

Haggadic Concord and Halakhic Conflict in the First Christian Generation

Jeffrey Peterson
Austin Graduate School of Theology
Austin, Texas

Modern students of Christian origins have frequently understood Christianity as theologically pluriform virtually from its beginnings. The most influential such account was the contribution of F. C. Baur, who understood the history of early Christianity in terms of conflict between Petrine and Pauline theological tendencies. In recent years, the work of a different Bauer has yielded an even more bountiful harvest; Walter Bauer maintained that the variety of Christianity that emerged as orthodox at Nicaea had no monopoly in the second and third centuries, and indeed that varieties of Christianity later deemed heretical preceded eventual “orthodoxy” in a number of locales, notably Edessa and Alexandria.¹ A number of recent interpreters have followed Helmut Koester and James M. Robinson in applying Bauer’s interpretive template to the first Christian century and positing irreducible theological diversity as marking Christianity from its very beginnings.² I wish to focus our attention on the question how well the work of Koester and Robinson and their followers find support in the evidence.

Indeed, I propose that the sources document a significant degree of concord as to the central messianic narrative promulgated and celebrated in Christian communities of the first generation (ca. AD 30 to 70), and that the conflicts attested in this period arose

¹ Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 1971.

² In addition to James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), see for example John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), Burton L Mack, *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy* (New York: Continuum, 2001), and Ron Cameron and Merrill P Miller, eds., *Redescribing Christian Origins* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

over the practices appropriate to a communal life configured in harmony with this narrative. To designate these two distinct but related aspects of early Christian existence, I have appropriated (no doubt idiosyncratically) the rabbinic terms *haggadah* and *halakah*. The thesis of the paper is thus that as far as our sources attest, first-generation Christian communities were broadly united by a messianic *haggadah* concerning Jesus of Nazareth and that their conflicts concerned the conduct, the *halakah*, appropriate to this sectarian understanding of Jewish history and God's eschatological purpose. Concretely, I propose that a narrative construing the crucifixion and resurrection (or exaltation) of Jesus the Messiah as God's decisive saving act was the common property of all the Christian groups and authorities attested earlier than ca. AD 90, and that alternative foci for religious association in the name of Jesus are attested only in the second Christian generation, and indeed toward its end, with the developments first attested in the Johannine letters, and perhaps in the Gospel.

The thesis incorporates four presuppositions which I will not argue for extensively but which it may be helpful to state at the outset. First, in the present state of our knowledge, the best scheme in which to treat the history of early Christianity is generational, plotting the developments we can reconstruct within generations of approximately forty years; the historian's first responsibility is thus to characterize each generation based on the sources that can be securely dated thereto.³ Among other things, this approach can accommodate the uncertainty that attends the date of some of the

³ I employed such a generational approach in my initial examination of the question treated more extensively here, which focused on the undisputed Pauline letters ("The Extent of Christian Theological Diversity: Pauline Evidence," *ResQ* 47 [2005]: 1–12). I am pleased to see that L. Michael White independently adopted a generational scheme in his useful survey *From Jesus to Christianity* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004). I differ with White in a number of details (e.g., I would think it mistaken to treat the Gospels of Peter, John, and Thomas as contemporary witnesses; so White, *From Jesus to Christianity*, 297–318), but on the general value of treating early Christian history in terms of generations I have only praise.

evidence; while it is not always possible to place a text even within a specific decade, most of our texts can safely be assigned to a generation, or sometimes to the transition between two generations.

Second, Christianity originated as a messianic sect within the Judaism of the Second Temple, and the essential comparative material for its earliest history is found in the evidence for Second Temple parties and sects, especially that of the group self-described as the “Unity” (היחוד) whose eschatological convictions and communal life are documented in the *Community Rule* and the other sectarian Dead Sea Scrolls. These two Jewish sectarian movements shared an imminent expectation of divine deliverance, an eschatological hermeneutic by which they found this deliverance prefigured in the Scriptures, and a sense of election which entailed the exclusion of other Jews from their fellowship (and, absent repentance on the part of the majority, from eschatological salvation); one decisive difference was the Christian openness to (and, indeed, recruitment of) non-Jews, based on a very different understanding of the eschatological imperatives derived from Scripture.

Third, the common sentiment that Judaism is a religion of orthopraxy and not orthodoxy does not take adequate account of the milieu of sectarian Judaism in the late Second Temple period.⁴ Along with other evidence, the Scrolls most dramatically attest that a distinctive narrative of divine actions (or *haggadah*, in the sense in which the term is used here) could hold a central place in the life of a sectarian Jewish community. By a happy coincidence, the term *haggadah* is best known to us from the rabbinic Passover Haggadah (the narrative there fulfilling the command of Exod 13:8, “And you shall tell”

⁴ E. P. Sanders is especially informative about this milieu (*Judaism: Practice and Belief 63 BCE–66 CE* [London/Philadelphia: SCM, Trinity, 1992], 13–43).

(פֶּסַח) your son, ‘[The Passover festival] is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.’” The coincidence is happy inasmuch as early Christian sources employed the setting and imagery of Passover to convey the significance of Jesus’ death in early Christian texts, including the Pauline letters (1 Cor 5:7), the Synoptics (Mark 14:1–26 et pars.), the Fourth Gospel (John 1:29, 36; 13:1; 18:28; 19:36), and the Revelation to John (5:6–12).

Fourth, some scholars have recently questioned the propriety of referring to “Christianity” in the first century and before the definitive parting of the ways from Judaism. While there is certainly a danger of anachronism, of supposing a religious self-consciousness or a degree of institutional development that came only later, it would also be a mistake to underestimate the earliest Christians’ sense of their membership in a new community. The expression οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ is already attested in Paul (1 Cor 15:23; Gal 5:24), where it is functionally equivalent to the later attested Χριστιανός (itself a first-generation expression, if the report of Acts 11:26 and 26:28 is accurate, though Χριστιανισμός is first attested ca. AD 110, i.e., at the transition from the second Christian generation to the third).⁵ Just as it would be a mistake to underestimate the degree to which the sectaries described in the *Community Rule* constituted a group distinct from the majority of Second Temple Jews, so it would also for those Jews who declared their allegiance to Jesus as Messiah; and non-Jews who became associated with the movement would certainly feel that they had entered a community distinct from both their inherited or previously chosen cultic associations and from the Jewish community gathered in synagogue, which evidently proved inhospitable to followers of Jesus who

⁵ Ignatius, *Phil.* 6, on which see Steve Mason, “Jews, Judeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 (2007): esp. 470.

were at all vocal (cf. 1 Thess 2:14; 2 Cor 11:24). If we recognize that the religion that came to be known as Christianity originated as a messianic sect of Second Temple Judaism, we may legitimately use the term Christianity to refer to “the messianic Jewish sect that became the imperial religion in the course of its first three and a half centuries, at any stage of its development from the one into the other.” That’s how I use the term and its cognates here.

