism in a fairly straight forward manner. He relies heavily upon the Bible as the basis for his belief that baptism is reserved for those who have believed in Jesus Christ. According to Ware, there is no indication in the biblical text that baptism is ever administered to someone who is not a believer. It should come as no surprise that Ferguson disagrees with this assessment. On this issue, Ferguson has to argue from silence in that those instances that speak of a household being baptized could have possibly included infants, but the text does not explicitly say as much. Ware does a commendable job refuting this claim by Ferguson. Another conflict that arises between Ware and Ferguson is over whether baptism is a seal of faith or a seal to faith. Not surprisingly, Ware argues that baptism is a seal of the faith that a person has in Christ, while Ferguson argues that baptism is a seal to faith. The exchange between both authors over this issue is enlightening as they work through the deep theological issues regarding covenant theology and the relation of baptism and circumcision. Another issue dividing Ware and Ferguson is what the historical record reveals. Ware argues that the early church evidence does not support infant baptism, while Ferguson argues that it does support it. Ware only gives a few pages to the historical evidence, while Ferguson begins his discussion with a historical treatment of baptism. While this reviewer agrees with the conclusion of Ware over Ferguson, both authors give a good presentation of the respective traditions that they represent.

As you might have noticed, so far in this review Dr. Lane's position has not been discussed and that is intentional. Dr. Lane presents a Dual-Practice view of baptism in which both infant baptism and believer's baptism can be supported. He does this by what he calls a "seismological" reading of church history. Lane wants to see history in a way that is analogous to how seismologists record earthquakes. A seismology station can be hundreds and even thousands of miles away from the epicenter of a quake and yet the station can still give an accurate reading of the intensity of the quake. In a similar manner, Dr. Lane argues that what is happening regarding baptism in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century are seismic readings from earlier in time. While this historical method has validity, there is the danger that as we attempt to read the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century practices backwards that we fill in the gaps with information that is incorrect. While Dr. Lane spends quite a large portion of his chapter dealing with the historical evidence with the conclusion that in the earliest church there was a dual practice of both believer's baptism and infant baptism and that the Bible's ambiguity on this issue is the reason for the dual practice that we see in the later church. Lane argues that this dual position is indeed the correct position, and Dr. Ware rightly

responds that if Lane is correct, then both Ferguson and he are wrong. It is for this reason that both Ware and Ferguson reject Lane's dual practice conclusion. While Ferguson argues that a church can both baptize infants and believers, he rejects Lane's position that says that the church accepted both a believer's baptism and a paedobaptist position. It is not that different churches can choose different practices, but that the same church could adopt both positions and still be theologically correct. Likewise, Ware rejects Lane's position, but his rejection stems from his rejection of Lane's conclusion that history shows infant baptism as an early practice of the church. Ware always argues that the Bible is not ambiguous on the issue as Lane argues, but is indeed quite clear that baptism is only for believers.

In our ever more diversified society, books that deal with various views on a topic are proliferating like bunnies. While this is a good thing, there is a danger that as the books take on widely disparate views that each view is watered down to such an extent that the reader is not given a robust presentation of the various views. It is a strength of *Baptism: Three Views* that only three views are presented and that these three views are presented by theologians who have a similar position regarding Scripture. It is the commonality of the writers that allows them to delve into the topic on a deep level. If one is looking for a good read on the issues surrounding believer's baptism versus infant baptism, with a hybrid third option thrown in for good measure, then *Baptism: Three Views* is a recommended place to start.

Rustin Umstatted  
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*Why Johnny Can't Preach* by T. David Gordon. New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2009, 108 pp., \$8.95.

Dr. Gordon was diagnosed with stage III cancer. Uncertain of how long he had left to live, he wrote what he thought could be his last contribution to the world, *Why Johnny Can't Preach*. He survived the cancer, but his last 30 years of sermon analysis reveals a worse disease that persists. As a conservative Christian who loves Jesus and the preaching of the Word, his diagnosis is that the American Church is plagued by ministers who cannot preach.

He writes from within the Reformed and Presbyterian world where pastors are required to be seminary graduates able to pass Hebrew and Greek exams. Within that tradition, with its high regard for the original texts of Scripture, he concludes that most ministers are not skilled in

handling the Bible. It is not the fault of the seminaries, he argues, but the fault of the students who arrive at seminary incapable of dealing with literary works.

