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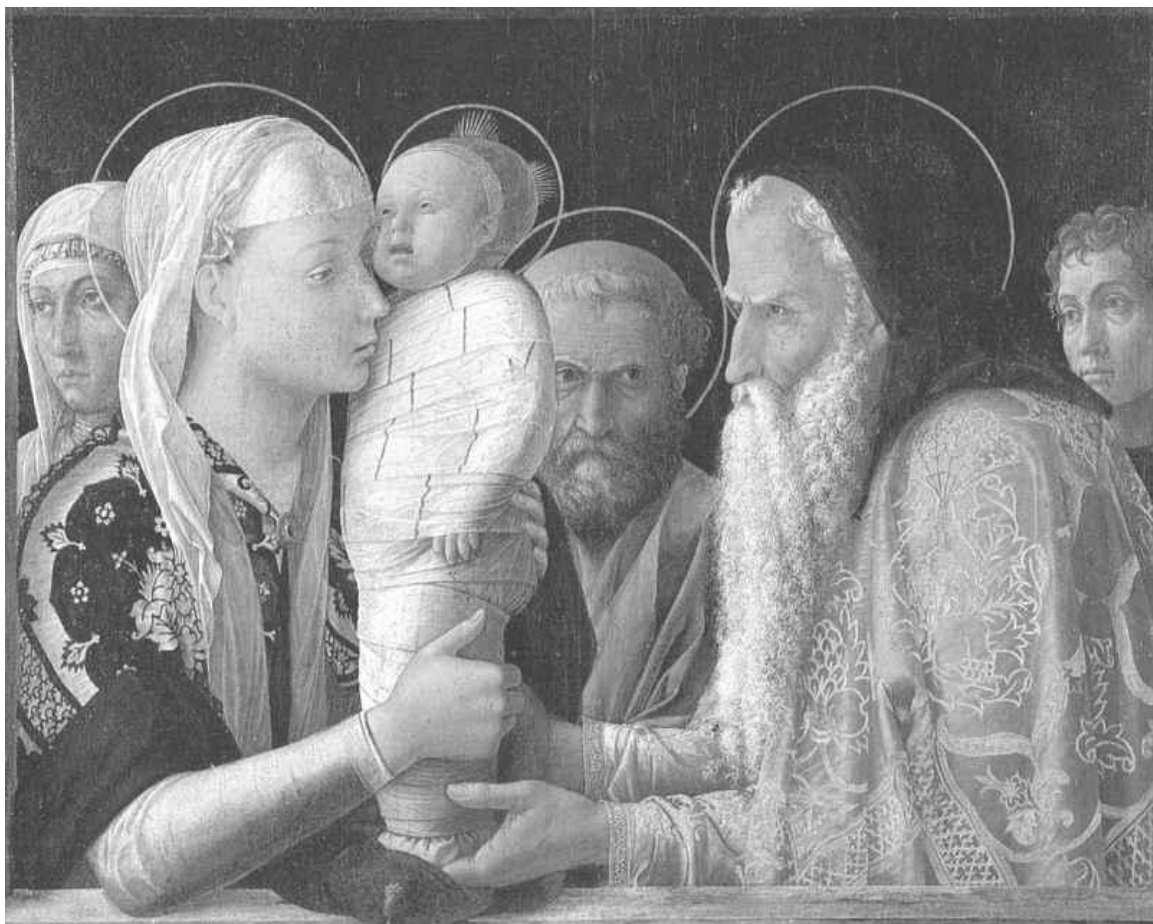
PRIEST

THE MAKING OF
THE MESSIAH

Everything You *Believe* is **Wrong**

Mark Gibbs

The Virgin And The Priest The Making Of The Messiah



Mark Gibbs

The Vineyard Press

To My Wife, Desak

The Virgin and The Priest: The Making of The Messiah

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Contents

Preface

Introduction

- 1. Supremacy of Blood
- 2. The Family of the New Abraham
- 3. Zacharias and Mary
- 4. Angel of the Lord
- 5. The Kingmakers
- 6. Sibling Rivalry
- 7. Dead Sea Scrolls
- 8. Legacy of Messianic Conflict

Conclusion

Notes

Bibliography

Index

Preface

Church attendance in developed nations has been on a downward spiral for the best part of a century. The strong likelihood is that it will continue to decline. In the past, almost everyone was a churchgoer. But today, irrespective of whether or not they believe in God, the majority of the population regards organized religion as an anachronism.

Increased levels of education since the end of World War II brought with them a greater demand for intellectual satisfaction. Now, most people will only accept something as 'true' if it can be explained by reason or else resonates with their experience. Absolute 'truths' must pertain to reality. Not reality as perception, but reality which is the same for everyone. Doctrines that insist on faith in the irrational and unfamiliar no longer have mass appeal, because by implication, they are not true.

Formerly, the Church could withdraw some of its erroneous tenets, for example, that the sun orbits the earth, because they were incidental to its central theology. In the modern era, as potential embarrassments cropped up with increasing regularity, the Church adopted the position that religion and science were mutually incompatible. Therefore, any attempts to reconcile them were futile.

The idea that life allowed for the existence of contradictory laws did not impress Einstein, who famously stated that "God does not play dice with the universe." His comment that "science would provide a surer path to God than religion," reflects a widely held opinion that religious institutions are paralyzed by the instinct for self-preservation and reluctance to acknowledge error. As far as most people today are concerned, the Church has not only ceded to science the ability to interpret the physical world, but also the world unseen, and all that that implies.

Despite public skepticism toward the Christian Church, the indisputable fact of history is that Western civilization is a Judeo-Christian legacy. The predominant culture is actually based on a complex synthesis of Hebraism and Hellenism, but its catalyst was provided by events in the life of one man -- Jesus. And we simply cannot understand the modern world without first understanding our Judeo-Christian past.

The phenomenal success of the movies, *The Passion of Christ* and *The Da Vinci Code*, prove that the desire to know what happened two thousand years ago has not diminished. Still, from whatever point of view Jesus is presented, we don't know *who* he was.

For traditionalists, the focal point of 'genuine' Christianity is Christ, the risen God. 'Christ' transcends human attributes, so in the grand scheme of things, the historical man Jesus is incidental. At the opposite end of the spectrum, liberal academics cite a lack of documentation to prove much of anything about Jesus, and being good scholars they only go where the 'facts' lead.

Making sense of Jesus then, is not easy. Apparently, he was rejected by those 'in charge of religion' as an ordinary man with blasphemous delusions of grandeur. But now that he is regarded as God, or as a character to be defined only on the limited basis of a few prose narratives, Jesus cannot be legitimately considered as an actual human being with normal physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual needs.

The Virgin and The Priest does not directly address the issue of Jesus' marital status, or even if he had children. Researching the possibility of a surviving bloodline without first

identifying Jesus' parents, not only puts the genealogical cart before the horse, it perpetuates the confusion over his status. Jesus' 'divinity' has been the foundation of Christian theology ever since Church councils began, and still conditions public perception of him today. For that reason, Jesus' ancestors, rather than his descendants, ought properly to be the starting point of any investigation of his life.

Officially, Protestant Churches do not insist on the virgin birth doctrine as do Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. Mary's miraculous conception, however, is taken for granted by most of their membership, and by a large percentage of the general population. Even non believers jump on the bandwagon when Christmas comes around. Who can blame them? It is a beautiful story. A young virgin conceives a child miraculously. She gives birth to God's only Son in a humble stable. Wise men travel from afar to offer gifts to the newborn king.

The word 'miracle,' however, can only be used legitimately when describing events that lack a rational or scientific explanation, and as an *absolute* principle, all forms of life are created by, and therefore preceded by, a relationship or interaction between opposites: male/female or positive/negative. So regardless of any theological claims, if Jesus existed then he must have had biological parents. His birth, therefore, was *not* a miracle. Moreover, if Jesus' father were identified it might help explain other aspects of his life, and inject a dose of much-needed reality into the study of Christian origins.

To protect the early church, the gospel writers deliberately crafted explanations of Jesus' birth to mystify the uninformed and obscure the truth from those deemed incapable of receiving it. To achieve this, they used an ancient 'messianic' scribal code belonging to an esoteric strand of Judaism. Later, as the church developed in the Gentile nations, ignorance of this code proved disastrous. Centuries of pointless and unnecessary theological argument precipitated divisions in human society that led to centuries of bloodshed, persecution, and suffering on a truly unimaginable scale. In explaining the messianic code, *The Virgin and The Priest* does not so much go where the facts lead, because hardly any exist. The case presented is not one that would stand up in a modern court of law. There are no sworn affidavits, no eye witness testimonies, and no DNA paternity-test results. The argument follows only where reason takes it, supported by a framework of coherent and consistent logic, based on the Jewish traditions of the biblical writers. Corroborative evidence is presented from apocryphal gospels, writings of early Church Fathers, and the Koran. The cryptic images of Renaissance masterpieces, so long a source of confusion to 'experts' and bewilderment to the general public, are deciphered to show that knowledge of Jesus' biological father was pivotal to an important and influential subversive tradition.

That the name of Jesus' father has never been publicly disclosed attests to the existence of a controlling and pervasive conspiracy of silence by those who knew it, both inside and outside the Church. The perpetrators were aided and abetted by the suffocating power of preconceived ideas, working hand in hand with history's largest ever propaganda campaign, incessantly and repeatedly broadcast throughout the world for seventeen centuries. And, in common with modern sales and marketing promotions, the message was both deceptive and illusory, designed solely to benefit vested interests. Deep down we knew it, but still bought the product.

Christianity's sacred cows have been challenged many times before, but never as comprehensively as in *The Virgin and The Priest*. Perhaps above all else, the spotlight falls on the life of Saint John the Baptist -- one of the most neglected areas of New

Testament studies and Dead Sea Scrolls research -- and the part he played in Jesus' tragic life. Hopefully, any errors along the way are minor and thus peripheral to the book's central arguments. For readers raised on the tenets of traditional religious teaching, *The Virgin and The Priest* will be a journey into uncharted waters. Bon voyage! Ubud, Bali
November, 2007

Introduction

Before diving straight into Jesus' story, it is essential to know the background. That means having a grasp of the basic fundamentals of Jewish history -- if only because Jesus allegedly claimed to be its fulfillment. The next few pages provide a general outline, but further reading is strongly recommended.

A great deal of argument exists among modern historians, archeologists, and biblical scholars about the historical reliability of the Old Testament. Similarly, in ancient Palestine much debate surrounded the sacred texts, but it was not about separating fact from fiction. Disputes were centered on how to interpret the narratives to correctly discern 'truth.' Holy Scriptures were considered guidebooks to the truth, not truth itself. The most significant groups in Jewish society, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes -- all contemporaneous to Jesus often took different meanings from the same writings.

There was general agreement, however, that the books of the Hebrew Bible comprised a reliable and inspired record of Israel and its relationship with God. There were no archives, and no way to chart ancient chronology, so recorders of the past prioritized archetypes over actual names, places and events.

History began with the Fall. Adam and Eve, the original ancestors, broke God's commandment to not "eat the fruit." As a result, they and their descendants were banished from the Garden of Eden. The writers of Genesis described the events of the Fall with references familiar to an agrarian society: 'tree,' 'plant,' 'garden,' 'fruit,' 'seed,' and so on. This agricultural metaphor was systematically repeated in later books of the Old and New Testament to explain the workings of Providence in the affairs of men. To the ancient Jews, salvation was an organic process to restore the Garden paradise. Religion, therefore, was not a matter of individual conscience, but the birthright of Israelite families. The prerequisite was not faith or deeds, but blood lineage.

Salvation history would end with the global sovereignty of the Jewish savior/king, or Messiah. No consensus existed on the specifics of how this new world order would materialize, but it was widely accepted that the Messiah would be a victorious warrior king, who would govern through his representatives -- the Jewish people. After first liberating Israel, the Messiah would subjugate the other nations. With pagan worship eradicated, the world would serve only Yahweh, the Hebrew God. In the ensuing brotherhood of man, 'swords would be turned into ploughshares,' and 'the lion would lay down with the lamb.'

According to Genesis, people were so corrupt that God "regretted he had made man," so He brought a flood judgment to wipe them out. Only the family of Noah was spared from the deluge. This was intended to be a new start for humanity, and after the flood they received the same instruction to "be fruitful and multiply" that was given Adam and Eve. However, things did not work out. The biblical text is guarded as to the reasons why, but like Adam before him, Noah's "nakedness" implied a sexual transgression had led to the loss of grace.

God's next attempt to rescue humanity involved making a unique covenant with one man, from whom a chosen people would descend. The man was Abraham, founding father of the Hebrew race.

The Jews were and still are the only people in the world who have their genealogical

origins written down and traced back to one individual, but not all of Abraham's descendants were Jewish -- only those who came through a specific bloodline. This is the most crucial aspect in understanding ancient Judaism; everything was based on ancestry. Ishmael, Abraham's first son, is understood by Arabs to be their common ancestor, but the chosen bloodline passed through Isaac, Abraham's second son.

Isaac also had two sons, Esau and Jacob, and again it was the younger brother, Jacob, through whom the providential lineage passed. Jacob, the third-generation patriarch, founded the Israelite nation. 'Israel,' literally meaning 'he who struggles with God,' was simply another name for Jacob.