The thesis I’m proposing is of course too broad in scope for a convincing argument on its behalf to be presented in brief compass; a proper case for it would constitute a history of early Christian theology (*haggadah*) and practice (*halakhah*). What the present occasion does permit, is a survey and discussion of some of the evidence most relevant to the case. I wish to begin the survey by noting the list of sources supplying “evidence for the continuation of a theology of followers of Jesus that had no relationship to the kerygma of the cross and resurrection” offered by Helmut Koester: in the fullest such list of evidence known to me, Koester cites “the Synoptic Sayings Source [Q,] . . . [t]he opponents of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1–4, the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Dialogue of the Savior*, and the opponents of the Gospel of John in the Johannine community.”⁶ Koester’s aim in compiling the list is limited to showing that a construction of Jesus’ significance apart from death and resurrection was “not an isolated phenomenon” in early Christianity, not specifically in its first generation; the Johannine opponents and the *Dialogue of the Savior* are hardly first-generation witnesses. Koester places the greatest

⁶ Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (Philadelphia: Trinity; London: SCM, 1990), 165. Elsewhere Koester mentions also *Didache* 9–10 as evidence of a community in which “not Jesus’ death and resurrection but Jesus’ words were the saving message” (“The Synoptic Sayings Gospel Q in the Early Communities of Jesus’ Followers,” in *Early Christian Voices: Essays in Honor of François Bovon* [ed. David H. Warren, Ann Graham Brock, and David W. Pao; Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2003], 57), but this is at best an idiosyncratic interpretation of the text of the *Didache*.

weight on Q (placing its composition “within the first three decades after the death of Jesus”); but as we will see, it is in fact only the opponents of Paul who can without question be placed in the first generation, and there is no firm basis in the evidence to attribute to them a theology that differs from Paul on Jesus’ death and resurrection as foundational symbols.

The Undisputed Paulines

Our most secure anchor in the first Christian generation, and therefore the starting point for any critical study of earliest Christian history, is supplied by the undisputed Pauline letters. Careful attention to these letters allows the critical historian to draw conclusions not only about Paul but also about his predecessors and contemporaries, indeed about the whole of the early Christian movement as Paul had experienced it virtually from its beginnings through the 50s and into the early 60s.⁷ I have elsewhere treated the evidence that Paul supplies for a widespread *haggadah* of the death and resurrection Jesus the Messiah and will mention in summary only three points from that analysis.⁸ First, Paul asserts that the gospel of Messiah’s death and resurrection was common to all those recognized as apostles of the risen Christ (1 Cor 15:11) and to Judean Christians generally (Gal 1:23), and his report of controversy with Peter and other Jewish Christians in Antioch presupposes the saving significance of Jesus’ death as common to all the parties in the dispute (Gal 2:14–21). Second, the rhetorical situations of 1 Corinthians and Galatians supply reason to conclude that Paul did not fabricate the concord he reports;

⁷ Dennis E. Smith recognizes the importance of the Pauline data, though in his desire to overturn the narrative of Acts he surely vies for the record in uses of the subjunctive mood in an essay interpreting ancient sources (“What Do We Really Know About the Jerusalem Church? Christian Origins in Jerusalem according to Acts and Paul,” in Ron Cameron and Merrill P. Miller, eds., *Redescribing Christian Origins* [Atlanta, Ga: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004], 237–52).

⁸ For elaboration, see “The Extent of Christian Theological Diversity: Pauline Evidence,” *ResQ* 47 (2005): 1–12.

that the Judean pillars did in fact agree with Paul on the centrality of the messianic *haggadah* is confirmed especially by his plan to put Corinthians in contact with followers of Jesus in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:3–4), which was a recipe for exposing any invention or exaggeration. Third, Paul’s letter to the Romans attests his agreement with the Roman church, not founded by Paul, on Jesus’ death and resurrection as fundamental, as emerges with particular clarity in his treatment of the baptismal rite (Rom 6:3–4).

The most extensively documented conflict of the first Christian generation concerned the conditions for gentile admission to the messianic community; our primary evidence is Paul’s participant account in Galatians chap. 2, supplemented by Acts chaps. 10–11 and 15.⁹ As reported in the sources, the issue was clearly a matter of the communal practice appropriate to membership in the crucified and resurrected Messiah’s eschatological community, rather than involving controversy regarding his identity or career. In Paul’s account, the arrival of emissaries from James in Jerusalem in Antioch, led Peter to reverse his former practice and separates himself from table fellowship with Gentile believers. One can certainly imagine fundamental theological disagreements that might underlie such an action, but Paul’s response to Peter, which extends at least through the first person plurals of v. 17 and then via connecting particles through v. 19, instead underscores the community of convictions between Paul and Peter, citing them as a basis for the critique of Peter’s conduct offered in v. 14; the differences between Paul

⁹ The best entry to the mountain of discussion generated by this text is provided by Richard Bauckham, “James, Peter, and the Gentiles,” in *Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tensions in Early Christianity* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans; Boston: Brill, 2005), 91–142, and Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2003), 49–83, 145–73.

and the Jews at Antioch concerned the behavioral implications of the messianic *haggadah*, not its constitutive elements.¹⁰

Paul's opponents, however, have often been found to be advocating a divergent theology or Christology through the magic of mirror reading. Of greatest importance to our inquiry, as noted above, are those whom Paul opposes in 1 Corinthians; Koester and others take Paul's multiple references to wisdom in 1 Cor 1:17–2:13 and 3:19 (and especially the antithetical formulations in 2:1–5) as evidence that one or more of the factions Paul identifies in 1:12 subscribed to a theology that understood Jesus in terms of wisdom theology rather than death and resurrection. Paul, however, has no difficulty expressing the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection in terms of wisdom (1:24, 30). Further, the most carefully argued and plausible explanation of faction in Corinth sees division as having emerged over the concrete question of to whom to direct a letter requesting authoritative guidance, and therefore which authorities were to be accorded respect in Corinthian house churches; this requires no imputation of a divergent theology or Christology to any Corinthian faction, which accords with the fact that Paul does not clearly mount a theological critique of those he confronts in chaps. 1–4.¹¹