Our image-based systems of communication have shaped the culture, and that culture is the matrix from which we obtain pastors. Pastors are not conversant in written texts because they swim in images. The rub comes when they try to converse about the sacred texts.

An unskilled preacher reads the Bible the same way he reads a computer manual, sports magazine or newspaper. The bible, it turns out, is not read with the regard one would give to Shakespearian literature because there is no enjoyment of Shakespeare or literature. Instead, the Bible is culled for data, quotes or proofs to be dumped into a sermon machine. A sermon machine generates the exact same sermon for John 3:16 as for Romans 5:8. The minister who is insensitive to the significant differences between John 3 and Romans 5 will produce the same sermon regardless of the text.

The sermon becomes the point, and the Scripture is incidental. The preaching is not shaped by the text, for the text is only the prompt that reminds the preacher of what he already thought. The text does not shape the sermon because it has no moving pictures to shape the minister, and that cascades down to the hearers. *Johnny Can't Preach* because Johnny cannot read literature. He is not skilled in any literature, including the Bible, because the dominant media has nourished him with constantly switching camera angles, tempo-intense music, pithy dialog, and now multi-sensory white-board markers that are scented in order to distract him from the pain he experiences when slowly writing actual words. (Scented markers are a sign of the end of our civilization.)

Americans read but they do not read literary works. Dr. Gordon calls this *aliteracy*: the ability to read, but not reading well. Being aliterate, the pastor is able to see the text and not see it. The sermon is preached, but it is not a sermon. The lauded sermon has become a media event that resonates with an aliterate culture.

The church can help solve this problem by preparing seminarians for seminary. Johnny can help too. Before entering into biblical studies he should turn off his television and adopt a life of reading and writing. Dr. Gordon's most controversial suggestion is a system of sermon reviews. I happen to agree, and I would love for more people to scrutinize what I am trying to preach. However, the problem will be with the reviewers themselves who are also immersed in the dominate media ecosystem. Are they above the fray? Are they in a better position for analysis than the man incapable of preaching? I ask because if *Johnny Can't Preach* then it probably goes unnoticed since Sally cannot hear.

By measuring and observing the sad state of preaching, Dr. Gordon is helping to change it with a happy instance of the Heisenberg uncertainty principle. I have the members of our church read *Why Johnny Can't Preach* because it is medicinal. It promotes Christ-centered preaching as the cure for the disease.

Stephen S. Rives  
Eastside Church of the Cross

*New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ.* By Thomas R. Schreiner. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008, 990 pp., \$ 44.99 hardcover. ISBN: 978-0-8010-2680-5

Judged by the number of books published at the time, the field of New Testament theology was quite barren only two or three decades ago. Those completing their theological training in the seventies and eighties remember well the shortage of reliable books on this topic. Especially for the evangelical students, the works of G. E. Ladd (1974) and of D. Guthrie (1981) were among the few valuable treatises in print. In them, the student was able to find the voice of the Center on a theological spectrum that was far better served by the agendas set by theologians on the Left, among them the acclaimed work of R. Bultmann (1951-55).

How radically the situation has changed in just three decades. Beginning with the early nineties, the discipline of NT theology seems to have started a period of vitalization, albeit not without a fair amount of skepticism or even rejection. As a result of this renewed interest, these decades have seen some of the greatest evangelical NT minds producing such valuable tomes that now the decision to assign a textbook for a NT Theology class has become a virtual nightmare. At least six books with that title have been published: L. Morris (1990), G. B. Caird (1992), B. Childs (1992), G. Strecker (2000), I. Howard Marshall (2004), and F. Thielman (2005). Just as important, one must acknowledge the significant series *New Testament Theology* of Cambridge University Press under the editorial work of J. D. G. Dunn, as well as the works of N. T. Wright and James D. G. Dunn, each one of them being engaged in writing a comprehensive *New Testament Theology*.