Jacob had twelve sons, and Joseph was his favorite. Resented by his brothers for a dream that the entire family would one day bow down before him, Joseph was kidnapped by them and sold to Ishmaelite merchants, who took him to Egypt. The brothers told Jacob that Joseph was dead. While in Egypt, Joseph's star rose. And after successfully interpreting the meaning of one of the Pharaoh's dreams, he was appointed Grand Vizier -- a type of Prime Minister.

Due to a severe famine, Jacob moved his family south to Egypt in search of food. Not long afterward, and much to his father's delight, Joseph revealed himself to them. The reunited children of Israel remained in Egypt to eventually become a nation within a nation. The Book of Exodus states that "they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them." The Pharaoh began to fear their numbers and doubt their loyalty, and that was his justification for forcing them into manual slavery. Despite a life of hardship, the Hebrew population continued to increase and constitute a threat. So much so, that the Pharaoh ordered all male Hebrew infants to be drowned at birth in the River Nile. This event began the story of Moses.

One of the Pharaoh's daughters found Moses floating down the Nile in a basket of bulrushes. She adopted the baby and raised him in the royal household. But just as the storyline seemed to be leading up to Moses becoming Pharaoh, he killed an Egyptian taskmaster whom he had witnessed abusing Hebrew slaves. Fearing the consequences of his actions, Moses escaped into the desert wilderness of Midian and lived the life of a nomadic shepherd.

The biblical narrative explains that while he was in exile, God instructed Moses to return to Egypt and, in tandem with his older brother Aaron, liberate the Israelites and lead them into the Promised Land of Canaan. After many trials and tribulations, the brothers eventually succeeded, and the Hebrew slave population was rescued. The journey into Canaan, however, was complex and protracted, taking forty years to accomplish.

During this period, Moses received the Ten Commandments, formulated the official Israelite religion, and instituted its priesthood. Aaron was the first High Priest of Israel and all future priests were drawn only from Aaron's direct descendants. Others belonging to the tribe of Levi, one of the twelve sons of Jacob, were designated as a lesser priesthood, responsible for organizing ceremonial functions. Priests and Levites lived on tithes collected from the remaining tribes but were prohibited from owning land. Theoretically, as they did not have to work, Priests and Levites were dedicated to a life of service to the community.

Moses did not survive to witness conquest of the Promised Land, and Joshua was appointed to lead the military campaign. In a relatively short period of time, his armies

won a series of stunning victories over the enemy. The land of Palestine was taken from the Canaanites and divided among the twelve tribes of Israel. It was not a totally comprehensive defeat, however, and several enclaves of unconquered territory remained.

The period after occupation and resettlement was characterized by continuous war with Canaanite kings and external enemies. Known as the age of 'Judges' -- divinely inspired prophet-warrior leaders, who emerged periodically to prevent the Hebrews from drifting into assimilation with foreign neighbors -- it formally ended when Samuel anointed Saul as the first ever King of Israel.

Later, Saul was deposed, and in his place the legendary David was anointed king, followed by his son Solomon, who purportedly built the original Jerusalem Temple. Future generations would view this time nostalgically as the golden age of Israel. But it did not last long.

After Solomon's death, civil war erupted and the formerly unified nation was split into two opposing kingdoms, north (Israel) and south (Judah). The southern kingdom was home for the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and the northern kingdom comprised the remaining ten tribes. The priesthood and the Levites remained for the most part in the south, because that was where Jerusalem was located. The Bible records that the northerners drifted in and out of idolatry and built their own competing cult centers, and that this ultimately led to their destruction.

It is extremely difficult to put dates on any of these occurrences, because a paucity of supporting evidence exists to verify either the historicity of events or of the characters involved. Moreover, biblical chronology followed an esoteric numerology, so important time periods were often recorded as forty years or multiples of forty, seven years or multiples of seven, and so on. All of which indicates that the writers never intended to compose historical journals. Details of the narratives were specially constructed so as to comply with fundamental principles that proved a divine connection.

With its larger population and more fertile land, Israel was always richer than Judah in the south, and made an irresistible target for any expanding empire. The rise of the Assyrian Empire during the eighth century B.C.E. meant disaster for the northern kingdom. Surviving Assyrian archives corroborate much of the biblical account. By 720 B.C.E., the Assyrians had not only invaded and conquered Israel; they had deported all of its citizens, and transmigrated settlers from other parts of the empire to take possession of the land.

What happened to the lost northern tribes remains a source of intense speculation, but from this time onward, as far as the biblical scribes were concerned, the only true 'Israelites' were in the south, and the majority belonged to the tribe of Judah. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the Bible prophesies Judah will rule the other tribes of Israel and that the Messiah will come from the line of Judah. In fact, the Old Testament is so pro-Judah that it must have been compiled and edited only after the purge of the northern tribes.

One hundred years later, when Babylon had overtaken Assyria to become the dominant power in the region, the army of King Nebuchadnezzar marched into Judah and laid siege to Jerusalem, an event described in the Bible and in Babylonian records. In 597 B.C.E. Jerusalem collapsed, and the victors took the usual spoils of war. More significantly, the priesthood, aristocracy, and skilled craftsmen were taken captive and exiled in Babylon.

In the decade that followed, the population left behind rallied against Nebuchadnezzar, but to no avail. In 587 B.C.E., the Babylonians attacked Jerusalem again, and this time the city was totally devastated and the Temple left in ruins. Outlying cities of Judah were similarly destroyed. Most of the inhabitants fled to Egypt, leaving Judah virtually uninhabited. Zedekiah, the last Judahite king, was blinded, chained in fetters, and taken back to Babylon after first witnessing the public execution of his sons.

The fate of the Hebrew religion was left with the exiles in Babylon. If they had integrated with the local culture, it would most probably have meant the end of Judaism. But the course of history took a dramatic twist in 539 B.C.E. when the Persian King Cyrus invaded and conquered Babylon. He issued a royal decree permitting both the return of Jewish exiles and the rebuilding of the Jerusalem Temple.

Whether Cyrus was motivated by altruism or pragmatism, the homecoming to Palestine was not a speedy process. Reportedly, three great waves of returnees spread over several generations, culminated in approximately 458 B.C.E. when Ezra the Scribe (who was also a priest) arrived in Jerusalem armed with a letter of authority from Darius, the King of Persia. Not all the Jews wished to return, however, and a significant number chose to remain in Babylon.

In due course a new Temple was constructed and the Palestinian Jews had themselves a semi-independent homeland. The Davidic monarchy, however, was not restored, and the priesthood became the de facto new ruling class. The foundations were made at this time for what would later become known as Second Temple Judaism.

Alexander the Great defeated the Persian Empire in the fourth century B.C.E., and in 332 B.C.E. the Jewish state was incorporated into the Greek dominated world and became known as Judea. After about 150 years of Greek rule, Jewish resistance against the forces of Hellenization erupted into a full scale war. When the dust finally settled, a period of relative independence followed that lasted for a hundred years, coming to an end with the arrival of the army of the Roman General Pompey in 63 B.C.E.

After three decades of Roman administration through a series of proxies, the Emperor Augustus installed Herod the Great as the client king of Judea in 37 B.C.E. As a convert to Judaism, Herod was not accepted by the majority of the population as a legitimate king, but nevertheless he embarked on an extensive reconstruction project that made the Jerusalem Temple into possibly the most magnificent building in the world. During the final years of Herod's rule, the birth of Jesus took place.

Jewish society and its core beliefs survived this incredible history because written records and oral traditions of their past were preserved, and the sayings of the prophets were recorded. In the main, their historical tragedies had not led to widespread cynicism or to the adoption of religions of their foreign masters, as was customary for subject peoples. This made the Jews fascinating to outsiders. But although the Jewish idea of a worldwide messianic kingdom was well known throughout the region, it did not endear Jews to their neighbors. To most outsiders, the racial and religious separation ethic of Judaism meant that non-Jews were considered inferior, even subhuman.

Messianic expectation reached fever pitch during the early Roman period. The rebuilt Temple had become a wonder of the ancient world and wealthy Diaspora Jews (the name given to Jews living outside Palestine) made constant pilgrimages to Jerusalem. The

Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek and circulated widely among the Greek speaking Diaspora population, estimated to be at least double the two million strong inhabitants of Palestine. Gentiles, impressed by the moral and ethical lifestyle of the synagogue, were converting to Judaism in ever increasing numbers. Yet by 70 C.E. the Temple had been destroyed and the priesthood totally obliterated. Neither institution has ever been restored.

The nation of Israel finally re-emerged in 1948, and it might easily be described as a protectorate of the new Rome -- the United States of America, complete with Emperor/President, Senate, eagle standard, and capital city where the government buildings follow the Greco-Roman style and are adorned with pagan gods and goddesses. The prosperous Diaspora Jews have resettled in the new Rome. And as before, the restored Israel is surrounded by unsympathetic neighbors, and survives with the help of a siege mentality.

Although Jewish prophecy was committed to the advent of the Messiah, no hard and fast details were given. Much of scripture, however, was compiled to meet the criteria of a covert messianic formula or code, essential to protect heaven's secrets. Understanding this messianic code was the first qualification of an ancient scribe. But when the crucial time came two thousand years ago, the code was not followed. Old Testament prophecy predicted a glorious future for the Jews in the coming messianic era, "all who see them shall acknowledge that they are a people whom the Lord has blessed." In reality, the Jews endured nineteen hundred years of exile and persecution that culminated in the Nazi-inspired genocide.

Meanwhile, Christianity -- the Gentile religion -- claimed the Jewish Messiah. And even though the New Testament recorded a travesty of ignorance, prejudice, and injustice, the Church declared that messianic prophecy *was* fulfilled. New and revolutionary theologies were developed to explain why the Messiah did not restore the Garden of Eden, why there was no peace on earth, and why swords were *not* turned into ploughshares. Needless to say, none were Jewish explanations.

Serendipitously, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered at the same time as Israel was granted statehood. Found hidden in desert caves, numerous first century Jewish manuscripts specializing in messianic prophecy, constitute the final installment of the Hebrew Bible. Finally, the bridge linking the Old and the New Testaments can be crossed. Let us now go back to first century Palestine, unravel the secrets of the messianic code, and find out what really happened.

1 Supremacy of Blood

For modern westerners, it is impossible to comprehend the extent to which life in today's world differs from life in first-century Jewish Palestine. In Western civilization, the development of law, politics, and religion has combined to make the individual the supreme unit of society. Most definitely, a human being is not considered as the living representative of a sacred ancestral bloodline ordained by God, as the individual Jew was regarded in the society of ancient Israel. Nowadays, most people know nothing about their forbears beyond three or four generations at the most; and everyone is free to make a family with whomever they choose.

In stark contrast, the social order of Second Temple Judaism was distinguished by a rigid patriarchal caste system, where more than in any other civilization in the history of the world; maintenance of the purity of one's family line was the principle duty of every member of the community, and the foundation stone of the culture. To guarantee the well being of the nation as a whole, the pureblood Jew was obligated to comply with the decrees on marriage passed down by scriptural tradition in the Torah -- the first five books of the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Numbers.

According to tradition, the Torah was written by Moses. The overwhelming consensus of modern textual critics, however, is that the Torah was composed and edited several centuries after Moses by numerous scribes across several generations. But irrespective of who authored the texts and when, the chief cause of misfortune to the Israelites was identified in them as sexual contact with non-Israelites, or Gentiles. This activity was deemed responsible not only for corrupting the community's bloodstock, but for introducing the worship of foreign pagan gods, considered deeply offensive to Yahweh. Consequently, all matters sexual in Israelite society were rigorously codified in the Mosaic Law; the genders were kept strictly segregated, and sexual contact with Gentiles was anathematized.

By Jesus' time, the religion of Moses had developed into the phenomenal cult of the Jerusalem Temple. Strictly speaking, the acceptance of Gentile converts proved that the term 'Jew' -- a nickname derived from 'Judah,' the name of the dominant tribe in the post exilic era -- was no longer a racial classification. Nonetheless, the majority view was that the final salvation of the Jews, promised in the coming messianic era, would come firstly to Israelite families of untainted lineage. Gentile converts and mixed bloods, therefore, were officially prohibited from marrying into Israelite families of pure ancestry.

THE CASTE SYSTEM

Within this legalistic structure, the population of the different tribes was divided into three castes of pure blood descent -- priests, who were descended from Aaron; Levites, who were members of the tribe of Levi; and a third group comprised of legitimate Israelites from the remaining twelve tribes. A fourth social caste was for those judged to be of impure blood -- illegitimate Israelites born from sexual unions prohibited by the Law.

The result was a nation defined by genealogy and obsessed with ancestry. Before a fellow countryman would acknowledge another, he needed to know his pedigree, and the importance of caste increased relative to one's proximity to the Temple. The four classes that divided society can be summarized as follows:

Priests

Legend has it that the priesthood resulted from fraternal cooperation between Moses and Aaron, whom Moses anointed as the first High Priest of Israel in the Sinai desert. Thereafter, the priesthood was strictly limited to the sons of Aaron and their descendants.

During the Second Temple era, priests could marry only the daughters of other priests (which was the preferred option), Levites, or pure-blood Israelites. By the first century, there were an estimated 7,200 priests, all understood to be direct descendants of Aaron. The modern surnames Cohen, Cahn, Kohn, derive from the Hebrew *Kohen* meaning priest, though not everyone today with one of these surnames is necessarily a descendant of the priestly clan.