¹⁰ I have elsewhere suggested that Exod 12:43–49 may have informed the conduct of the Jewish Christians who separated from non-Jewish Christians at Antioch; if the communal meals observed by the Messianists in Antioch had paschal associations (as examination of 1 Cor 5:7; 11:23–25 may indicate), “those from James” perhaps counseled separate but equal messianic banquets to allow for literal compliance with the command of YHWH that only the circumcised of the land participate in the Passover (see “Christ Our Pasch,” in *Renewing the Tradition: Studies in Honor of James W. Thompson* [ed. Mark W. Hamilton, Thomas H. Olbricht, and Jeffrey Peterson; Princeton Theological Monograph Series 65; Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2006], 133–144). For evidence that Antioch was treated as lying within the Land (and therefore subject to this command), see Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law*, 61–70.

¹¹ See the somewhat neglected essay by Nils A. Dahl, “Paul and the Church at Corinth,” in *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 40–62, esp. 44–52; the details of this case are only infrequently engaged.

Similarly, the absence of explicit theological critique from 2 Corinthians 10–13 suggests that Paul’s reference to one proclaiming “another Jesus,” offering the Corinthians “a different gospel,” and facilitating their reception of “another spirit” (2 Cor 11:4) is better taken as hyperbolic critique of the “false apostles,” their defects of conduct (as Paul sees them) supplying grounds for Paul’s criticism of their apostolate and message.¹² Careful attention to the texts supports the conclusion of Jerry Sumney’s methodologically painstaking study of the positions ascribes to opponents throughout the Pauline corpus: Sumney finds “no major Christological issues being debated with opponents,” and the reason he straightforwardly suggests for this lacuna is that “Paul and his opponents agreed about them.”¹³ That is, the issues between Paul and his opponents were issues of *halakah* rather than *haggadah*, concerning the obligations incumbent on members of the new community formed through the proclamation of Jesus’ messianic death and resurrection.

Ironically, while Paul does not address teachers who denied the crucifixion and resurrection or questioned the significance of those events in 1 Corinthians 1–4, his response there to Corinthians quarreling over authorities anticipates the path by which varieties of Christianity that de-emphasized or abandoned messianic death and resurrection as central symbols emerged beginning in the second Christian generation. In Paul’s missionary experience, the story of Jesus the crucified savior king was by and

¹² See Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: Translated with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (AB 32A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984), 500–2; David E Garland, *2 Corinthians*, New American Commentary 29 (Nashville, Tenn: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 463–66.

¹³ Sumney, ‘*Servants of Satan*,’ 313. In Sumney’s account, the issues on which Paul encountered opposition concerned rather “the extent to which the eschatological age has broken into the world and what that means for Christian existence in the present,” “how to use the Hebrew Bible and what requirements from it are incumbent on Christians, both Jews and Gentiles,” “the significance of Jewish descent for establishing oneself in an authoritative position,” “how the power of God is revealed in apostles/ministers,” and finally, “who agrees with Paul” about those matters under dispute (Sumney, ‘*Servants of Satan*,’ 314).

large “an obstacle to Jews and folly to Gentiles” (1 Cor 1:23). As Christian communities grew throughout the first decades, it would be surprising if such ambivalence about this central symbolic complex was completely abandoned by all converts to the new movement.¹⁴ As we extend our survey beyond unambiguously first-generation evidence, we can trace the effect of such reticence on the formulation of early Christian theology.

(Pseudo-?)Paul to the Ephesians

Sometime between AD 60 and 100, a Christian writer included the following statement in a letter that came to be associated with the most significant Christian community in Asia Minor, Ephesus: “There is one body and one spirit, just as you also were called in the one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Eph 4:5). The position of μία πίστις, sandwiched in between the convert’s initial confession of εἷς κύριος (cf. 1 Cor 8:6; Rom 10:8–9) and the initiatory rite of ἐν βάπτισμα suggests that the allusion is to the initial profession of faith(fulness) common (hence μία) to converts in the Pauline tradition, uttered in response to hearing the story of Christ “preached” (i.e., told); this profession took the form of an acclamation of “Jesus as Lord” (Rom 10:9–10) and accompanied the baptism of converts (1 Cor 6:11), representing the convert’s assent to convictions and behavioral implications rehearsed in Pauline preaching (summarized as “Jesus Christ is Lord” in 2 Cor 4:5). While the use of πίστις for the *fides quae creditur*, as well as concern for the content of this body of doctrine, is often regarded as a post-Pauline development, it is found in an undisputed

¹⁴ For the rate of growth of Christian communities into the fourth century, see Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

letter in Gal 1:23, in which Paul not incidentally asserts that he and Judean churches share the same faith.

Ephesians rehearses the content of this faith in several passages, beginning with the introductory blessing (Eph 1:3–14) and extending throughout the first section of the letter (1:18–2:22; 3:5–6, 8–13). The rehearsal is cosmic in its scope, spanning all of space and time (1:3–4, 9–10), but its pivot is Christ’s death (“blood,” 1:7; “cross,” 2:16) and resurrection (1:20–22; 2:4–6). The narrative of Jesus’ humiliation and exaltation supplies the framework in which the recipients are to understand their own history as a passage from death (2:1–3) to life via participation in Christ’s resurrection (2:4–10), death signifying their sinful former conduct (2:1), life signifying a course of life (*halakhah*) characterized by good works (2:10). The second section of the letter (chaps. 4–6) bases a series of behavioral appeals on this pattern, characterizing the vices it calls on the readers to shun as conduct inconsistent with the way they “learned Christ” (ὁμεῖς δὲ οὐχ οὕτως ἐμάθετε τὸν Χριστόν, 4:20) and “heard and were also taught in (or by) him” (ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἐδιδάχθητε, 4:21). Frequent allusions to the crucified and exalted Lord punctuate the exhortation and ground the halakhic imperatives in the prior hagaddic rehearsal (4:1, 17, 32; 5:2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 14, 17, 19–20, 21, 22–24, 25–32; 6:1, 4, 5–8, 9, 10).