Of course, in such a crowded field, the legitimate question is how could one justify yet another book on the theology of the New Testament, one just shy of 1000 pages? Even as I am writing this review, I see on the advertising brochure of the same publishing house, Baker Academic, an announcement that by the end of the year the *magnum opus* of Udo Schnelle will be made available to the English readers. Its

title? *Theology of the New Testament*. Their rival company Zondervan has just embarked on a new series of eight monograph-size volumes, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, under the editorial work of Andreas Köstenberger. Why, then, another book on NT Theology? The answer given by the author in the Introduction of the volume as well as the book as a whole will have to be assessed by each reader. To that end, the present review aims to highlight the distinctive elements of this most recent New Testament Theology, written by a well known and respected evangelical scholar, Thomas Schreiner, the James Buchanan Harrison Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

The author advances and defends the thesis that “the New Testament theology is God-focused, Christ-centered, and Spirit-saturated, but the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit must be understood along a salvation-historical timeline; that is, God’s promises are already fulfilled but not yet consummated in Christ Jesus” (p.23). This undergirding theme is traced in the major corpora of the NT writings: the Synoptic Gospels, the Johannine Literature, the Acts of the Apostles, The Pauline Literature, Hebrews and James, 1-2 Peter and Jude, and Revelation.

The book is divided into four parts, each one dealing with a particular aspect of the concept of “promise”, the theme which, in Schreiner’s synthesis, best captures the essence of God’s revelation in the events unfolding in the New Testament times, which subsequently became the New Testament Scriptures. The theme is reminiscent of the theological center chosen by W. Kaiser for his Old Testament Theology, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*. Unlike Kaiser who traced the theme of “promise” diachronically throughout the Old Testament, Tom Schreiner advances a thematic approach, a decision that does justice to the unified nature of the New Testament writings, highlighting the overarching theme reflected in the various subdivisions of the New Testament. This indeed is the most distinctive feature of the present volume.

The first part, “The Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises,” lays out the conceptual framework needed for a proper understanding of the New Testament theology when a concept of such as “Promise” is set at its center. The dual aspect of fulfillment of God’s promises, on the one hand, already fulfilled in Christ, but on the other, yet to be fully consummated, is central to every aspect of the Schreiner’s work. Schreiner summarizes, “The promises made to Abraham have been fulfilled in a decisive way through the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but the end of history has not arrived. ... the final curtain has yet to come down of the last act” (p.116).

In part two, the author develops his perspective on the saving work of the Godhead from the assertion that the “centrality of God in Christ is the

foundational theme for the narrative unfolded in the NT,” (p.119). From the very beginning, Schreiner distances his approach from that of a standard systematic theology, arguing that his analysis pursues the inner agenda found within the New Testament itself, and not that of a philosophical or dogmatic system imposed for the exterior. This, indeed, constitutes a safe and secure foundation for biblical theology, carefully guarded by Schreiner. Theology proper is treated as an inseparable tandem with the Christology espoused in the New Testament: “Separating the revelation of God in the New Testament from Christology, as if God is central and Christ is secondary is impossible” (p. 120). Subsequently, the topic is explored at length in the span of ten chapters. The first and last of these are allotted to the persons of God the Father and God the Spirit, respectively, while the remaining eight are devoted to the person and work of Christ. The partition of the material in the Christology section is not always clear, since the two main foci of the analysis, the person and the work of Christ, are not uniformly divided among the major NT corpora.

Part three, “Experiencing the Promise: Believing and Obeying” focuses on the “work of salvation that is accomplished by Father, Son and Spirit” (p. 509). The argument is built on three distinct stages. It starts with an analysis of the problem of sin, the condition of mankind for which salvation was necessary. The response to God’s salvific work is then summarized in the call to faith and obedience, seen primarily as a personal and individual responsibility. Finally, these important theological concepts are framed in the specific timeline of salvation history, the proper place to discuss the topic of the Mosaic Law and related issues.

The fourth and last part presents the theme of the people of the promise and the future of the promise. Three chapters are set aside to unfold Schreiner’s perspective on these topics. The first one delineates and defines the people of the promise; the second scrutinizes the social work of God’s people; lastly, the third looks forward to the consummation of God’s promises. A variety of subthemes pertaining to ecclesiology and eschatology are treated within the textual perimeter of their canonical placement.