The centrality of the priesthood in Second Temple Judaism was established in the middle of the fifth-century B.C.E. by the priest known as Ezra the Scribe, who determined that the way to prevent future national catastrophes was to strictly enforce the Law of Moses. This applied specifically to the hereditary priesthood, whose propensity for taking Gentile wives and concubines was declared the most significant factor in bringing about God's judgment on His people.

As a result, Ezra implemented a policy that required all priests to provide a genealogical listing to prove purity of descent. If a priest failed to meet the stringent criteria, he lost all rights to priestly office, not only for himself but for his descendants. In the Old Testament, several genealogical listings are given for priests, and an archive was maintained at the Jerusalem Temple where records of priestly families were kept. Writing about 100 C.E., the Jewish historian Josephus, himself the son of a priest, listed several generations of his ancestors in order to establish his credentials with the reader, "thus I have set down the genealogy of my family as I have found it described in the public records, and so direct adieu to those who would slander me."¹

Significantly, Josephus explained that the priestly caste was the Israelite aristocracy, "as the nobility among several nations is of a different origin, so with us to be connected with the priesthood is an indication of the splendor of a family."² The High Priest was not only the most prominent member of the priesthood but, in times when there was no king, he was the pre-eminent person in the land and effectively the ruler of a theocracy. His duties were mostly ceremonial but the real importance of the High Priest was as figurehead and symbol of the Jewish nation. By the time of Jesus' public ministry, the political power of the High Priest had been substantially weakened by Herod the Great and two decades of direct Roman rule.

Beneath the High Priest were the Chief Priests, who held different ranks according to their responsibilities. The Chief Priests oversaw management of the Temple, which included finances, security, and overseeing the daily and weekly ceremonial rites of the ordinary priests, who formed the bulk of the priesthood.

There were twenty-four priestly clans, each in turn serving one week at the Temple, performing liturgical duties. This meant that an ordinary priest spent only two weeks of the year serving at the Temple, and the rest of the time they lived throughout Judea and Galilee as farmers, merchants, landlords, craftsmen, etc.

Levites

Levites were theoretically the descendants of Levi, from whom Aaron was also descended, thus they were closely related to the priesthood. They constituted a lesser clergy, and were likewise divided into twenty-four courses, each serving one week at the Temple. Levites were singers, musicians, and attendants in the daily services, and carried out necessary menial tasks in the Temple. There were approximately 10,000 Levites at the time of Jesus. Many people today with the surnames of Levy and Levi are among descendants of the Levite tribe.

Pure-Blood Israelites

The lay population consisted primarily of members of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Included in their number was a remnant from the lost northern tribes, exiled and scattered after the Assyrian invasion of 722 B.C.E. Purity of descent, which required the production of a genealogy, was essential for any applicant to hold an official position of trust or authority in society. Daughters of pureblood Israelites also needed to prove an unblemished ancestry in order to be married into priestly families, which was often the hope of parents.

Israelites of Impure Birth

People with unknown fathers, undocumented orphans, children of adulterous or incestuous relationships, Gentile proselytes, slaves and freedmen who were converts to Judaism -- these were all considered illegitimate. Officially, no one with impure blood was permitted to hold public office, and they were refused full participation in Temple ceremonies. In reality, many people inhabited the twilight zone between the pure and the defiled. Not least of which were children of concubines and slave girls -- women kept by wealthier Israelites, priests as well as laity, who could afford them. Predictably, a convenient system was developed that ranked illegitimate Israelites into a hierarchy to differentiate between the varying degrees of impurity.

Among the impure grades, the least sullied were illegitimate children of priests -- born from a priest and a concubine or a woman of impure descent. Sons from such unions were forbidden from becoming priests and from marrying the daughters of priests, though they could marry into the rest of Israelite society.

The lowest grade was the *mamzerim* or bastards. There was disagreement as to how to define a *mamzer*, but once a person was known as such, he was barred from participating in public life and from marrying into the pureblood community. Descendants of *mamzers* were similarly excluded in perpetuity.

Proselytes were the most numerous illegitimate grouping. Herod the Great, from the mixed Semitic race of Idumeans, was the most famous or infamous proselyte. Herod's kingship and dynasty were considered unlawful by most pureblood Jews, who demanded the king be a direct descendant of King David. Like most converts, Herod's brand of Judaism was not fundamentalist or Pharisaic, but he respected the influence that the Pharisees wielded over the people and he did not seek to eradicate them from public life.

Civic rights were denied to anyone even suspected of being of dubious heritage. And to enforce this code of cleanliness on society, Pharisees had installed themselves as a self-appointed 'blood police.' Nobody with high public profile could escape investigation into his family background. On one notorious occasion, the Pharisees unsuccessfully attempted to remove the High Priest on the grounds that his mother had once been a

prisoner of war, and thus was potentially ‘soiled,’ so unfit to be a legitimate wife and mother.³

The ordinance forbidding a person of illegitimate status from marrying into priestly families was strictly enforced by the priesthood, who even disallowed the illegitimate sons of priests. Candidates for the priesthood had to prove purity of blood descent at twenty years of age in front of the Sanhedrin -- the Jewish Supreme Court -- in order to be ordained. This policy was in direct opposition to traditions of the Scribes, who recognized precedents that allowed illegitimate sons of priests into the priesthood.

SAMARITANS

Although the Samaritans insisted that they were descended from the Jewish patriarchs, this claim was contested by most observant Jews. Despite their strict adherence to Mosaic Law, Samaritans were classed as a mixed race and excluded from membership of the Israelite community. This was largely due to their perceived idolatrous veneration of Mount Gerizim, where they had built their own parallel version of the Temple, and which the Jews destroyed during the first century B.C.E. Effectively, Samaritans were the outcast caste. No Jew was allowed to marry a Samaritan.

Jewish hostility toward the Samaritans probably reached its peak during Jesus’ time. Herod the Great had taken a Samaritan wife and, in defiance of the Pharisees, he had permitted Samaritans access to the inner court of the Temple, a privilege withdrawn shortly after his death. Josephus recounts that during the administration of the Roman Procurator Coponius (6-9 C.E.), Samaritans defiled the Temple grounds by scattering human bones throughout the sanctuary during the night.⁴ No explanation was given for the reasons behind this action, but it resulted in the renewal of their outcast status.

Although the New Testament illustrated Jewish antipathy toward Samaritans, it also showed that Jesus did not harbor them the same ill will. Along the road between Galilee and Samaria, he reportedly healed ten lepers, but only one of them, a Samaritan, gave thanks.

Now he was a Samaritan. Then said Jesus, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."
Luke 17:17-19

John’s gospel alleged that many Samaritans believed in Jesus. On one occasion, Jesus was even accused of being a Samaritan, a charge he did not bother to deny in response. Nevertheless, when he met a Samaritan woman at the well, Jesus let her know that “salvation is from the Jews.” So, as a first-century Palestinian Jew, Jesus believed in the concept of the ‘chosen people.’ Consequently, he regarded Samaritans as “foreigners” whose ancestry disqualified them. But Jesus himself could not escape being stigmatized by his birth status.

The model of Samaritan as pariah was used in the famous *Parable of the Good Samaritan* to show how the Israelite caste system conspired against Jesus so that only outsiders acknowledged his messianic status.

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by

chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers? He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.' And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise.'
Luke 10:30-37

The aim of Jesus' parables was not to teach a higher moral ethic, as is commonly thought. His public ministry had a singular message and unique focus -- the kingdom of God. Everything else was secondary. Although confusion still surrounds the meaning of "the kingdom of God," first and foremost it meant acceptance of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. And *this* was the purpose behind the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*. Addressed to a lawyer (a title for a scribe), it was a scathing condemnation of the caste system and was never intended as a sermon on compassion. The lawyer must acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, and use his privileged position to teach others the same thing. In the kingdom of God, the rank of Messiah transcended *all* caste designations.

Hence, the unidentified victim on the road represented Jesus. By refusing to help, the priest and Levite rejected him as the Messiah, when, as leaders of Israel, they ought to have been the first to recognize him. Their justification for doing so derived from Jesus' social rank. He was considered impure, and to avoid contamination, the pureblood priest and Levite crossed the road. In direct contrast, the Samaritan's positive response to the injured man signified that only those similarly ostracized by caste status could readily accept Jesus.

JESUS' FATHER

Jesus' social status depended on the identity of his parents. Mary was known as his mother, but although New Testament scholarship has been on a quest to uncover the historical Jesus for over two hundred years, there has been no breakthrough yet on the issue of his paternity. The name of Jesus' father remains unknown and -- to all intents and purposes -- unknowable.

When it comes to interpreting ancient texts, professional academics, who read them in the original languages, have a right to expect a certain amount of due deference. However, the general approach of biblical scholars is conditioned by a tradition of fear and extreme caution that goes back almost two thousand years. In the past, 'dissenters' of orthodoxy would be tortured, jailed, or killed. Today, when scholars cross that invisible line, they lose their jobs. Consequently, few 'experts' are willing to debunk cherished popular myths in public, and most are quick to distance themselves from those who do. And as the Christmas story is the most beloved myth of all time, so the name of Jesus' father remains the greatest mystery of all time.

One classic case in point occurred about twenty years ago, when Jane Schaberg of the Catholic University of Detroit, published *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*. The book caused a genuine storm of controversy in the late 1980s. The author was deluged with hate mail, abusive calls, and demands for her resignation. Even her car was set alight and burnt to a

cinder. Meanwhile, her academic peers ran for cover. All this was because Schaberg dared to suggest that the text of the infancy narratives in the gospels of Matthew and Luke implied that Jesus was illegitimate. More specifically, that Mary had conceived Jesus after being raped or seduced by a person unknown. She now freely admits underestimating the negative reaction her thesis would generate among fellow Catholics. Perhaps, as an avowed feminist, Schaberg was by nature inclined to regard Mary as an exploited victim living in a brutal male-dominated society. But while adamant Jesus was not conceived miraculously, she found no clues to the identity of his biological father.

The standard academic text on this subject is Raymond Brown's *Birth of the Messiah*. Although it contains a great deal of valuable research, it is nevertheless the paramount scholarly affirmation of the ancient notion, still held by many contemporary scholars, that Matthew and Luke promoted the doctrine of virgin birth. This, despite the idea of virgin birth having no precedent anywhere in Jewish Scriptures, canonical or otherwise, and being totally alien to Judaic thought and rationale. More importantly, the concept of virgin birth negated the genealogical basis of blood descent upon which Judaism was founded.

Strangely enough, Matthew and Luke provide the only surviving genealogies of Jesus. And the very existence of an ancestral listing, however theologically contrived it may have been, would constitute proof that Jesus had a known father.

GENEALOGIES

Expectancy that the Messiah would come from the line of David, a descendant of Judah, meant that stringent records were kept by the Davidic family, the leading lay family at the time of Jesus. Matthew and Luke claimed that both Joseph and Mary were Davidic, and that Jesus was a direct descendant of David. Yet the names mentioned in the respective lists of Jesus' ancestors differ dramatically, and no attempt to harmonize them has ever been successful. Each genealogy was composed to suit the writer's theological purposes, and neither list of names is likely to be historically accurate. Separate genealogies, however, would have already existed for Joseph and Mary. And if each gospel was based on one or the other's genealogy, then this would explain the huge discrepancy between the names given.

Authentic Jewish genealogies proved the paternal line of descent, but Luke, being a less strictly "Jewish" gospel than Matthew, used Mary's genealogy as his source for ancestral names. Both writers insist that Joseph was not Jesus' biological father, but identifying the father was apparently not a viable option. The father must have been a source of severe embarrassment; otherwise his name would have been used to validate Jesus' credentials. No doubt the early Jewish Christians had reasons to conceal it, but it was a strategy that backfired in the long term.

In the First Letter to Timothy, the author warned against listening to "fables" and "godless and silly myths" associated with Jesus that had spread among the Gentile church outside Palestine. In a transparent attack on writers such as Matthew and Luke, he demanded that church members did not "occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculation rather than divine training that is known by faith."⁵ This type of literature sparked a great deal of interest among new converts. Evidently, the tendency of these Gentile novices was to interpret them naively and draw the wrong conclusions. If they mistakenly assumed that Jesus had no human father -- that his birth was a miracle -- then belief in him was made all too easy. Genuine faith sprung from

‘divine training,’ not from “silly myths.” Plainly, this was an argument that fell on deaf ears.

VIRGIN BIRTH

Insiders, who remained loyal followers despite knowing the facts, lacked confidence in the ability of outsiders to do likewise. Paul, for example, decided the best way to deal with Jesus’ paternity was to avoid any mention of it. He knew that such a strategy could never succeed in converting Palestinian Jews, but they were not his target audience. In any case, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. effectively ended the influence of the Palestinian Church on the future development of Christianity. Thereafter, the missionary focus was overwhelmingly on the Gentile nations.

Nevertheless, the problematical subject of Jesus’ father lingered, and the Roman church needed to unravel it. It could not claim that Jesus was God outright because he had addressed God as *Abba* or ‘Father.’ This was taken as proof that he was at least the ‘Son of God.’ But this was not good enough. Gentiles were accustomed to legends of gods descending from heaven to impregnate women on earth, and so already had a long tradition of worshipping ‘sons of gods.’ The danger existed that Jesus would be understood as just another son of Zeus.