The author expresses concern about the rootedness of his audience in the faith he rehearses (3:16–19), about their attainment of “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (μέχρι καταντήσωμεν οἱ πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ, 4:13), about the degree of maturity they possess (4:13–14) and their ability to resist being displaced “by every wind of

doctrine” (ἵνα μηκέτι ὦμεν νήπιοι, κλυδωνιζόμενοι καὶ περιφερόμενοι παντὶ ἀνέμῳ τῆς διδασκαλίας, 4:14). Unlike conduct, he mentions no specific doctrine to be shunned, however, and it is unclear whether the potential threat is envisioned within the community or as coming from outside; the remedy to the danger the author sees is a secure attachment to the body of Christ (4:15–16), which will distinguish the recipients’ conduct from that of “the Gentiles” (4:17; cf. 2:12, 19–22) whose futile ways of life they once shared (4:22). This suggests that the letter’s principal concerns are ethical rather than doctrinal, halakhic and not haggadic. The rehearsal of the common faith (μία πίστις) undergirds the appeal for distinctive conduct, and the letter betrays no concern about dangers posed by alternative constructions of Christ or God’s redemptive work accomplished through him.

Ephesians thus asserts a unity of conviction with which its recipients are assumed to be familiar and develops this assertion by rehearsing the narrative (*haggadah*) of the crucified and exalted Messiah which has been formative of its converts’ experience. This argument is addressed to a general audience; the phrase ἐν Ἐφέσῳ is of course absent from the earliest MSS at 1:1, and the document is best understood as a circular letter in its origins.¹⁵ For the letter’s appeal to carry any conviction, regardless of its date and authorship, the recipients must recognize the narrative centering on Jesus’ death and

¹⁵ This does not incidentally rule out Pauline authorship; among Paul’s undisputed letters we find one addressed “to the churches of Galatia” (ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας, Gal 1:2) and another “to the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints who are in all Achaia” (τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῇ οὔσῃ ἐν Κορίνθῳ σὺν τοῖς ἁγίοις πᾶσιν τοῖς οὔσιν ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Ἀχαΐᾳ, 2 Cor 1:1). It is not then inconceivable that Paul could have composed a circular letter intended for a still wider audience amid circumstances that left the possibility of his return uncertain and supplied an incentive to compose a literary testament for the benefit of his churches in the Eastern Mediterranean. On this understanding, Ephesians would have been composed to serve the testamentary function that has often been ascribed to Romans (see, e.g., Krister Stendahl, *Final Account: Paul's Letter to the Romans* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995]), though that letter clearly also serves to prepare for Paul’s prospective mission in the West (see esp. Rom 15:23–32).

resurrection as corresponding to the Christian teaching they have previously received, and for the appeal to “one faith” to strike with any force, this death/resurrection narrative must be the sole construal of Christ known to them, or at least the dominant one. The later we date Ephesians, the later we push the evidence for this rhetorical situation.

The Johannine Letters and the Emergence of Docetism

It is instructive to compare the hortatory strategy of Ephesians with the one we find in a text commonly dated in the middle of the second Christian generation (ca. AD 90 to 100), the homily known as 1 John. This author is likewise concerned to encourage loving conduct among his audience, but he must also contend explicitly with an alternative construction of the narrative of Christ than that to which he adheres. He opposes those who “deny that Jesus is the Christ” (2:22), as well as “spirits” (i.e., prophets speaking by inspiration, 4:1) who “do not confess Jesus,” (4:3), i.e., who do not “confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh” (4:2). The appearance of such teachers is apocalyptic in its significance, a sign that the last hour has come (2:18), fulfilling the recipients’ prior expectation that “Antichrist is coming” (2:18; 4:3; cf. 2 Thess 2:5 for an eschatological narrative of one opposing Christ as traditional). The teachers are presented as having separated themselves from the Christian communities addressed in the homily (2:19). As an antidote to the teaching of the schismatics, the homilist appeals to his audience to “abide” (μένειν) in the tradition of teaching they have “heard from the beginning” (ὁ ἠκούσατε ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς, 2:24), and to “let it abide” (μενέτω, 2:24) in them; the anointing mentioned in this context evidently refers to an aspect of their Christian initiation (cf. 2 Cor 1:21) and so is functionally equivalent to the appeal to baptismal initiation in Ephesians (Eph 4:22–24; cf. Gal 3:27; Col 3:10). The dissociation of Christ from the

flesh is presented as a departure from the teaching that was formative of the recipients' Christian identity, and for the homily's exhortation to have a possibility of success, the recipients must be able to recognize this as an account of their own experience.

The two lesser Johannine epistles add little to our understanding of the theological issues being debated in the mid-second generation, but they cast significant light on the way in which theological disputes were prosecuted in geographically far-flung communities, as well as supplying incidental evidence that fundamental disagreement of this sort was a recent phenomenon in the areas concerned. The social mechanism by which the Elder seeks to limit the spread of objectionable teaching is the householder's authority over access to the household (μη λαμβάνετε αὐτὸν εἰς οἰκίαν, 2 John 10), the institution in which the infant church subsisted.¹⁶ Before 2 John was written, traveling missionaries might presumably have expected to gain admission to a household *ekklesia* via a simple confession such as Κύριος Ἰησοῦς, which was evidently standard in the Pauline churches (1 Cor 12:3; 2 Cor 4:5; Phil 2:11) and which Paul also assumes as familiar to Roman Christians (Rom 10:9), or perhaps even by the mere declaration that one came “in the name of Jesus” (cf. ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἐξῆλθον, 3 John 10); prospects for admission were doubtless enhanced by ability to appeal to a known authority, as in the case of the Elder's emissaries presenting themselves to Gaius when they received no welcome from Diotrephes (3 John 5–6, 9), but it seems unlikely in view of the importance attaching to hospitality in early Christian circles that inability to cite a

¹⁶ Diotrephes uses the same means to exclude the Elder's own associates from his house church (Ἐγραψά τι τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ· ἀλλ' ὁ φιλοπρωτεύων αὐτῶν Διοτρέφης οὐκ ἐπιδέχεται ἡμᾶς, 3 John 9), and the Elder commends Gaius for extending to his associates the welcome as guest-friends (ξένοι, 3 John 5) that they had been refused by Diotrephes. For the full range of evidence for the importance of the ancient household to the establishment and growth of early Christianity, see L. Michael White, *Building God's House in the Roman World: Architectural Adaptation Among Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990) and *The Social Origins of Christian Architecture* (Valley Forge, Pa: Trinity Press, 1996).

mutual acquaintance would have denied one admission to most Christian households.¹⁷ If the Elder's specification of a doctrinal test for admission to the assembly is a novelty, as seems the most likely reading of 2 John 10, this mitigates against existence, prior to the controversy documented in this letter, of unrelated communities gathered in the name of Jesus in this region.