For the reader who will find an overwhelming amount of material covered, the volume includes useful conclusions at the end of each chapter. In fact, an abridged version of Schreiner’s theology is already in the editorial plans of Baker Academic. An appendix charting the development of the NT theology as a bona fide theological discipline is a good guide for the readers new to the field. The book also includes an author index and a Scripture index, as well as a bibliographical list of almost 50 pages, no doubt a selective one, showing the daunting task

awaiting any author attempting to write a NT theology at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Will this book become *the* definitive evangelical voice in the area of New Testament Theology? This is unlikely, if not simply for the abundance of the sources already available. As other reviewers remarked, Schreiner's book stands tall within the evangelical and Reformed theological traditions, and yet, the decision to choose between the volumes of Marshall, Thielman and Schreiner, to name only three representatives, is never going to be an easy one. I have found many brilliant passages in Schreiner's volume, particularly in the Introduction and the Pauline chapters that indeed show the mind of a seasoned NT theologian at work. In other parts, however, especially in the areas not known to be of prime interest for Schreiner's research, his analysis amounts to a mere enumeration of ideas drawn from relevant biblical passages, without any particular fine tuning. As a case in point, one finds that Schreiner's treatment of the people of God, of their social world, and the consummation of the promise within the epistle to the Hebrews corpus, lacks the depth of theological discourse that his treatment of Pauline corpus, for example, has made us expect.

Schreiner's volume, however, has no competition among the thematic approaches to the biblical theology of the New Testament. As such, it is a worthy and timely replacement of D. Guthrie's classical treatment for the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and every student and pastor will benefit immensely from reading it and using it.

Radu Gheorghiuță

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

*The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires.* By Leo G. Perdue. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008, 502 pp., \$38.00

Leo G. Perdue's *The Sword and the Stylus* is meant to serve as an introductory handbook on wisdom literature. By "wisdom literature," Purdue means not only the biblical books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Qohelet, but also includes the deuterocanonical books of the Wisdom of Solomon and Sirach.

Perdue hopes his text will fill what he believes is a gap in the majority of texts on wisdom literature. He believes that most treatments have viewed the wisdom literature idealistically as "disconnected ideas that are seen as eternal thoughts the savants understood to be true" (1). His text regards wisdom literature as a socio-political development of ancient

Near Eastern cultures. Central to his thesis is that wisdom literature served the purpose of propping up and legitimizing the political power of the ancient Near Eastern empires.

Perdue begins his discussion with a lengthy Prolegomenon. In this first chapter he explains his method of approaching wisdom literature and how it differs from the investigation of the same subject by other scholars. He also surveys the wisdom literature of the great Near Eastern empires from the early Egyptian period until the Hellenistic era. Included in this survey is an overview of the various texts, their peculiar terminology and general themes, as well as the function of the scribe in each of the societies.

In chapter two, Perdue discusses the biblical book of Proverbs which he views as a representative of wisdom during the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah, which received its final form during the Second Temple period. Perdue's examination of the various collections which comprise the book has convinced him that Proverbs was internationally influenced. He concludes the chapter with a discussion of the role that the scribes played during Israel's monarchy and the major themes that are found in the book of Proverbs.

The subject of the third chapter is Job which Perdue identifies as a representative of wisdom during the Exile. Following a discussion of the date and literary structure of the book, Perdue discusses parallels between the book of Job and Babylonian wisdom literature. Perdue concludes the chapter with a discussion of the role of the scribe in the Neo-Babylonian Empire and the theme of the book. Perdue believes that Job should be understood "as a response to the devastation caused by a traumatic national experience in the life of the community of Judah," i.e. Judah's fall and the pursuant exile (148). The conclusion which Job draws in the face of this tragedy is that God does not rule the world in righteousness and is generally unconcerned by the plight of humans. According to Perdue, this questioning of God's justice is the only proper recourse in the face of the tragedy of the Exile (149). While I agree that the Jew in exile would have questioned the justice of God, I think Perdue is wrong to date Job to this time period and to conclude that Job presents a picture of God as one who is unconcerned with human misery.

Perdue turns next to the Psalter which he believes developed over a long period of time, and includes numerous hymns that would have been a part of the liturgy at the Temple in Jerusalem. Perdue does not concern himself with the entire Psalter but limits himself to one particular genre of psalms, the wisdom Psalms, which he claims is representative of wisdom literature during the Persian period. The basis of this identification is the focus on the Torah in these psalms, which Perdue believes is the result of the developing importance of the Torah during

the time of Ezra. The prominence of Torah in this period is due to the role of Torah as the basis of Israelite society and piety, and the role of the scribe as its official interpreter.

Chapter five is dedicated to the book of Qohelet. Perdue argues that the central feature of Qohelet is skepticism, which he believes makes this book a representative of Jewish wisdom literature during the early Hellenistic period (which Perdue identifies as the Ptolemaic Empire). He argues that during the Hellenistic period Greek philosophical skepticism along with other Greek philosophies were introduced into Palestine. Qohelet was influenced by this skepticism. The search for meaning and the conclusion that man must seize the day (*carpe diem*) are seen as further indications of Hellenistic influence.