A human father, however, would have contradicted Jesus’ divinity. Worse still, it would have meant that the unmarried Mary had participated in an adulterous sexual tryst to conceive him. And that was unthinkable. The solution was to transform “fables” and “myths” into absolute truths. Mary, it was decided, had conceived a child miraculously and given birth as a virgin. But if Jesus had no human father, then exactly who, or what, was he?

Ironically, the dynamics of how Mary conceived while preserving her virginity intact provided fertile breeding ground for all manner of cerebral hypotheses by Greek-speaking intellectuals. After a great deal of deliberation and heated dispute, the Church eventually nailed its mast to the high theological concept of the Trinity. No longer could he be regarded as a first century Palestinian Jew. Simultaneously God, the Son of God, and the Holy Spirit, Jesus was Master of the Universe. The world’s first and only hermetically sealed individual; spontaneously generated inside the womb of his mother; without sexual intercourse, lacking the sperm, chromosomes, and DNA of a human father, and devoid of the particular genetic signature of a paternal ancestry. Pagan legends of virgin births were simply satanic imitations of the real thing. The devil, it was argued, always preempts God in order to lead the ignorant masses astray.

SON OF GOD?

The Jews, meanwhile, had heard it all before. Alexander the Great had claimed to be the son of God, and even though he was still venerated as a quasi prophet among many Jews,⁶ they were not about to tolerate the same idea about one of their own kind. Yahweh did not impregnate women. He was spirit only, and had given the responsibility for human reproduction to Adam and Eve when He commissioned them to “be fruitful, multiply, and have dominion.”⁷ The precondition for the creative process was that “the two shall become one flesh,” otherwise Adam was superfluous. Since the earliest Christians were Jews, they did not believe nor did they teach that Mary conceived a child without a human sexual partner.

On the other hand, an event of such monumental significance for Judaism and the whole world -- a woman producing a child directly by God -- would surely have been proclaimed ceaselessly and unambiguously by those who knew it. That God's only Son was living on the earth would have had immense repercussions for everyone alive at the time. He would be tracked down and followed everywhere, twenty-four hours a day. His words would be Law; every syllable recorded instantly, copied, and disseminated as quickly as technology allowed. No Emperor, King, or Priest would dare contradict him. Human society could never be the same again.

But the truth is that while Jesus was alive, nobody knew him as the Son of God. Had they done so, he would not have been left to die alone. None of his disciples, or even the members of his own family (according to Mark, Matthew and Luke), were present at his public execution. Reportedly, Mary and her other children even tried to "seize" Jesus to prevent him from speaking in public.⁸ So either his mother had forgotten about the miraculous nature of his conception, or there was nothing miraculous about it.

Others, who supposedly knew the truth of Jesus' divine status, did little or nothing constructive to help him while he was alive. The so called 'wise men' dropped off their gifts and sped back home never to show again, leaving Mary alone with the baby and at the mercy of Herod. Joseph played no part whatsoever in Jesus' adult life. John the Baptist did not become a disciple, but maintained his own separate group of followers who constituted a rival sect. Peter, supposedly the 'rock' upon which Jesus built his church, denied any knowledge of him once the going got tough. Such embarrassing information was only included in the gospels because it was common knowledge and, despite the awkward questions it raised, could not be edited out.

PRIMACY OF DOCTRINE

Absence of clear and explicit statements on Jesus' parentage enabled the Church to force its own interpretation onto the biblical texts. The doctrine of virgin birth was justified mainly by the inclusion of the Greek word for "virgin" in the nativity accounts of Matthew and Luke. However, the literal reading of "virgin" adopted by the Church was entirely out of context. All Jewish girls were described as virgins before marriage, and nothing special or extraordinary was invoked by use of the word. Conveniently overlooked, 'virgin' was no longer used by the gospel writers to describe Mary after Jesus was born, which was the whole point of the doctrine.

Mark's gospel, usually dated the earliest, recorded nothing of the circumstances of Jesus' birth. The author afforded no special honor to Mary, and Joseph was not even mentioned. Mark recorded an incident when neighbors used the highly unorthodox genealogical phrase, "son of Mary" to describe Jesus, an insult in a society where maternal identification was used only for somebody whose father was either unknown or unmentionable.

"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Mark 6:3

The idea that Jesus' father was incognito among his own townsfolk is not credible. The neighbors' comments simply reflected the common gossip that Jesus' father was not the father of Mary's other children. People living in tightly knit communities, especially in

first century Palestine, generally thrive on scandal of this sort. Realistically, the reason why they “took offense” at Jesus was linked to his status in the community, which was derived from his parentage, not from his employment.

The Gospel of John mentioned no details of Jesus’ birth, and the famous *logos* introduction circumvented it. Paul wrote only that Jesus was “born according to the flesh,”⁹ which carried no implication of supernatural involvement whatsoever.

Following ratification of the Nicene Creed in 323 C.E. the official Church position was that the truth was signed, sealed, and delivered. Although most new converts were illiterate, they still needed protection from manipulation by unscrupulous heretics, who might exploit apparent contradictions in the New Testament. The Church, therefore, banned the reading and disseminating of Holy Scripture to all who were not its own officers. Even low-ranking priests were restricted access to many texts.

Now that the general public has unfettered access to the scriptures, the nativity stories of Matthew and Luke are probably the two most widely read sections of the entire Bible. The colossal Christmas phenomenon has evolved out of them, and even if people know little about the Old Testament, and next to nothing about Jesus’ life, at least they know something about his birth. And the popular interpretation of the Christmas story still rests on precisely the same pseudo-literal reading of the narrative, isolated from any historical, sectarian, or literary influences that the ancient Church stipulated.

MATTHEW AND LUKE -- JEWISH SCRIBES

Because their accounts of Jesus’ birth referenced ancient Jewish texts, Matthew and Luke kept within the parameters of Jewish tradition. Clearly, both understood that the circumstances of Jesus’ birth proved he was the Messiah, but if he were not the child of a normal married Israelite couple, then they also understood that in certain special cases an illicit sexual union could produce divinely ordained progeny.

This was not mainstream Jewish philosophy. Sexual relationships outside the confines of the Law could be life-threatening for Second Temple Jews, and extremely prejudicial against the child itself. The Bible, however, contains numerous tales of sexual intrigues and shenanigans. Seduction and betrayal were constantly recurring themes in the lives of Jewish heroes, and even if much of the content was obviously mythologized, most of the stories have credible human characterization and incident, and often portray the central figures unflatteringly. These illicit sexual activities baffle modern readers of the Bible, but the specialty of Jewish scribes was to interpret and explain issues not directly covered by the Law of Moses. And the extraordinary circumstances of Jesus’ birth necessitated an explanation based on these *extra*-legal scriptural precedents. This is the key to understanding the infancy narratives in Matthew and Luke.

Responsible for preserving the literary heritage of the community, scribes were also the keepers of an important legacy of oral traditions closely guarded secret teachings, knowledge of which contributed to the scribes’ aura of wisdom and learning, and gave them an elevated status in society,¹⁰ not just in Palestine, but also in the large Jewish communities of the Diaspora. The works of Josephus, the New Testament, and the Dead Sea Scrolls prove that first century scribes were not limited to any particular branch of Judaism.

It was forbidden to write down the oral teachings, and they could not be divulged to

ordinary people lest they be misused. After the destruction of the Temple some of the oral traditions were recorded, surviving in the rabbinic writings of the Mishnah and the Talmud, which date between 150 C.E. and 450 C.E. The most secret teachings were not written down until early medieval times, when the literature of the Kabbalah was compiled.

Evidence this policy of cautious discretion permeated early Jewish Christian literature comes from the letters of Clement of Alexandria (c.150 -- 250 C.E.), a leading apologist and missionary to the Gentiles. Clement wrote to a man named Theodore, and though only parts of his letter remain, he throws light on the origins of Mark's gospel.

As for Mark, then, during Peter's stay in Rome, he wrote an account of the Lord's doings, not, however, declaring all, nor yet hinting at the secret ones, but selecting those he thought most useful for increasing the faith of those who were being instructed...he yet did not divulge the things not to be uttered, nor did he write down the hierophantic teachings of the Lord. In a short treatise entitled *The Mysteries of the Faith not to be Divulged to All*, Clement expanded on this tradition;

The wise do not utter with their mouth what they reason in council. "But what you hear in the ear," says the Lord, "proclaim upon the houses," bidding them receive the secret traditions of the true knowledge, and expound them aloft and conspicuously; and as we have heard in the ear, so to deliver them to whom it is requisite; but not enjoining us to communicate to all without distinction, what is said to them in parables.

One of the scribes' most important duties was to compose the mandatory genealogies required of candidates for public office. As the lawyers of their day, they were adept at camouflaging harsh truths and putting a spin on information to suit their clients. As highly educated scribes, albeit from different schools, Matthew and Luke wrote genealogies of Jesus principally for clients familiar with an esoteric methodology of scriptural exegesis. Gentile readers and uninformed Jews were unlikely to grasp the deeper meaning embedded in the narrative.

Creative scribes, as opposed to copyists, had to satisfy the soul of the reader. This meant conforming to certain conventions. As with sacred architecture, religiously inspired manuscripts were constructed on symmetrical principles. A text required a subtle inner harmony to complement its obvious outer structure; or else it read as nothing more than inventory. Code, symbol, and cryptic allusion were among the literary techniques used to preserve the sanctity of core truths and protect them from outsiders. An effective composition was far greater than the sum of its parts.

The Church, on the other hand, was primarily concerned that the content of any given text did not threaten the Church's theological underpinnings. It was believed, rightly or wrongly, that the four gospels selected for inclusion in the New Testament fulfilled this need better than any others. Each gospel had a different emphasis, but the Church intended that its appeal would come only from a fundamentalist reading of the prose. In some ways, this succeeded in gratifying the religious impulse of the masses, but by stressing only the blatant externals of the narrative, its subtle internal qualities were neglected. Consequently, half-truth became the foundation of Christian faith; belief, not understanding, the traditional message of the Church.

Most people today read scripture in the same way as they read biography or journalism.

Even if sacred literature is appreciated in general terms, readers usually remain ignorant of the point intended by the author. This is never truer than of the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke.

Both writers made extensive use of Mark's gospel to compose their much longer versions, but included identical sayings of Jesus not found in Mark, believed to originate in a lost collection of teachings known for convenience sake as 'Q.'¹¹ The significance of this is that they did not borrow one from the other; each was unaware of the other's account. Their respective infancy narratives and genealogical lists are radically dissimilar because they were drawn from unrelated sources. The only obvious thing they have in common is the affirmation that Joseph was not Jesus' father. But as they accepted that Jesus' ancestry was the determinative factor in fixing his messianic status, the implicit identification of his father was *the* central component of their opening chapters.

It is worth repeating -- every Palestinian Jew belonged to a social caste. Jesus was no exception. His comment, "the harvest is great, but the laborers are few," was a typical agricultural metaphor to bemoan the lack of manpower his ministry had attracted. It would be naïve to imagine that, in a society obsessed with bloodline, the reason why Jesus was snubbed by fellow Jews had nothing to do with his birth status. Mathew and Luke wrote that "nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known."¹² Two thousand years have passed -- it is time we knew the truth, and let the chips fall wherever they may.

2 The Family of the New Abraham

Nobody knows exactly who the author of Luke's gospel was or where it was written, but historical research dates its composition to sometime during the last three decades of the first century C.E. Written in a sophisticated literary style of the Greek language, it emulated the style of language used in the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Pentateuch, which proves the author was highly educated. The Septuagint, regarded with awe during ancient times, was generally accepted as being divinely inspired.¹ So Luke used the same manner of expression to demonstrate that his account of Jesus' life reflected the same divine *modus operandi*.

A considerable amount of content was unique to Luke, and this material provided the spine of his gospel. Specifically, it was used in the infancy narratives of Jesus and John the Baptist to illuminate the 'truth' of Jesus' parentage.

In the formal preface to his gospel, and without impugning any other writers by name, Luke suggests that he is the most trustworthy chronicler of events.² It would be a serious mistake, however, to expect totally accurate history. Luke's sources, both for his gospel and the Book of Acts, would have been a combination of fact, speculation, proclamation, and fabrication, and the historicity of names and events were always of secondary importance to the schematization he applied to present his case. Not only that, Luke wrote in the time-honored way typical of religiously motivated texts -- so newcomers and lower ranks of the sect would not be offended by its content. He subscribed to the view that cold hard facts don't gain adherents to a cause as effectively as dramatic invention, so his manuscript was composed accordingly.

For example, Luke needed to show that Jesus' birthplace was Bethlehem, Judea, because of a prophecy in the Old Testament which early Christians interpreted as meaning that the Messiah would be born there.³ The problem was that Jesus was well known for having been raised in Galilee. His solution was to create a storyline with impossible facts.

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be enrolled. This was the first enrollment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be enrolled, each to his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be enrolled with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

Luke 2:1-5

Earlier in his gospel, Luke stated that Jesus was born "in the days of Herod, King of Judea. Herod died in 4 B.C.E. The supposed journey from Galilee to Bethlehem was in response to a census called by the Roman Emperor Augustus. This particular census, however, is known by historians to have occurred in 6-7 C.E., more than ten years after the death of Herod. And to compound matters further, it only applied to Judea, not Galilee. Stranger still is the claim that the Romans required people to travel to their ancestral villages to register for taxation purposes. There is no record of any such requirement for any tax census in the history of the Roman Empire. Needless to say, Luke's intention was not so much to deceive the reader as it was to impress upon him that Jesus was the Messiah of prophecy.