The dissociation of Jesus from "the flesh" of bodily existence is countered in 1 John 5:6 with the insistence that Jesus Christ came "not by the water only but by the water and by the blood." This passage evidently alludes to John 19:34–37 (or to a tradition with the same elements in circulation before the composition of the Gospel). The tradition preserved in the Gospel serves to ground the observance of the sacraments of baptism and eucharist in the physical reality of Jesus' death rather than to oppose a non-physical interpretation of Jesus' existence.¹⁸ In 1 John 5:6, this tradition, presumably impressed on the consciousness of the audience through repeated participation in baptismal and eucharistic rites, is turned back on those schismatics who deny the reality of the flesh of Christ. This second-generation strategy for opposing a docetist interpretation of the narrative of Jesus, and so dissociating Jesus from the reality of physical death, is adopted by Ignatius early in the third generation (*Smyrn.* 6.2; cf. *Trall.* 6.2; 10; *Smyrn.* 2; 4.2; 5.2; *Eph.* 6.2). Basilides countered this argument from the sacraments with an exegetical argument, exploiting the ambiguity of the pronominal referents in Matt 27:31–37//Mark 15:20–26 to construct a narrative in which Simon the

¹⁷ For a general treatment, see John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission* (Overtures to Biblical Theology 17; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

¹⁸ See Udo Schnelle, *Antidocetic Christology in the Gospel of John: An Investigation of the Place of the Fourth Gospel in the Johannine School* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 209; Raymond E. Brown, S.S., *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2.1178–82; Craig R Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (2d ed.; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 200–204.

Cyrenian suffers the death of crucifixion rather than the Son of God (*apud Irenaeus Adv. Haer.* 1.24.4). Clearly, then, the sources for the second and third Christian generations attest alternatives to the *haggadah* of Jesus death and resurrection as a basis for association in the name of Jesus. Can such be found earlier, in the first Christian generation?

The Sayings Gospel Q

The Sayings Gospel Q has supplied a number of recent scholars with such a precedent and so merits extended investigation. In treating Q as a source for early Christian history, I find myself in the awkward position of not believing that the document existed as an adherent to the Farrer hypothesis of “Marcan Priority without Q,” or more fully, “Marcan Priority Plus Luke’s Use of Matthew as well as Mark.”¹⁹ If we follow Austin Farrer and others in dispensing with Q, then this hypothetical document evaporates, and so does the principal evidence claimed for a first-generation Christian community not oriented on the messianic *haggadah* of death and resurrection.

I do not propose to let myself off so easily; though an early adopter of Marcan Priority without Q (as I like to think), I recognize that “this knowledge is not present in all.” If we then grant the majority its rights and admit Q to the database of earliest Christian sources, my thesis is not imperiled, for close analysis of the Q material shows

¹⁹ In addition to Austin Farrer, this Synoptic hypothesis is maintained by Michael Goulder, John Drury, E. P. Sanders, and most recently Mark Goodacre, who has pruned both Farrer and Goulder of the implausible and dispensable growths which luxuriate in their Synoptic criticism (*The Case Against Q: Studies in Marcan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* [Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity, 2002]). The earliest scholar I know of to advocate Marcan Priority without Q was the unsung Oxonian Edwin Lummis, whose book *How Luke Was Written* was praised for its care by B. H. Streeter in a review when it appeared in 1915. Streeter neglected to cite Lummis’s book in *The Four Gospels* in 1924, although he there repeated the two objections that his review had directed against Lummis’s conclusions; Farrer evidently formulated his version of the theory in argument with Streeter’s two objections in *The Four Gospels*; see further my essay, “Order in the Double Tradition and the Existence of Q,” in Mark S. Goodacre and Nicholas Perrin, *Questioning Q: A Multidimensional Critique* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2005), 28–42.

that it contains a construction of the death and post-mortem activity of Jesus in which it vests considerable significance. But (I hasten to add, in view of my confessed Q skepticism) I do not ask that this claim be accepted on my authority; no believer can rest secure in an agnostic's assurances as to the content of the faith. But in his magisterial study *Excavating Q*, John Kloppenborg reaches the following conclusions on this question: "it seems clear not only that Q is well aware of the death of Jesus but that it has also invoked a framework by which to understand its significance. The Deuteronomistic understanding of the prophets is common in Q and thus it seems plausible that Q understands Jesus' death as an instance of the typical—perhaps climactic—prophetic death. Jesus' death is also seen within the context of a collective interpretation of the 'wisdom tale.' Persecution, rejection, suffering and death are the fate of *all* God's envoys and the righteous. Jesus' fate is an instance of this fate."²⁰

Kloppenborg's assessment is based principally on Q 6:22–23, and he is especially concerned to avoid the suggestion that Q exhibits "a salvific interpretation of Jesus' death" (evidently meaning expiatory, as "salvific" is glossed as "vicarious") as in Paul and Mark.²¹ But he also refers to Q 14:27 in this connection, and here, we may note both that Jesus' death has paradigmatic significance, serving as a model for the disciple, and that the image of taking up one's cross evokes the instrument of Jesus' death (cf. John 21:18–19); the significance of this point of contact between Q and the "passion kerygma" attested in Paul and Mark should not be underestimated. The use of the cross as a model for believers is not alien to the "salvific construal" of Jesus' death, appearing in both Paul (cf. Rom 6:3–11; Phil 2:5–13) and Mark (8:34–37); in this respect, Kloppenborg may be

²⁰ John S. Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 373.