Hellenistic influence upon Jewish wisdom literature extends into the Seleucid Empire with Sirach, which is the subject of chapter six. While Sirach was composed in Hebrew, Perdue demonstrates that it was heavily influenced by the Greek language, literature, and philosophy. Rather than advocating a wholesale adoption of Hellenism or a full scale rejection, Sirach attempts an adaptation of traditional Judaism to Hellenism which results in the importance of the Torah and temple observance in order to participate in the continuing order of the universe.

Perdue also writes about another deuterocanonical book, the Wisdom of Solomon. Perdue believes that the Wisdom of Solomon reflects wisdom among the Diaspora during the Roman era. The purpose of the book is to encourage loyalty to traditional belief in the face of persecution and Greek xenophobia.

In his final three chapters, Perdue discusses the continuation of wisdom. In chapters eight and nine he connects wisdom with the apocalypticism of Daniel and Enoch, and Qumran. In chapter ten Perdue views the Tosefta and Midrashim as rabbinic continuations of wisdom literature.

*The Sword and the Stylus* is a reminder of the importance of the historical, literary, and social setting in the interpretation of biblical literature, including biblical wisdom literature. The Prolegomenon will serve as a valuable resource for those needing a quick overview of the wisdom literature found throughout the ancient Near East. Perdue does spend a disproportionate amount of time discussing Greek wisdom which had the least impact on biblical wisdom. The extensive bibliography and multiple indices (modern authors, scripture references, and nonbiblical ancient literature) are a great help.

However, the late dates which Perdue assigns to most of the wisdom material are questionable. This is particularly the case with his dating of Job to the time of the Exile and his dating of Qohelet to the early Hellenistic period. Of course, accepting earlier dates also challenges the

detailed settings he constructs for these books, as well as his interpretation.

Perdue's central thesis that wisdom served the legitimization of the "institutions of wealth and power, in particular monarchies and temples" of their time is also questionable. Much of the biblical, and even some of the nonbiblical, wisdom literature can be seen as critical of the political structures of their time. This would be true of Perdue's understanding of Job as well as Qohelet and Sirach, but also the Admonitions of Ipuwer, in which Perdue states "the king is also roundly condemned" (22).

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*The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching.* By Rick Blackwood. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 208 pp., \$19.99, hardback.

What began as an observation in Rick Blackwood's personal devotion time became a preaching experiment in his Miami, Florida church, developed into the regular practice for preaching and teaching in his church, became the topic for doctoral research and a resultant dissertation, and finally the subject of his book, *The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching*. The observation involved Jesus' use of multisensory elements when preaching and teaching. Blackwood's observations and research led him to the conclusion that "the more senses we stir in the learner, the higher the levels of learning" (17). His book is based on that premise. Blackwood's goal is to encourage the reader to implement multisensory elements that will help him or her move from being a good communicator to a great one, from being a great communicator to being a phenomenal communicator (13).

Blackwood divides his book into three parts. The first introduces multisensory communication. After telling of how he came to be aware of this communication mode, Blackwood explores the benefits of multisensory communication and the neurological explanations of why this is an effective means of preaching and teaching. Further, he examines objections that some have raised about this methodology and offers responses to those objections. Blackwood closes his first section by explaining how expository sermons can integrate multisensory elements, and how together these can result in increased retention and life change. Concerning expository preaching and multisensory communication, Blackwood says, "Let's connect these two God-given forces so that we can be more effective for the kingdom's sake" (87).

The second part of Blackwood's book offers the method for beginning to implement multisensory communication. He reassures readers that the task is not complicated and advises the pastor and the church to implement changes gradually. Pragmatically, Blackwood offers what is almost a chronological check-off list beginning with the idea and developing it through a worship and sermon series. In doing so, he explains who needs to be involved in the process at every step and stage. Finally, Blackwood explores various multisensory elements and how to incorporate them.

The third part targets pastors, offering them instructions for preparing a multisensory sermon. Blackwood presents examples of multisensory sermons, explains how to plan them according to a text, and lists various elements to incorporate and how to do so. In this last section, Blackwood emphasizes how multisensory preaching achieves what every communicator wishes to accomplish: increasing attention, elevating comprehension, and strengthening the audience members' retention. Using the same pattern, Blackwood offers full text manuscripts of sermons that demonstrate these three benefits.