Every religion had its mysteries and secrets, and Christianity was no different -- on the contrary, it had more secrets than most. This was highly sensitive material that could

never be casually revealed lest it be misunderstood, or much worse, fall into the hands of the Church's enemies. Only after a novice had grown sufficiently in faith, and gained the trust of others, was he granted access to the group's closely guarded secrets. Usually, this was a slow and deliberate process because the higher ranks derived status, wealth, and respect from the lower orders by manipulating these hidden 'truths.' And the one thing that the early Church never wanted made public was the truth of Jesus' origins. Yet this information, which contained the power to undermine its credibility and challenge its authority, is precisely what Luke revealed.

THE NATIVITIES

Luke's opening chapter was devoted entirely to a complex theological rationalization of Jesus' conception. And it was no coincidence that his account began with an identification of the parents of John the Baptist.

In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

Luke 1:1-5

This was followed by two separate annunciations from the angel Gabriel to herald first the birth of John the Baptist and second Jesus. The details of the two nativities were intertwined and carefully constructed, but went much further than was necessary to simply inform the reader that John was the forerunner of Jesus.

Most Bible commentaries note that Luke's infancy narratives were patterned on birth legends of Jewish heroes of the past. And the introduction of John's parents was a clear pointer to that. Zacharias and Elisabeth represented the return of Abraham, the original Hebrew patriarch, and his wife Sarah. Key components in the story of Abraham's family, as recorded in Genesis, were copied by Luke and insinuated into the lives of Zacharias and Elisabeth. Both couples were elderly; Abraham and Zacharias "walk blameless;" as Sarah was "childless," so Elisabeth was "barren." God told Abraham that his wife will bear him a son and also named the child; the angel Gabriel gave the same message to Zacharias and also named his son. Both men responded with incredulity [Table 2].

Annunciations, 'old age,' and 'barren' motifs, also formed part of the birth accounts of Isaac, Samson, and Samuel. And the consensus view among scholars is that Luke lifted his characterizations and plotlines from the Hebrew Bible to show that God's providence had now passed from the old era of Israel to the new era of Jesus. Close analysis of the text, however, reveals that the birth annunciations and infancy narratives within Zacharias' family were integrated into a unity specifically designed to replicate the dynamics of Abraham's family. So rather than symbolizing a break with the past, the 'new era' represented a return to former times. Luke, as an ancient historian, believed that the direction of salvation history was cyclical and not linear.

The relevance of intricate family-based plot mechanics in the stories of Old Testament legends has largely been neglected due to the predisposition of both clergymen and scholars to regard Jesus as a self-contained unit -- regardless of whether he is understood as the Son of God, a wandering holy man, a political revolutionary, an itinerant preacher, or a Mediterranean peasant. In Jewish tradition, each person was by definition part of a complex web of blood relationships from which they could not be separated -- father, mother, son, daughter, brother, sister, and so on. No man was an island. Principal actors

in the sacred texts thrived on human interaction. And the reason so many protagonists and dramas from the Bible have held the popular imagination for so long is that they resonate with ordinary people.

The scribes who wrote Genesis explained that it took three generations to establish the nation of Israel. In the Old Testament, therefore, the preferred divine self-appellation was not “God of Abraham” but “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” Likewise, the new Israel would be made by descendants of the new Abraham. Each member of Luke’s cast of characters -- Zacharias, Elisabeth, Mary, John the Baptist, and Jesus -- had its counterpart in Abraham’s family [Table 1]. The necessity of providential archetypes was the basic theological premise underlying Luke’s opening chapter.

Table 1. FAMILIES OF FAITH

Source	Father	Mother	Maid	First Son	Second Son
Genesis	Abraham	Sarah	Hagar	Ishmael	Isaac
Luke	Zacharias	Elisabeth	Mary	John	Jesus

THE VISITATION

Luke might not have been an historian in the modern sense of the word, but he knew how to structure his sources to fit a chronological plan that allowed him to chart a detailed scheduling of events. So in Luke-Acts, the time and place of incidents was never haphazard as it was in other gospel accounts. It is surprising, therefore, to notice that between the time of Gabriel’s annunciation to Mary and the birth of Jesus, an apparent contradiction exists between the storyline and the sequence of events that requires explanation. The timeline is as follows:

Gabriel announces to Zacharias that his elderly wife Elisabeth is to give birth to a son who shall be named John.
Luke 1:13

Six months later, Gabriel announces to Mary that she will give birth to a son who shall be named Jesus.
Luke 1:26

Mary goes “with haste” to the house of Zacharias.
Luke 1:39

Three months later, Mary leaves the house of Zacharias.
Luke 1:56

Elisabeth gives birth to John.
Luke 1:57

Mary gives birth to Jesus in a manger in Bethlehem.
Luke 2:7

Elisabeth was already six months pregnant with John the Baptist when Gabriel told Mary to go to the house of Zacharias.

And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus... And Mary said to the angel, "How shall this be, since I have no husband?" And the angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible. "And Mary said, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word." And the angel departed from her. In those days Mary arose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zacharias and greeted Elizabeth.

Luke 1:31-40

The Greek phrase "*meta spoudes*," is normally translated as "with haste," but this does not suit the context here. Mary would hardly have rushed to congratulate Elisabeth on her pregnancy when six months had already elapsed. If they were "kinswomen" or sisters, then Mary would have already known, and her response to Gabriel did not suggest otherwise. Mary would be even less enthusiastic to give news that she had just conceived a child out of wedlock. But she only consented to her *future* pregnancy. Luke's use of future tenses ruled out the possibility that she conceived at the moment the angel spoke, and nothing in the narrative implies that it had already occurred.

Jane Schaberg explained that the phrase *meta spoudes* was an idiom used several times in Greek translations of the Hebrew Bible, used to denote anxiety and a disturbed psychological or spiritual condition.⁴ Any movement implied was from a peaceful state of mind toward one of high stress. The only other occasion where *meta spoudes* was used in the New Testament is in Mark's famous banquet scene when Herod Antipas, bewitched by the dancing of Salome, daughter of his newly acquired wife Herodias, promised to give her whatever she wished. After consulting with her mother, Salome returned "with haste" and asked the king for the head of John the Baptist.

For when Herodias' daughter came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you wish, and I will grant it." And he vowed to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, even half of my kingdom." And she went out, and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the baptizer." And she came in immediately with haste to the king, and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

Mark 6:22-26

The translation of *meta spoudes* as "with haste" is particularly redundant here, because it is preceded by "came in immediately," which means exactly the same thing. In the context Mark used it, *meta spoudes* described Herodias' mental state, the result of her mother's extraordinary request.

A journey from Galilee, through the dangerous gauntlet of Samaria and into the hill country of Judea, in a society where betrothed women did not normally go out in public, was not something that could be done without considerable logistical preparation. Luke's use of *meta spoudes* implied that Mary's trip was not sanctioned by Joseph's family. Her psychological condition was unlikely to have been one of unbridled joy, as church tradition would have us believe. Realistically, Mary was extremely apprehensive about visiting the house of Zacharias. Moreover, her cause for concern was connected to the

angelic message she had received. Gabriel did not specify with whom Mary was to conceive a child, but his statement, “your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has *also* conceived a son,” suggested it would be in the same way as John was conceived.

As soon as Mary entered the home, the fetal John the Baptist heard the sound of her voice, recognized her as the future mother of Jesus, and leapt for joy inside the womb. His mother Elisabeth exclaimed,

Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb! And why is this granted me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?... Blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.

Luke 1:42-45

At a stroke, Luke fixed the superiority of Jesus over John. Most New Testament scholars consider that Luke’s repeated references to John the Baptist were intended to emphasize his inferiority to Jesus. But this notion misses the deeper implications Luke drew from the nature of their relationship.

Because Elisabeth was described as Mary’s *sungenis*, variously translated as “kinswoman”, “relative,” or “sister,” this has been taken as evidence that John the Baptist and Jesus were cousins. Skeptics cite Luke as the sole source to attest to this, and that its significance was far too great for other writers to disregard. In the end, this is moot because any familial connection between the two mothers-to-be was incidental to the reason for Mary’s visit.

Mary’s visit was not a Jewish family protocol. While in the betrothal period, a woman was expected to remain at the husband’s home. By showing up at Zacharias’ house, Mary showed Elisabeth that she had “believed” what she had been told. That “there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken” meant that Mary had agreed to complete her mission. This ‘mission’ required action and not simply lip service. Her deeds would result in her being the “mother of the Lord.”

As the younger ‘sister’, the reader might assume that Mary had come to help with chores and take the burden off Elisabeth during the final months of her pregnancy. As the time of John’s birth drew near, Mary’s responsibilities would increase, and her assistance would be vital during labor and in the days immediately following childbirth, especially in view of the mother’s supposed old age and that the newborn child purportedly had no elder siblings. All these things might normally be taken for granted.

Priestly families, however, usually kept slaves or servants who took care of menial tasks. But more importantly, Mary did not actually stay for the full term of Elisabeth’s pregnancy. She left the house after about three months; before John was born, and did not return. Luke gave no reason for her abrupt departure:

And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home. Now the time came for Elisabeth to be delivered, and she gave birth to a son. And her neighbors and kinsfolk heard that the Lord had shown great mercy to her, and they rejoiced with her.

Luke 1:56-58

If her visit was a providential necessity, why was Mary absent precisely at the time she

was needed the most? It made no sense for her to leave before John's birth. Her next appearance in the narrative was to give birth to Jesus at Bethlehem six months later. Based on the timeline of events, as Mary was not yet pregnant at the time of the angelic announcement, conception must have occurred during her stay at the house of Zacharias.

THE FATHER OF MARY'S CHILD

Luke's plot mechanics derived from the template of Abraham's family that he had adopted for Zacharias. Implicit in Mary's sudden and unexplained exit was a corresponding parallel with the banishment of Hagar from the house of Abraham. Hagar was Sarah's servant girl who became pregnant by Abraham. As Sarah was 'barren,' she was initially compliant with the idea of Hagar bearing her husband's child, but eventually she threw out both the maid and her son in a fit of jealous rage. Luke explained that Mary left the house of Zacharias after "about three months," which is when her pregnancy would have started to become noticeable. Elisabeth reacted in the same manner as Sarah. Mary was expelled.

In this strictly patriarchal society, wives had a religious duty to be obedient to their husbands. The wife's dependence on her husband was total. No matter what the circumstances, the right to divorce belonged to the husband alone. Polygamy was practiced at the time, and if a husband could afford a concubine, the wife had to tolerate it. If Elisabeth was no longer comfortable with Mary's presence, the most she could do was to force her to leave the house.

Gabriel's original message to Zacharias was to inform him that he would father a son by his wife, Elisabeth. Gabriel's second message was about Mary's child, but the father was not specified, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." This famous phrase has been interpreted naively to mean that Luke described a spontaneous conception in Mary's womb by supernatural powers. Nothing, as they say, could be further from the truth.

To the ancients, an unseen force was present in all conceptions of human life. The concept of sex with the divine was a familiar one in the Mediterranean world, and lay behind the ritual practices of temple prostitution and *heiros gamos*, which still prevailed in some parts. The spirit of the god or goddess would enter the body of one or both participants during intercourse, and offspring from such unions would be considered holy. Although such practices were officially anathema in Second Temple Judaism, the process of sexual reproduction and birth was nevertheless closely linked to the divine will. Jews frequently invoked God's participation to increase fertility and particularly to produce male heirs.

The idioms "The Most High," "Son of God," and "Holy Spirit," were titles used by Jewish scribes (used regularly by the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the period shortly before Luke wrote), to signal a providential association between people and events. As a priest who "walks blameless in the Lord," Zacharias was recognized as God's representative in the conception of his children. From the instant Mary's impending pregnancy was announced, to the moment it was acknowledged, the only man mentioned by name in the narrative was Zacharias. On the evidence of Luke's gospel, Zacharias is the sole candidate to be the father of Jesus.

MARY, HANNAH, AND RUTH

To show a precedent for the conception of a holy child from an illicit sexual relationship between a priest and a younger woman, Luke exploited the story of Hannah and Eli from the First Book of Samuel [see Table 3]. Hannah went to the temple to pray for a son:

O Lord of Hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thy maidservant, and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant, but wilt give to thy maidservant a son.

1 Sam 1:11

The Greek word *doule*, used to describe Hannah, is usually translated as “maidservant,” “handmaid,” or “bondswoman,” but technically the closest meaning is “slave girl.” Mary was also described as a *doule* in Luke 1:38, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word,” to link her with Hannah.

Eli, the priest on duty while Hannah prayed, noticed her quietness, and initially believed she had been drinking. She denied it, and implored Eli, “not to regard your maidservant as a base woman.” Accepting what she told him, Eli granted her prayer request. This curious exchange ended with Hannah saying, “Let your maidservant find favor in your eyes.” She became pregnant and gave birth to a son, Samuel, whose destiny was to be one of Israel’s greatest prophets. Samuel anointed Saul as the first ever King of Israel, and later anointed David as Saul’s replacement.