²¹ Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 374; cf. 370–71,

suspected of exaggerating the difference between Q's exemplary cross-taking and "the passion kerygma's salvific construal of Jesus' death."²²

As to the resurrection of the martyred Messiah, Kloppenborg begins by endorsing Marinus de Jonge's judgment that "[t]hose who handed down the Q material believed in a God who had vindicated Jesus, . . . and they believed that he would come again to share with them the full bliss of the kingdom of God."²³ He then cites the specific proposal of Dieter Zeller that Q 13:35b (οὐ μὴ ἴδητέ με ἕως [ἤξει ὅτε] εἶπητε . . .) alludes to 2 Kgs 2:12 LXX (καὶ οὐκ εἶδεν αὐτὸν ἔτι), thereby casting Jesus in the role of Elijah as a figure assumed bodily to heaven and expected to return to fulfill an eschatological role, a status also accorded to Enoch, Baruch, and Ezra in Second Temple Jewish literature.²⁴

One may question whether the allusion Zeller detects is sufficiently forceful and specific as to reliably invoke Elijah and the tradition of bodily assumed figures as an explanatory model; in Tob 12:21, the angel Raphael's return to heaven is similarly described (οὐκέτι ἠδύνωντο ἰδεῖν αὐτόν), showing that the language was not restricted to cases of bodily assumption but could be used in reference to any relocation from the earthly sphere to the heavenly which removed the subject from terrestrial sight. Even if the allusion is to 2 Kgs 2:12 in particular, one may question whether the aspect of the Elijah narrative (as understood in Second Temple readings of this text) that Q seizes on is the bodily assumption of the living prophet rather than simply the interval experienced between his past and future actions, during which Elijah is unseen by earth

²² Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 374; on the theological lacuna at the root of this common exegetical judgment, see Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief; a Discussion of Essentials* (New York: Morehouse-Barlow, 1965), 111–14.

²³ Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 375.

²⁴ Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 377. This interpretation of Q 13:34–35 is given exhaustive consideration by Daniel A Smith, *The Post-mortem Vindication of Jesus in the Sayings Gospel Q* (Library of New Testament Studies 338; London: T & T Clark, 2006).

dwellers. Mark 14:62 (et pars.) uses the mirror image of this language (“You will [eventually] see the Son of Man”) to describe the future advent of the resurrected Christ, and John has no difficulty using parallel language of Christ as his passion impends (“A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me,” John 16:16). In any case the allusion to bodily assumption in Q 14:35 (if any) was not so unmistakable that Matthew and Luke saw any difficulty in applying the passage to the crucified, resurrected, and returning Christ of their narrative, or any need to modify the language. In the Jewish texts Zeller adduces, what establishes a figure as bodily assumed into heaven is a narrative or prediction of the assumption (Elijah, 2 Kgs 2:11; Enoch, Gen 5:24; Baruch, 2 Bar 76:2; Ezra, 4 Ezra 14:9, 50), but this is lacking for Jesus in Q. Further, Zeller’s exegesis neglects the reference in Q 14:27 to the cross, which implies an awareness of Jesus’ death by Roman execution. This in turn precludes live bodily assumption as the mode of divine vindication granted to Jesus; if the Jesus who leads his disciples down the path to crucifixion (Q 14:27) is to return in glory as Son of Man (Q 12:40; 17:24, 26, 30), he must first be raised from the dead.

The acclamation in Q 13:35b is not incidental or offhand but brings to its climax a theme sounded by John the Baptist in the presumed opening of Q. In Q 3:16, John announces “the coming one” (ὁ ἐρχόμενος), a figure surpassing John in both power (ἰσχυρότερός μου ἐστίν) and honor (οὐδὲ οὐκ εἰμὶ ἰκανὸς τ[α] ὑποδήματ[α] [βαστα]σαι),²⁵ who will bathe those who have received John’s water bath (Q 3:7), and

²⁵ James M. Robinson, Paul Hoffmann, and John S Kloppenborg, *The Critical Edition of Q: Synopsis Including the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, Mark and Thomas with English, German, and French Translations of Q and Thomas* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000, 14 (I have simplified the sigla). The IQP reads ὁ ἐρχόμενος in the unformatted text of the pericope, though the critical apparatus appears to set on equal footing the options that Q employed “Luke’s construction with ὁ ἰσχυρότερός as the subject and ἔρχεται as the verb or Matthew’s with ὁ . . . ἐρχόμενος as the

perhaps all Israel, in the holy spirit and in fire (αὐτὸς ὑμᾶς βαπτίσει ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ πυρί). In Q 7:19, John sends disciples to ask Jesus if he is the coming one (ὁ ἐρχόμενος) or if another is awaited. Jesus' reply evokes Isaianic images of eschatological blessing (Isa 61:1; 42:7, 18, 26:19; 35:5–6; 29:18–19 LXX), implicitly answering John's question in the affirmative, and pronounces a blessing on those who do not stumble in response to Jesus (μακάριός ἐστιν ὃς ἐὰν μὴ σκανδαλισθῆ ἐν ἐμοί, Q 7:23); the function of this declaration in Q might be compared to Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi in the Marcan tradition (Mark 8:27–33 et pars.). The conclusion of the lament over Jerusalem resumes the theme of the “coming one” and brings it to fruition, evoking the language of Ps 118:26 (117:26 LXX) and looking forward to the advent of ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου. This extends the expectation from the time of the sayings and events reported in Q and makes it a future also anticipated by the audience of Q; in this respect the passage is comparable in function to the Synoptic apocalypse. That portion of the audience conversant with Ps 117 LXX would also catch an intertextual echo of “the stone that the builders rejected, which has become the head of the corner” (Ps 117:22 LXX); if the singing of the Hallel psalms along the lines of *m. Pesah* 10:6–7 was already an element of Passover observance in the first century, readers conversant with the practice would find here an allusion to the festival, as well.²⁶

subject and ἐστιν as the verb.” In view of the question regarding ὁ ἐρχόμενος in Q 7:19, I follow Kloppenborg in holding that “Q uses the participial phrase ὁ ἐρχόμενος (‘the one who comes’) in a quasi-titular fashion to refer to a figure coming in judgment (Q 3:16)” (*Excavating Q*, 370).