The book contains an epilogue and two appendices. The epilogue offers a testimony from Blackwood, describing an opportunity he had while sitting in the back of the church to observe the effect a multisensory sermon had on a nonbeliever. The first appendix offers details of Blackwood's doctoral research design and his methodology for statistical data gathering and evaluation. The second describes a sermon series the author used that involved visual art.

*The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching* has many strengths. The first is Blackwood's consistent passion and conviction about the effectiveness of this communication method. His conviction is based on biblical study, personal experience, and empirical research. This triumvirate of support solidifies his passion for multisensory communication.

Second, Blackwood consistently elevates the Word. He emphatically states that the *method* of communication should never eclipse the scriptural message:

I am not saying that visual aids and interaction should dominate the sermon. In fact, let me be clear. Textual accuracy is the most critical portion of biblical teaching. Second to that is the need for verbal clarity. Sound biblical teaching must begin with sound exegesis followed by verbal clarity. Visual aids and interaction with the audience should be viewed as aids to that process. (38-9)

Blackwood clearly explained how he began to hypothesize that multisensory communication increased the listeners' attention, comprehension, and retention levels. The book's third strength is the way Blackwood explains how he went from having a hypothesis to having statistically significant data. Throughout the book, he offers glimpses into how he came to his conclusions without ever allowing his research information to become cumbersome for the reader. Then for those who would want to know more about his data collection and analysis, Blackwood offered an appendix to describe the details.

Finally, for those wanting to incorporate multisensory communication in their teaching and preaching, Blackwood offers step-by-step instructions. Generously, he is willing to share not only important information but also practical advice. He offers: "Please feel free to use any and all sermon materials presented in this book" (90).

Two omissions, though, weakened the book. Although Blackwood offered biblical support for many of his points and offered responses to possible objections, he failed to address those who might object using Romans 10:17: "... faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (NKJV). Those offering a narrow interpretation to that verse might object to multisensory preaching and teaching. I wish Blackwood would have offered a response to those who might raise such an objection. Second, I thought Blackwood failed to explain how to implement multisensory preaching and teaching in a small church. He explains the many teams and staff members who need to be involved in the process and even diagrams it (122). However, he offers no scaled-down parallel advice for pastors who serve smaller churches.

*The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching* comes in a long line of books on preaching. The classic work by John A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (originally published in 1870), set the standard for generations of preachers. Edwin C. Dargan's work, *A History of Preaching* (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1906), offers a look at homiletic style and trends from A.D. 70 to 1900. Blackwood's work, though, is different in that it does not explain how to preach or prepare sermons nor does it offer an overview of sermonic methods. Instead Blackwood uniquely offers a handbook for implementing a single communication style, a style derived from his personal observations and empirical research.

Several books have come out recently that highlight preaching. Examples include: *Communicating for a Change: Seven Keys to Irresistible Communication* by Andy Stanley (Multnomah: 2006); *The Preacher as Storyteller: The Power of Narrative in the Pulpit* by Austin B. Tucker (B&H; 2008); *Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons that Connect with our Culture* by Zack Eswine

(Baker: 2008); *Preaching on your Feet: Connecting God and the Audience in the Preachable Moment* by Fred R. Lybrand (Nashville, B&H: 2008). Blackwood's *The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching* highlights a different facet than any of these others. The overarching message from this many books, though, is that preaching is still vitally important in today's churches and for today's culture. Methods vary; the unchanging message, however, still has the power to change lives. And Blackwood's multisensory method can help take this Sunday's sermon from good to phenomenal.

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Lifeway, Nashville, TN

## Book Review Index

Blackwood, Rick. *The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching*. (G. B. Howell, Jr.)

Elliger, Karl and Willhelm Rudolph (eds.). *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. (Stephen J. Andrews)

Ferguson, Sinclair, Anthony N.S. Lane, and Bruce A. Ware, David F. Wright (ed.). *Baptism: Three Views*. (Rustin Umstatt)

Gordon, T. David. *Why Johnny Can't Preach*. (Stephen S. Rives)

McIntosh, Gary L. *Taking Your Church to the Next Level: What Got You Here Won't Get You There*. (Rodney A. Harrison)

Perdue, Leo G. *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires*. (Kevin D. Williford)

Schreiner, Thomas R. *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ*. (Radu Gheorghită)

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