The relationship between Hannah and Eli was well out of the ordinary. As a “slave girl,” her desire for a son was facilitated by her ‘master.’ But in this instance, her master was clearly not her husband, Elkanah. Who then, was her master? Hannah identified herself as the *doule* of both God and Eli. The expression, “Let your maidservant find favor in your eyes,” suggests that she hoped Eli would find her physically attractive.

After Samuel was born, Hannah returned to Eli and handed him over to be brought up ‘in the service of the Lord.’ Elkanah could only have agreed with this plan if Samuel were not his own son. Apart from the reality that precious sons would never have been given away, the Law of Moses stated that first-born sons were to be given to the priesthood and purchased back for a ransom payment.⁵ Priests could not adopt male heirs. Membership of the priesthood was inherited through direct blood descent, and by no other means. Even prophets were not permitted to carry out priestly duties.

Eli already had two sons, Hophni and Phineas. But an angel told Eli that although the Lord had promised that his “house and the house of your father should go in and out before me forever,” his sons had shown themselves unworthy. Accordingly, they were killed in battle as punishment for their sins. The angel added that “the man of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared....And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and in my mind.”⁶ As Samuel carried out priestly ritual duties, which are plainly described in the biblical text,⁷ the “faithful priest” could only be a reference to Samuel, son of Eli and Hannah.

Here then, was a nativity story of one of Judaism’s most important figures -- and he was the illegitimate son of a priest and a *doule*. This explains why scribes in the time of Jesus differed with priests on the question of allowing illegitimate sons into the priesthood. Obviously, they understood that Samuel was a priest.

Although the meaning behind the story of Hannah and Eli is transparent enough, orthodox Jews in the Second Temple period tried to cloud the issue of Samuel’s

parentage to conform to their own religious sensibilities. Samuel was regarded so highly in Pharisaic tradition that he could not possibly have been of impure blood. Fundamentalist Pharisees would have drawn considerable discomfort from the idea that he was a priest. Samuel was illegitimate if Eli, and not Elkanah, was his biological father. And according to the stipulations of Ezra 2:61-63 and Nehemiah 7:63-65, illegitimate sons of priests could not hold priestly office. For this reason, Samuel was identified as a Levite in I Chronicles. Modern textual scholars, however, agree that Chronicles was written as a later attempt to redact embarrassments from the Book of Samuel.

Cynics, who regard this entire episode as an invention with no historical value whatsoever, still need to provide a convincing explanation as to why scribes chose to describe Samuel's conception in this way. The most logical reason to disclose his illegitimacy was to bear witness to a deep-seated principle that transcended the Law of Moses to consecrate his birth. And by using the model of Samuel's conception by Hannah and Eli to throw light on Jesus' conception by Mary and Zacharias, Luke testified to the same principle.

A sexual relationship between a *doule* and her master was also recounted in the Old Testament story of Ruth and Boaz, great grandparents of King David. As described in the Book of Ruth, Ruth's husband died leaving her childless, so her mother-in-law Naomi decided to fix her up with Boaz, a wealthy family relative. One night, Naomi instructed Ruth to wait until Boaz had finished dining and to "observe the place where he lies; go and uncover his feet and lie down." In ancient Hebrew, 'feet' was often used as a euphemism for genitals.⁸ Ruth "came stealthily and uncovered his feet, and lay down," Boaz awoke startled and asked who she was. Her response was, "I am Ruth; spread your wings over your maidservant, for you are my redeemer." Eventually they married and produced a son, Obed, who became the grandfather of David.

The stories of Hannah and Mary followed the pattern established by Ruth. In each account, none of the women were described as victims of predatory male overlords. Each woman sacrificed herself willingly, risking her life and reputation, to give birth to a child of providential significance.

CANTICLES OF PRAISE

Mary's song of praise, known as the *Magnificat*, is generally acknowledged to have been based on Hannah's own celebratory hymn from 1 Sam 2:1-10. There is some scholarly argument whether or not Mary's verses were originally recited by Elisabeth, in honor of John the Baptist, but that is tangential. Luke associated Hannah with Mary to highlight the parallel nature of their pregnancies. In the opening verse of the *Magnificat*, Mary repeated Hannah's recognition of herself as God's slave girl. "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden." Luke 1:47-48

Despite the illegitimacy of their children and the negative societal consequences it could hold for mother and child, each woman expressed delight in their reward from heaven. They thanked God profusely, and heralded their children in terms of messianic prophecy [Table 3].

Luke also attributed a song of thanksgiving to Zacharias. Known traditionally as the *Benedictus*, it began with a proclamation on the unborn Jesus:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.

Luke 1:69

The odd phrase ‘horn of salvation’ further cemented Zacharias’ relationship with Mary/Hannah. This expression was drawn from Hannah’s song at the birth of Samuel:

And Hannah prayed, and said; my heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation.

I Sam 2:1

“Horn” was a symbol used regularly in many ancient cultures to denote abundance or fertility, but more often than not to represent lineage. “Mine horn is exalted” referred to Hannah’s bloodline, to which God had granted a special honor. The “horn of salvation” mentioned by Zacharias signified the messianic lineage. But although he was referring to the unborn Jesus, this accolade was curiously given at the occasion of John’s birth.

Did Zacharias know about the miraculous conception of Jesus? Does this explain how he understood Jesus’ superior status to John? No. If Zacharias had believed that Mary was carrying the Son of God in her womb, he would never have allowed her to leave his house. Zacharias’ special interest came from his role in Jesus’ conception, and this is why he gave thanks. The “horn of salvation” was the messianic bloodline of Zacharias and the Davidic Mary.

In the *Magnificat*, Mary referred to her pregnancy as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, “he has helped his servant Israel... as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity forever.” Likewise, Zacharias praises God for remembering, “the oath which he swore to our father Abraham.” The union of Mary and Zacharias completed the original covenant made with Abraham. Thus Luke closed his opening chapter by sealing the association with which he began it.

FAMILY OF THE NEW ABRAHAM

In the Abraham-Zacharias parallel, each was the father of two sons of dispensational relevance. One son by his wife, and the other by his wife’s maid, or *doule*. Isaac was the son of Abraham and Sarah, Ishmael the son of Abraham and Hagar. Similarly, John the Baptist was the son of Zacharias and Elisabeth, and Jesus was the son of Zacharias and Mary.

Despite Abraham’s pleading, God favored Isaac over Ishmael the first born, who was later banished into the wilderness. In the family of the new Abraham, God favored Jesus, “and the child grew strong, filled with wisdom and the favor of God was upon him,” over John the Baptist, the first born, who was “in the wilderness” until his public ministry began [Table 2]. The sons of Abraham prefigured the sons of Zacharias.

According to Genesis, Isaac also had two sons, Esau and Jacob, who were twins. Once again, the second born was preferred by God. While Isaac’s wife Rebecca was pregnant, the unborn twins jostled for position inside her womb. God’s message to her at that time was, “the one shall be stronger than the other; the elder shall serve the younger”. Though Esau was the first born, Jacob was the founder of the nation of Israel. Luke described the unborn John the Baptist leaping in the womb of Elisabeth to make the association with

Esau and Jacob. Therefore, John the elder brother should serve Jesus the younger. Both instances represented a reversal of Jewish tradition, whereby the firstborn son was paramount, but Luke merely used a formula that was already well known in Jewish Christian circles.

Table 2. THE SONS OF ABRAHAM AND ZACHARIAS

FIRST-BORN SONS

Ishmael

God was with the boy, and he grew up; and he lived in the wilderness.
Gen 21:20

John the Baptist

And the child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness.
Luke 1:80

SECOND-BORN SONS

Isaac

“O, that Ishmael might live in Thy sight.” No...I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year.
Gen 17:18-21

Jesus

Blessed be the Lord God...he has raised for us a horn of salvation...to remember the holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham.
Luke 1: 69-73

The Clementine literature is a collection of ancient writings originating from a Jewish-Christian sect, which purported to be a transcript of a series of discourses given by the apostle Peter. Most scholars date its composition somewhere between the second and third centuries, but the original source material was likely to be much earlier. The curious scene between Peter and Simon Magus described in the Book of Acts⁹ betrayed a distinct familiarity on Luke’s part with the Clementine writings, large sections of which consisted of a debate between the two men. One of Peter’s main arguments was that history progressed according to a divine plan, which entailed specific pairs with providential significance.

For, as I was beginning to say, God has appointed for this world certain pairs; and he who comes first of the pairs is evil, he who comes second, of good.¹⁰

This theory was further elaborated as a paradigm of sibling rivalry, the first born son intrinsically inferior to the second born. Ishmael and Isaac are cited as examples along

with Esau and Jacob.

As in the beginning God, who is one, like a right hand a left, made the heavens first and then the earth, so also He constituted all the combinations in order; but upon men He no more does this, but varies all the combinations. For whereas from Him the greater things come first, and the inferior second, we find the opposite in men -- the first worse, and the second superior.

Therefore from Adam, who was made after the image of God, there sprang first the unrighteous Cain, and then the righteous Abel....From Abraham also, the patriarchs of our nation, two sprang -- Ishmael first, then Isaac, who was blessed of God. And from Isaac himself, in like manner, there were again two -- Esau the profane, and Jacob the pious. So, first in birth, as the first born in the world, was the high priest Aaron, then the lawgiver Moses.¹¹

Peter described John as “a day-Baptist, who was also, according to the method of combination, the forerunner of our Lord Jesus.” As the first-born son, John the Baptist not only ranked lower than Jesus, he was Jesus’ natural enemy. When Luke’s gospel was written, it was not understood outside Christian circles that John was inferior to Jesus. John was the far more popular figure, and his elevated status, as articulated by Josephus, was not earned through any association with Jesus. So Luke trod carefully. Everything was implicit.

As he drew from scriptural tradition to explain the relationship between Jesus and John, Luke described John’s birth as the fulfillment of a famous prophecy from the Book of Malachi that predicted the prophet Elijah would return in the days before the Lord’s coming:

And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready for the Lord a people prepared."
Luke 1:16-17

Malachi had prefaced his prediction with a reminder to remember “my servant Moses”.¹² This is key to Lucan theology, because a tradition existed that the Messiah and the returning Elijah would together repeat the fraternal cooperation between Aaron and Moses.¹³ The greatest Jewish hero of all time, the younger Moses was the undisputed leader of the two brothers. Cognizant that John the Baptist, ‘in the spirit and power of Elijah,’ was a priestly descendant of Aaron, the older brother, Luke sought a way to link Jesus with Moses. He made the connection in Jesus’ genealogy, while delineating his descent from King David.

When David was king of Israel [tenth century B.C.E.], belief developed that his ancestral house would reign forever, not only over Israel but over all nations. And popular opinion demanded that the Messiah be descended from the Davidic family line. Zacharias, however, was from the Aaronic line, so if Jesus was to be a Davidic Messiah, then it must have been through Mary’s family. This is exactly what Luke sets out to prove in Jesus’ ancestry.

Forty-three generations are listed from David to Jesus. The significance of this number comes from the Jewish exile in Egypt, which lasted exactly four hundred and thirty years,

“at the end of four hundred and thirty years, on that very day, all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt.”¹⁴ In ancient numerology, the number ten signified one complete cycle, so four hundred and thirty years represented forty-three cycles or generations. The duration of the exile in Egypt symbolized the time period between David and the coming of the Messiah. Thus the liberation brought by Moses foreshadowed the salvation brought by Jesus.

Consequently, the missions of Moses and Elijah were to be consummated by Jesus and John the Baptist. So it is not surprising that Luke described the appearance of Moses and Elijah together at the Mount of Transfiguration, where they allegedly communicated with Jesus about his course of action. Clearly, this was an event loaded with theological import.¹⁵

HOLY BIRTHS

Suggestion of a sexual relationship between Hannah and Eli may have been hard for Second Temple Jews to accept, but it pales in comparison to the difficulty of Christians to acknowledge the same thing of Mary and Zacharias. But no way could Luke have predicted the enormous theological impact made by the naïve interpretation of his opening chapter. For Luke, the harsh facts of Jesus’ conception were not so much grounds for awe and wonder, they were reasons to appreciate the core principles that operated in salvation history.

Ancient Jewish scribes were not too embarrassed or ashamed to describe illicit sex triangles in Genesis and other books. Yet for Judeo-Christians, these tales are often the cause of puzzlement or righteous indignation. They are not read in synagogues, are rarely heard from church pulpits, and are never taught in Sunday school.

Some have tried to make sense of these stories as examples of God’s inclusiveness. Redemption is possible for all sinners, no matter how murky their past. This view, however, disregards the school of Judaism to which the scribes who wrote these questionable narratives belonged. Everything was composed to be in harmony with rudimentary laws. Not to be confused with the Mosaic Law, these basic principles were the mechanics through which God interacted behind the scenes in human affairs.

These underlying laws were developed in the medieval Kabbalistic literature, in particular by Nahmanides (1194 -- 1270), who composed the famous *Letter on Holiness*. Nahmanides explained that the circumstances of conception determined the quality of the child, not the pedigree of the parents. The “holiness” of a child depends not on legalistic rules defining kinship, inheritance, and social order, but on the attitude of the parents during the sexual act. Purity comes from the intention and motivation behind conception, not from the technicalities of the Torah. “When the sexual relationship points to the Name, there is nothing more righteous and more holy than it.” When this is understood, one “will then grasp a great secret regarding the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.” Therefore, the key to understanding the messianic lineage is found in the conception of “holy” children, not in the legal identification of their birth status.