²⁶ First-century origins for singing the Hallel at Passover—a possibility recognized by Baruch M. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder: The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 45—may be suggested by Philo's reference to a ὕμνος in *Spec. Leg.* 2.148 and by Mark 14:26/Matt 26:30 (ὕμνήσαντες, a *hapax* in both Mark and Matthew, so an observance associated specifically with Passover in their narratives).

All the texts mentioned so far are conventionally attributed to Q. I would like to note two passages not usually ascribed to Q, but which satisfy the standard criteria for recognition of Q material. On the basis of these passages I will suggest that a passion narrative and a resurrection appearance to the Twelve cannot be confidently excluded from the reconstruction of Q.²⁷ The first passage is the famous Minor Agreement against Mark 14:65, the question τίς ἐστὶν ὁ παίσιας σε, which I suggest should be identified as Q 22:64. Here we have a striking five-word verbatim sequence common to Matthew and Luke in a Marcan context; the passage is a well-known difficulty for the Two-Source Hypothesis and is commonly recognized as among the most significant of the Minor Agreements. On the Two-Source Hypothesis, by far the most parsimonious explanation of the passage is that the question derives from Q. Eric Franklin suggests further that the hypothesis of a passion narrative in Q may account for the divergences of Luke from Matthew and Mark that appear throughout the passion.²⁸ In any case, the context of the question is inextricably supplied by the Passion narrative, and Matthew and Luke agree in locating it there. On this evidence, the Passion deserves recognition as an instance of Mark/Q overlap.

If Q thus had a passion narrative, and if we agree with de Jonge and Kloppenborg that its tradents “believed in a God who had vindicated Jesus,” it seems necessary to

²⁷ F. C. Burkitt long ago suggested that in view of the narrative present earlier in Q, “there is nothing surprising that it should have given an account of the last scenes” (F. Crawford Burkitt, *The Gospel History and Its Transmission* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911), 135. Mark S. Goodacre has shown that Q does not merely contain narrative but exhibits a narrative sequence beginning with John’s preaching and baptism at the Jordan (Q 3:3, 7–8, 16–17) and continuing with John’s baptism of Jesus (Q 3:21–22), Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness (Q 4:1–13), Ναζαρά (Q 4:16), the Inaugural Discourse (Q 6:20–49), healing the centurion’s boy at Capernaum (Q 7:1), and receiving the Baptist’s messengers (Q 7:18–35); see Goodacre’s *Case Against Q: Studies in Marcan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity Press International, 2002), 172–76.

²⁸ Eric Franklin, “A Passion Narrative in Q,” in *Understanding, Studying and Reading: New Testament Essays in Honour of John Ashton* [ed. Christopher Rowland and Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis; JSNTSup 84; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998], 30–47).

consider the possibility that Q included a narrative of resurrection or resurrection appearances establishing Jesus' vindication by God. A textual basis for recognizing this can be found in the resurrection appearance in which the Twelve (who appear previously at Q 22:30) are appointed to mission. Such a pericope is present in both Matthew (28:16–20) and Luke (24:33–49) but lacking in Mark if 16:8 forms the original conclusion of the earliest canonical Gospel.²⁹ Either Matthew or Luke, or more likely both, have considerably reshaped the language of Q in this pericope, but this degree of editorial activity is not surprising at the conclusion of a document, and we find Matthew and Luke exercising considerable freedom in the use they make of Mark 16:1–8. The geographic placement of the incident by each evangelist may be redactional (Matthew taking his Galilean setting from Mark 16:7 and 14:28, Luke indulging his preference for Jerusalem), but perhaps Q located the appearance in Jerusalem (the city figuring also in Q 4:9 and 13:34) and so supplied Luke a precedent. Common elements attributable to Q include the gathering of the Eleven, so numbered (Matt. 28:16; Luke 24:33), their seeing Jesus (Matt 28:17; Luke 24:37), reactions by disciples both negative (οἱ δὲ ἐδίστασαν, Matt 28:17; πτοηθέντες δὲ καὶ ἔμφοβοι γινόμενοι, Luke 24:37) and reverential (προσεκύνησαν, Matt 28:17; αὐτῶν . . . θαυμαζόντων, Luke 24:41), Jesus' final charge to the disciples (Matt 28:18–20; Luke 24:44–49) directing them to “all the nations” (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, Matt 28:19; Luke 24:47) and culminating in a temporal coda (Matt 28:20; Luke 24:49).³⁰ On that last, the Matthaean conclusion promising Jesus'

²⁹ This remains likelier on textual and exegetical grounds than the hypothesis of an incomplete or lost original ending, which N. Clayton Croy has recently sought to revive (*The Mutilation of Mark's Gospel* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003]).

³⁰ A further parallel appears if one accepts H. Benedict Green's careful argument that the Matthaean variant attested by Eusebius which lacks baptism and the Trinitarian formula is the earlier reading (“Matthew 28:19, Eusebius, and the Lex Orandi,” in *The Making of Orthodoxy: Essays in Honour of Henry*

continued presence with the disciples could well be ascribed to Q, given the widespread judgment that as a Sayings Gospel, Q finds its theological center in the words of Jesus, which constitute, in Helmut Koester's words, "the rule of life for the community of the new age insofar as Jesus continues to speak in sayings of wisdom and in rules for the community."³¹ Read as the conclusion to Q, Matt 28:16–20 promises that in the form of "all the words I have commanded you," Jesus would be with his disciples "always, even to the close of the age," and Matthew adopted this conclusion as a fitting complement to his opening announcement that the child born to Joseph's betrothed would bear the saving presence of God to his people (Matt 1:23). Luke finds this lacking in historical verisimilitude, as Jesus did not in fact remain bodily in the presence of his disciples, but the conclusion of Q nonetheless inspired him to write a second volume showing in sequence how the risen Christ continued to do and teach through the Spirit poured out on his followers (Acts 1:1; 2:32–33).

I conclude, then, that there are reasonable grounds for finding the messianic *haggadah* of Jesus' death and resurrection embedded in Q, and indeed for holding that the document concluded with its own partially preserved narrative of Jesus' death and resurrection appearance to the Twelve. But before we leave Q, a final point, which arises from one of the texts we've considered, Q 13:34–45. Q or its earliest stratum is often treated as unquestionably a first-generation witness to Christian beginnings, indeed as the most primitive Christian text we possess; Kloppenborg characterizes it as "a document in circulation long before the appearance stories of Matthew, Luke, and John are attested,

Chadwick [ed. Rowan Williams; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ Pr, 1989]), 124–141. In that case both passages would obligate the disciples to teach or preach in Jesus' name.

³¹ Helmut Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 159.

and roughly at the same time that the bare formula of 1 Cor 15:3b–5 was circulating in Antioch and the Pauline churches.”³² But the announcement of judgment on Israel in the form of the abandonment of her house (ἰδοὺ ἀφίεται ὑμῖν ὁ οἶκος ὑμῶν, Q 13:35), which evokes the narrative of Ezekiel 10–11 and the departure of divine glory from “the house” (οἶκος, 7x in Ezekiel 10–11 LXX; cf. esp. Ezek 10:4), suggests a date for Q after the destruction of the temple in AD 70. That is, Q 13:35 supplies the same sort of grounds for a post-70 date of Q that Mark 13:14–19 et pars. provides for the Synoptics. I conclude that Q is best regarded as a fiction of the critics, but if accepted as a witness to early Christianity, its testimony is to the second generation, not the first, and it attests the importance of Jesus’ death and resurrection in the circles of which it is representative.³³

Synoptic Gospels

No extensive argument is needed to establish the importance of Jesus’ death and resurrection as the climax of Jesus’ story in the Synoptic Gospels, which in my judgment span the second generation of Christianity (i.e., from AD 70 to 100), though we may pause to differ with Helmut Koester’s judgment that “the passion narrative, i.e., the central piece of the ‘kerygma,’ is no longer a fundamental structural element of Matthew’s Gospel.”³⁴ While incorporating considerably more sayings material than Mark and arranging it by subject in a form easily accessible by teachers of congregations, Matthew retains the passion predictions and the bulk of the Marcan passion narrative, as

³² Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 365.

³³ One might suggest that it was the appearance of Q in the 70s that spurred Matthew and Luke to their revisions of Mark in the 80s or 90s. On the date of Q, see Kloppenborg Verbin, *Excavating Q*, 80–87, and the literature cited there.

³⁴ Koester, *Ancient Christian Gospels*, 45.

well as sharpening the explanation it supplies of the judgment visited on his fellow Jews in the destruction of AD 70 (cf. 27:25).³⁵

Luke's appropriation of the Marcan passion narrative illustrates the way in which variations in the same basic haggadic structure could introduce theological diversity without radical disjunction. This is best illustrated in Luke's redaction of Jesus' eucharistic words, preserved in the shorter text of Luke 22:19–20, the longer text reflecting assimilation to the Pauline tradition. As Bart Ehrman summarizes, Luke “portrays the death of Jesus with remarkable consistency not as an atoning sacrifice, but as a miscarriage of justice that God reversed by vindicating Jesus at the resurrection,” and his redaction of Marcan material (notably of Mark 10:45 and 15:38–39) expresses this theological preference.³⁶

The Gospel According to Thomas

After Q, the second most prominent witness to a variety of Christianity not oriented on Jesus' messianic death and resurrection in recent discussion is this collection of sayings, preserved in a fourth-century Coptic edition and in Greek fragments of the second century. The principal questions about this text as it relates to our thesis are its date and its relationship to the canonical Gospels, and these questions are related; if Thomas manifests literary dependence on any of the canonical Gospels, then its final form dates to the second Christian generation at the earliest, and its sayings cannot serve as evidence for a first-generation variety of Christianity without specific argument for the saying(s)

³⁵ For the significance of 27:51 in Matthew's exposition of this theme, see Daniel M. Gurtner, *The Torn Veil: Matthew's Exposition of the Death of Jesus* (SNTSMS 139; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 199–200.

one seeks to base conclusions on. (The issue of method is analogous to that pertaining to the Mishnah as a source for Second Temple Judaism in the post-Neusner era.)

The most significant evidence for our purposes is found in sayings 65 and 66. Saying 65 presents a version of the Parable of the Wicked Tenants with three significant points of agreement with the Lucan redaction of the parable. Luke omits allusion to Isaiah 5 (Luke 20:9), reports the killing only of the son (Luke 20:14–15), and leaves off the quotation at Ps 117:22 LXX, omitting v. 23; also in disagreement with Mark and Matthew, Luke reads δώσουσιν αὐτῷ in v. 10 and adds ἵσως in v. 13. In all these points Thomas agrees with the Lucan redaction of the Marcan pericope and so betrays a familiarity with Luke’s Gospel, most likely embodying a memory of the text declaimed rather than a reproduction of the written text of Luke.³⁷ Indeed, the presence in Thomas of material paralleling every stratum of the canonical Gospel tradition, including the redactional matter of each of the Synoptics, commends a date for Thomas after the conclusion of the second Christian generation, i.e., not earlier than AD 110.³⁸

The evidence of Sayings 65–66 is significant in that it not only manifests *Thomas*’s dependence, but it also attests awareness of the story of Christ’s passion and resurrection. In the Synoptic tradition, the parable is the final public statement interpreting Jesus’ impending death, and the quotation of Ps 117:22 LXX indicates the divine vindication to follow rejection. Thomas’s distinctive interpretation of the Jesus tradition did not then originate independently of the passion/resurrection *haggadah* but has reconceived the significance of “the living Jesus” (itself perhaps an appropriation of

³⁷ My treatment of *Thomas* 65–66 is indebted to Klyne R. Snodgrass, “The Gospel of Thomas : A Secondary Gospel,” *Second Century* 7 (1990): 28–31.

³⁸ John P Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 134–9.

the designation of the risen Christ as ὁ ζῶν in Rev 1:18) through the collection of sayings attributed to him and through the promulgation of an esoteric significance to them (Incipit). Thomas bears witness to the dissatisfaction some Christians felt with the cross/resurrection kerygma in the second century; it is not an independent witness to a first-generation community with no awareness of or interest in Jesus' death and vindication by God.

Conclusion

The messianic haggadah of Jesus' death and resurrection was a complex story that evoked varied reactions. While not responding to dissent from the story within his communities, Paul's summary of the response the story has met with in his missionary experience (1 Cor 1:18ff) anticipates much of the history we can trace in the first century of Christian theologizing. It is through attention to the vicissitudes of the founding Christian *haggadah* that we may understand the emergence of alternative constructions of Christian existence arising in the second generation and beyond.