Lorenzo and Jacopo Salimbeni, *Mary and Elisabeth meet Zacharias*, 1415, Oratorio di San Giovanni Battista

This artist(s) depicted Mary’s “Visitation” to send a specific message. Though forbidden for Jews to touch women in public, Mary holds hands with Zacharias, as Elisabeth “introduces” her to him. A pregnant woman behind Mary makes a hand sign suggestive of the female sexual part. The man above Zacharias folds his hands in an “X,” a traditional esoteric symbol for the union of masculine and feminine.

One can be certain that most Second Temple Jews living in the time of Jesus, like their modern Judeo-Christian successors, would not approve of sexual trysts outside the accepted norms of civil society and beyond the limits of the Law. But from where did Luke get his information? Was it invented simply to fit his theological concepts? And if he used a pre-existent tradition of Jesus’ parentage, how come nobody else knew it? Evidence exists that others did know it. In fact, rumors of the relationship between Mary and Zacharias reached the early Church fathers. It was an oral tradition that was kept alive in the Middle East for over a thousand years. Eventually it spread to Western Europe, where it formed the basis of an underground heretical movement centered not on Jesus, but on John the Baptist.

Table 3. Parallels between Luke and 1 Samuel

1 Samuel	Luke
Woman visits Priest “Doule” conceives	
After they had eaten in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the Lord. 1 Sam 1:9	In those days Mary rose and went with haste into the hill country, to a city of Judah, and she entered the house of Zacharias . Luke 1:40-41
Proclamation	
“O Lord of hosts...look on thy maidservant , and remember me, and not forget thy maidservant., but wilt give to thy maidservant a son” 1 Sam 1:11	“Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” Luke 1:38
Returns to husband	
Then the woman went her way and ate, and her countenance was no longer sad.” 1 Sam 1:18	And Mary remained with her about three months, and returned to her home. Luke 1:56
Prophecy	
“My horn is exalted in the Lord; My mouth derides my enemies because I rejoice in thy salvation” 1 Sam 2:1	“He...has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.” Luke 1.70
“The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble gird on strength. Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread, but those who were hungry have ceased to hunger.” 1 Sam 2:4-5	“He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away.” Luke 1:52-53
Formative Years	
His mother used to make for him a little robe and take it to him each year, when she went up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice. 1 Sam 2:18-19	Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. Luke 2:41
Piety	
Now the boy Samuel continued to grow both in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men. 1 Sam 2:2	And Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man. Luke 2:52

Table 4. Parallels between the Families of Abraham and Zacharias

Genesis	Luke
Righteous Man	
The Lord appeared to Abram and said....”walk before me and be blameless.” Gen 17:1	There was a priest named Zacharias ...walking in all the commandments of the Lord...blameless. Luke 1:5-6
Childless Wife	
Now Sarai was barren, she had no child.	They had no child because Elisabeth was

Gen 11:30	barren. Luke 1:7
Annunciation	
I will bless her and...I will give you a son by her. Gen 17:16	Your wife Elisabeth will bear you a son. Luke 1:13
Disbelief	
Can a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah who is ninety bear child? Gen 17:17	How shall I know this? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years. Luke 1:18
Maid conceives	
Sarah, Abram's wife took Hagar ...her maid and gave her to Abram her husband, as a wife. Gen 16:3	"You will conceive in your womb and bear a son," ... Mary said, "I am the handmaiden of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word." Luke 1:31-38
Second child preferred	
O that Ishmael might live in thy sight! God said, No....I will establish my covenant with Isaac. Gen 17:18-19	When Elisabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb....she cried "Blessed is the fruit of your womb" Luke 1:41-42
Maid leaves	
Then Sarah dealt harshly with her and she (Hagar) fled from her. Gen: 16:6	Mary remained with her for about three months and returned to her home. Luke 1:56
Prophecy	
Your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. Gen 17:5-7	Zacharias...prophesied... "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people ...to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham." Luke 1:73-75

3 Zacharias and Mary

The paternity of Jesus was always a highly sensitive subject, and we will never know how much relevant material was lost or destroyed in the past. What is certain, however, is that once the victorious Roman Church had made the virgin birth an absolute, only those with a death wish would have dared to suggest otherwise in public.

Mary was much maligned by enemies of the early church, but as far as we know, she was never accused by them of having had an illicit sexual relationship with a priest. Conversely, one would hardly expect Jewish anti-Christian propaganda to accuse a priest of fathering Jesus.¹ Even if that were known, it would not be widely disseminated lest it ruin the myth of the priestly status.

As mentioned previously, the notion that Jesus' contemporaries were ignorant of his parentage is absurd. He would have explained it to his followers in light of scriptural tradition, because that was how everything was justified in ancient Palestine. The highly educated, whom Jesus might otherwise have expected to have supported him, failed to do so. Consequently, he resorted to healings, and teaching in parables because his audience was, for the most part, illiterate or uneducated in the scriptures. But even for normal Jews sympathetic to Jesus' message, the issue of his illegitimacy would have been a major stumbling block.

PROTOVANGELIUM OF JAMES

Zacharias and Mary feature prominently in the non-canonical Protovangelium (pre-Gospel) of James. Purportedly written by James, the brother of Jesus, it is a pseudipigraphical work (not authored by the name attributed to it). Dated early-mid second century C.E., it was rejected for inclusion in the New Testament most probably because of its fantastic tales of Jesus' childhood, which invited ridicule into the Church. In addition, it exalted John the Baptist in a manner that would have been uncomfortable for most Christians. For example, the Massacre of the Infants was described as a product of Herod's desire to kill the infant John, and not Jesus, as Matthew explained it.

The Protovangelium is essentially a devotional infancy gospel, and displays the typical stylizations of the genre. Although heavy on apologetics, doctrine, and myth making, its main appeal was likely as an early source of Mary veneration. The reader is provided with information, missing from other gospels, to strengthen the developing cult of Mary that had begun to form outside Jewish-Christian circles in the second-century C.E. It may also have been written in response to accusations against Mary's character from opponents who accused her of harlotry.

Although most scholars dismiss it as a work of pure fiction, more Greek manuscripts of the Protovangelium have survived than of any other gospel, which indicates that it had a high level of popularity at one time. Of special relevance is the inclusion of elements that suggest the writer was familiar with Baptist traditions that paid tribute to Zacharias.

Today, in southern Iraq, an ancient religious sect known as the Mandaeans claims to be the ancestral remnant of John the Baptist's original disciples. They possess several Aramaic texts centered on John the Baptist, which are difficult to date accurately, but some are believed to go back to the second-century C.E. In all likelihood, John's disciples kept written records, and some early Christians were acquainted with these texts. This material was twisted, revamped, and expanded upon, but traces of it are

perceptible in Christian literature, including Luke's gospel.

The first seven chapters of the Protovangelium are an account of Mary's elderly and childless parents, Joachim and Anna, based loosely on the model of Abraham and Sarah. When Mary was born, her special destiny was immediately recognized and, at three years old, she was given to the care of the Temple priests. In Jewish tradition, however, only first-born sons were presented at the Temple. This was done forty days after birth to fulfill a specific requirement of the Mosaic Law. The existence of a kindergarten or an orphanage on Temple grounds is unlikely, and is not mentioned in relevant archives. If a type of boarding school existed, it would unquestionably have been for boys only, and limited to the training of priests and Levites.² Most emphatically, young girls would not have been placed into the care of the all-male priesthood. All the same, we are told that when Mary was twelve years old, a council of priests decided she would no longer be able to stay, as she was approaching puberty and her continued presence could defile the Temple.

Evidently, the writer knew little about the workings of the Jerusalem Temple. This ignorance was further compounded by his claim that Zacharias was High Priest when he entered the Holy of Holies to pray about Mary. Not only was Zacharias never High Priest, the Holy of Holies was visited only once a year on the Day of Atonement, and on no other occasion. This storyline was invented; first, to demonstrate the purity of Mary, second, to elevate the status of Zacharias, and third, to explain a connection between them.

While inside the Holy of Holies, an angel appeared to Zacharias and instructed him to organize a lottery of eligible widowers to choose Mary's husband. Joseph was the widower selected. But he refused to take Mary, saying that she was too young and he will become a laughing stock for marrying her. Zacharias convinced him to accept after threatening him with God's punishment. At the start of their betrothal period, Joseph instructed Mary to stay at his house, and wait until he returned after his work at a building project was finished.

Meanwhile, at a further meeting of the council of priests, it was decided to make a new veil for the Temple. Seven virgins were summoned to weave the thread in the special colors as required by the Law. Mary was one of the virgins chosen,

And the priest remembered the child Mary, that she was of the family of David, and undefiled before God. And the officers went away...And they brought them into the temple of the Lord. And the priest said: Choose for me by lot who shall spin the gold, and the white, and the fine linen, and the silk, and the blue, and the scarlet, and the true purple. And the true purple and the scarlet fell to the lot of Mary, and she took them, and went away to her house. ...And Mary took the scarlet, and span it. And at that season Zacharias became dumb, and Samuel was in his stead until the time when Zacharias spake again. But Mary took the scarlet and began to spin it.³

Next, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary to announce that she will give birth to Jesus. At first she doubted, but later accepted her fate, "behold the handmaid of the Lord is before him: be it unto me according to thy word." Mary went home, spun the thread, and returned.

And she made the purple and the scarlet and brought them unto the priest. And the

priest blessed her and said: Mary, the Lord God hath magnified thy name, and thou shalt be blessed among all generations of the earth. And Mary rejoiced and went away unto Elizabeth her kinswoman: and she knocked at the door. And Elizabeth when she heard it cast down the scarlet and ran to the door and opened it, and when she saw Mary she blessed her and said: Whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come unto me? For behold that which is in me leaped and blessed thee. And Mary forgot the mysteries which Gabriel the archangel had told her, and she looked up unto the heaven and said: Who am I, Lord, that all the generations of the earth do bless me? ⁴

This section is reminiscent of Luke's *Visitation* scene, except that for some reason colored threads have been drafted into the narrative. Scarlet was an essential color of the Temple veil and in the tapestries of the Temple. It also figured in the Yom Kippur scapegoat ritual and other Temple sacraments. The Hebrew phrase for scarlet thread, *chut hashani*, occurred twice in the Old Testament.

The first instance was recorded in Tamar's story as described in Genesis. Disguising herself as a temple prostitute, Tamar seduced Judah, her father-in-law, and was made pregnant with twin boys. During childbirth, one of the unborn twins, Zerah, extended his arm through the birth canal, and the midwife tied a scarlet thread around his wrist to identify him as the first-born. But in the birth struggle, the second twin Perez emerged first.

And the midwife took and bound a scarlet thread, saying, "this one came out first." But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out.....his name was called Perez. Afterwards his brother came out with the scarlet thread upon his hand; and his name was called Zerah.
Gen 38:28-29

Following in the footsteps of his grandfather Jacob, Perez assumed the birthright of his older brother. According to Jewish tradition, the messianic bloodline descended from Perez, and he was listed by Matthew and Luke as an ancestor of Jesus.

Scarlet thread was also mentioned in the story of Rahab from the Book of Joshua. Rahab invited two Hebrew spies to stay in her home in Jericho, but when questioned by the king's men, she denied knowledge of their whereabouts. In return, the Hebrews spared Rahab and her family from the massacre of the city's inhabitants. She was told to display a scarlet thread from her window to distinguish her house from the others.

The men said to her... Behold, when we come into this land, you shall bind this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down: and you shall gather into your house your father and mother, your brothers, and all your father's household. ...and they departed; and she bound the scarlet cord in the window.
Joshua 2:17-21

In later rabbinic traditions, Rahab was highly venerated -- even to the extent that she was described as the ancestor of some of the greatest prophets of Israel. Matthew listed her as a maternal ancestor of Jesus, and in a tradition not found elsewhere, claimed that Rahab married Salmon, a prince of the tribe of Judah.

The color scarlet has an obvious association with blood. In the stories of Tamar and Rahab, it was used to signify the messianic bloodline. In the Protovangelium, Elisabeth

“cast down the scarlet,” and rushed to greet Mary. Jettisoning the scarlet thread was the signal that the messianic birthright had passed from the first-born John to the second-born Jesus.

Purple was a color long associated with priestly authority throughout the Mediterranean region. The distinguishing color of the divine Roman Emperor as head of the state religion, purple was also adopted as the official color of the Pope and of the British monarch as head of the Anglican Church.

That Mary made the scarlet and the purple threads meant that her son would fulfill a dual purpose. Jesus’ destiny was to unify the roles of both messianic king *and* High Priest. Although Elisabeth had been given a special responsibility as a mother in the providential family, she was linked only briefly with scarlet thread, and never with purple. Her son John, therefore, would have no responsibility in the kingdom of God.

Mark recorded that soldiers ridiculed Jesus by putting a purple robe on him before his crucifixion. Matthew, on the other hand, stated that the robe was scarlet. Either he possessed a more accurate source than Mark, or more likely, Matthew correctly understood that scarlet was the color representative of the Davidic Messiah.

And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe upon him, and plaiting a crown of thorns they put it on his head, and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!"
Matt 27: 28-30

The Protovangelium explained that Mary stayed at Zacharias’ house for three months, but left lest “the people of Israel” discovered her condition and “accused her of fornication.” Six months after leaving his fiancé behind, Joseph returned home to find her pregnant. If he exposed Mary she could be stoned to death, but if he were to hide her away to conceal the sin, he would be violating the law of God. What was Joseph to do? Remarkably, an angel appeared to him in a dream and provided a solution based on Christian theology. Mary’s child “will save the people from their sins.” Joseph awakened, “glorified the God of Israel,” and the matter was thus satisfactorily resolved.

THE KORAN

Non-Islamic scholars maintain that certain materials in the Koran have their sources in the apocryphal books of Christianity. In the time of Mohammed, the majority of Christians in Arabia belonged to sects deemed heretical by the Church, and many had taken refuge outside the borders of the Roman Empire. These groups clung to some noncanonical writings and unorthodox oral traditions, and theoretically, compilers of the Koran used them to appeal to Christians in the region. In particular, the third Surah, which contains references to Zacharias and Mary, is suspected of having directly drawn sections of its content from the Protovangelium. Mary’s parents are described giving their daughter “to the care of the Lord.” In return, the Lord put Mary into the custody of Zacharias:

And her Lord accepted her with full acceptance and vouchsafed to her a goodly growth; and made Zachariah her guardian.
Surah 3:37

If the Koran borrowed from the Protovangelium, then this storyline was adopted for the

same reason -- to sanction a relationship between Zacharias and Mary.

In the next verses, Zacharias asked the Lord to “Bestow upon me of Thy bounty goodly offspring.” Angels responded that his wife Elisabeth will have a son named John. They then announced that Mary had been especially chosen and sanctified by Allah,

Then Zachariah prayed unto his Lord and said: My Lord! Bestow upon me of Thy bounty goodly offspring. Lo! Thou art the Hearer of Prayer. And the angels called to him as he stood praying in the sanctuary: Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a son whose name is John, who cometh to confirm a word from Allah lordly, chaste, a prophet of the righteous. He said: My Lord! How can I have a son when age hath overtaken me already and my wife is barren? The angel answered: So it will be. Allah doeth what He will. He said: My Lord! Appoint a token for me. The angel said: The token unto thee shall be that thou shalt not speak unto mankind three days except by signs. Remember thy Lord much, and praise Him in the early hours of night and morning. And when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! Allah hath chosen thee and made thee pure, and hath preferred thee above all the women of creation. O Mary! Be obedient to thy Lord, prostrate thyself and bow with those who bow in worship.

Surah 3:38-43

Mary was asked to “be obedient to thy Lord” which carries the same meaning as the biblical *doule* or “handmaiden of the Lord.” The essence of obedience is self sacrifice, precisely what was required from Mary. She was a “preferred” woman because she will conceive Jesus, and her “obedience” was substantiated in the sacrificial act of conception.

In the Protovangelium, Joseph was selected from a group of eligible widowers called to take part in a lottery to decide who would be Mary’s husband. In the Koran, not only is Joseph never mentioned, the lottery described (throwing of pens) was to select a priest, not a widower. The chosen one would be the “guardian” of Mary, not the husband. Zacharias was the priest selected. Such a significant alteration in the plot dynamic indicates that the writers of the Koran also drew from traditions outside the Protovangelium.

This is of the tidings of things hidden. We reveal it unto thee (Mohammed). Thou wast not present with them when they threw their pens to know which of them should be the guardian of Mary, nor wast thou present with them when they quarreled thereupon. And remember when the angels said: O Mary! Lo! Allah giveth thee glad tidings of a word from him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near unto Allah.

Surah 3:44-45

As Mohammed was not present at the “throwing of pens,” he did not witness the controversy it had caused. As a euphemism, “guardian” barely conceals the sexual aspect of Zacharias and Mary’s relationship that was undoubtedly the reason for the priestly outrage. The “tidings of things hidden” related to the birth of Jesus, and the hitherto secret identity of his father, now revealed as Zacharias. Mohammed is reminded that Mary’s “obedience,” linked to the outcome of the lottery, resulted in the birth of Jesus.

HERETICAL ART

The secret of Jesus' parentage endured in the region. Europeans, who had visited the Holy Land during the crusades of the twelfth and thirteen centuries, brought it back home, where it took root in non-conformist intellectual circles and was a crucial part of a powerful antiestablishment heresy. But to publicize blasphemous ideas during this time was tantamount to signing one's death warrant. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, even an institution as influential as the Knights Templar -- a major participant in the crusades -- was brought down following charges of heresy.

In the stringently controlled feudal theocracy of medieval Europe, painting was the obvious medium to express subversive ideas. The Renaissance provided the occasion and the opportunity to broadcast unorthodox opinions as never before. As European civilization grew richer, its private citizens and public institutions increasingly commissioned paintings with religious themes both for decoration and prestige. The most talented artists became society celebrities, and a select few, who held heterodox religious views, took advantage of the assumed gullibility of their patrons to include profane images and symbols in what were supposedly wholly devotional works with conventional Christian themes.

Folklorists and Jungian psychologists tell us that through art, the psychological truth emerges as it is shared by the collective unconscious. In great paintings, the psychic background of our ancestral and primal past is revealed. In reality, many great artists of the past manipulated symbols and archetypes of the "collective unconscious" to advocate specific "truths." And the most famous perpetrator was Leonardo Da Vinci.

In recent years, many people have come to acknowledge that Leonardo's brilliant artwork was not the product of a devout Catholic, but rather the work of a strident anti-church heretic who delighted in undermining, even ridiculing, traditional Christian beliefs whenever an opportunity presented itself for him to do so. Yet he was far from being an atheist. Leonardo definitely held religious views, but they were so radical he could never declare them openly. Although most current interest has centered on Leonardo's representation of Mary Magdalene, his greatest obsession was John the Baptist.

In their book , *The Templar Revelation*, Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince brought attention to Leonardo Da Vinci's apparent infatuation with the figure of John.⁵ In his religiously inspired paintings, it was the Baptist and not Jesus who featured most often, and their traditionally accepted roles appear to be reversed. Leonardo's final painting, for which he was not commissioned, was a portrait of John the Baptist [Plate 1].

A particularly significant element in Leonardo's art is what Picknett and Prince describe as "the John gesture," made by pointing the right hand forefinger directly upward.



Plate 1. Leonardo Da Vinci, *John the Baptist*, c 1513, Louvre, Paris

Earlier artists had shown John the Baptist more subtly making this same hand signal, but Leonardo chose to make it the dominant feature of his famously enigmatic portrait of John. But nobody is sure what it means. Probably the gesture's most baffling appearance is in his unfinished work known as *Madonna and Child with Saint Anne and Saint John the Baptist* [Plate 2]. Above and between the infants Jesus and John, a mysterious, almost masculine, hand gives the "John gesture." Controversially, Jesus' two blessing fingers rest on the elbow fold of Anne's arm. Fingers positioned in this way constitute an extremely offensive gesture in Western Europe, particularly in Italy, where it is used specifically to denote the sex act. And the look on Anne's face suggests this is precisely her meaning. This is an unlikely coincidence because, although Leonardo rarely finished his projects, nothing in them was left to chance.



Plate 2. Leonardo Da Vinci, *Madonna and Child with St. Anne*, c 1510, National Gallery, London

The large hand makes the “John gesture.” Note Anne’s knowing smile as her arm and Jesus’ fingers combine to give the well known sign for sexual intercourse.

Raphael, a younger contemporary of Leonardo, painted the figure of Plato in *The School of Athens*, clearly modeled on Leonardo Da Vinci making the “John gesture” [Plate 3]. He also famously painted a young John the Baptist as a boy in the desert, making the same sign. Other renowned artists of the period, including Ghirlandaio, Caravaggio, Guercino, and Fontana also painted John giving this sign. Manifestly, it represented an idea or principle that had important connotations for members of an elite group.

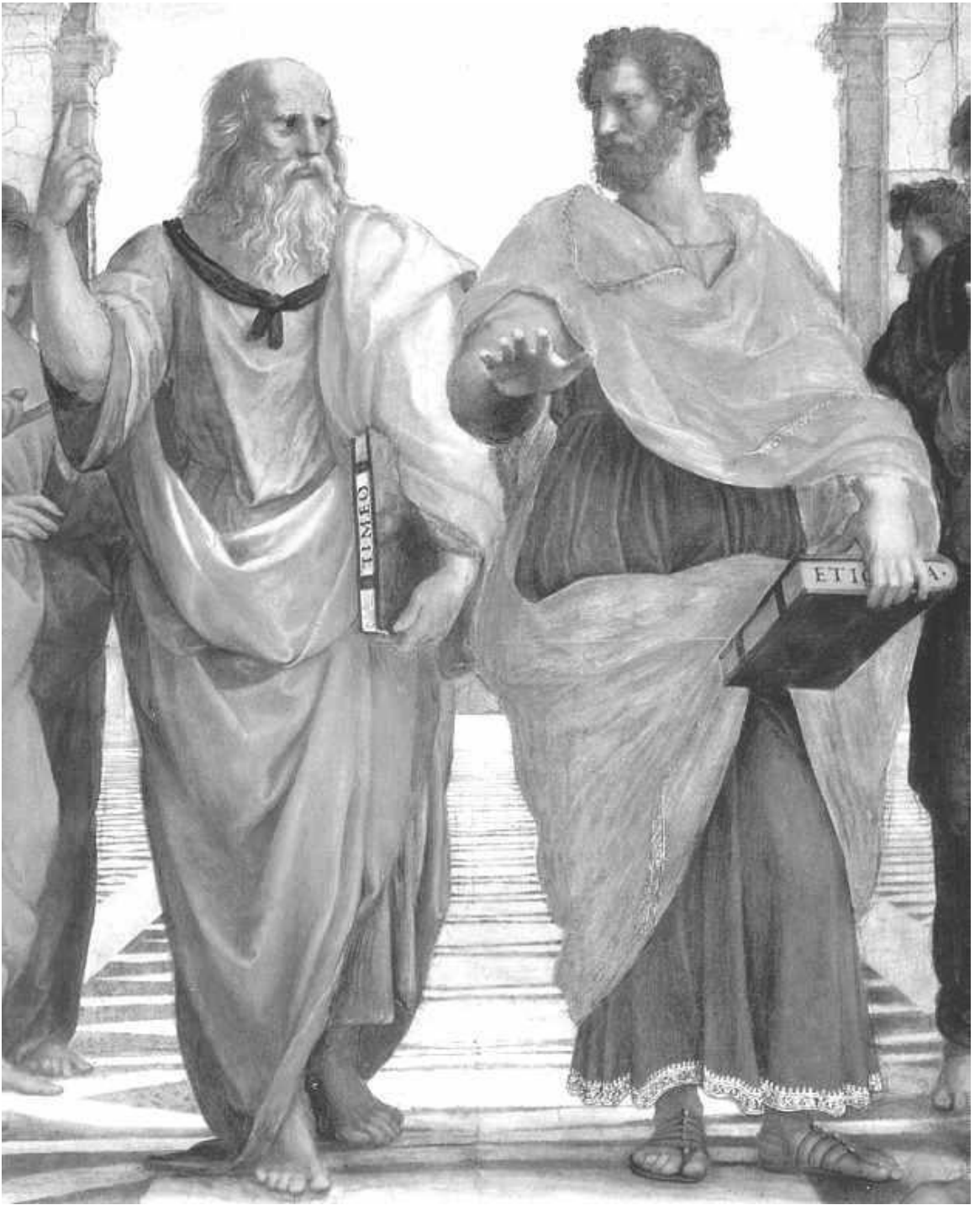


Plate 3. Raphael, *The School of Athens (Detail)*, 1511 , Vatican, Rome

The German artist Andrea Mantegna, working at the same time as Leonardo, painted a disturbing scene of the Holy Family [Plate 4]. In the center foreground, Mary looks on adoringly as she holds the baby Jesus. Standing on her left is the elderly Elisabeth, and on her right side is Zacharias, clean shaven and bald. Not to be mistaken for Joseph, because Mantegna had already painted Joseph in his *Adoration of the Shepherds*, a much younger man, bearded and with a head full of hair. In the lower right-hand corner of the painting, the infant John the Baptist looks straight ahead, while raising his right-hand forefinger. Elisabeth's expression as she looks past Jesus is one of bitterness, even contempt, while Zacharias stares forward dispassionately. Mouths turned down at the sides, they do not make a picture of the happy couple.

The forefinger and index finger raised together constitute the “blessing gesture,” which Popes give to crowds during their public appearances. Jesus was often depicted making this sign, but the single raised forefinger is not part of any recognized Christian iconography.⁶ However, Hermes, the Greek god of shepherds, was frequently depicted by medieval alchemists making this exact same gesture. Moreover, Botticelli -- one of Leonardo’s mentors -- also painted Hermes in this way. Ancient hermetic mystical traditions experienced a revival during the Middle Ages, and Hermes was revered by initiates as “the revealer of all wisdom.” In the Middle East, Hermes was equated with Enoch, the father of Methuselah, who reputedly never died but was taken directly by God to be instructed in the deepest secrets of heaven.⁷

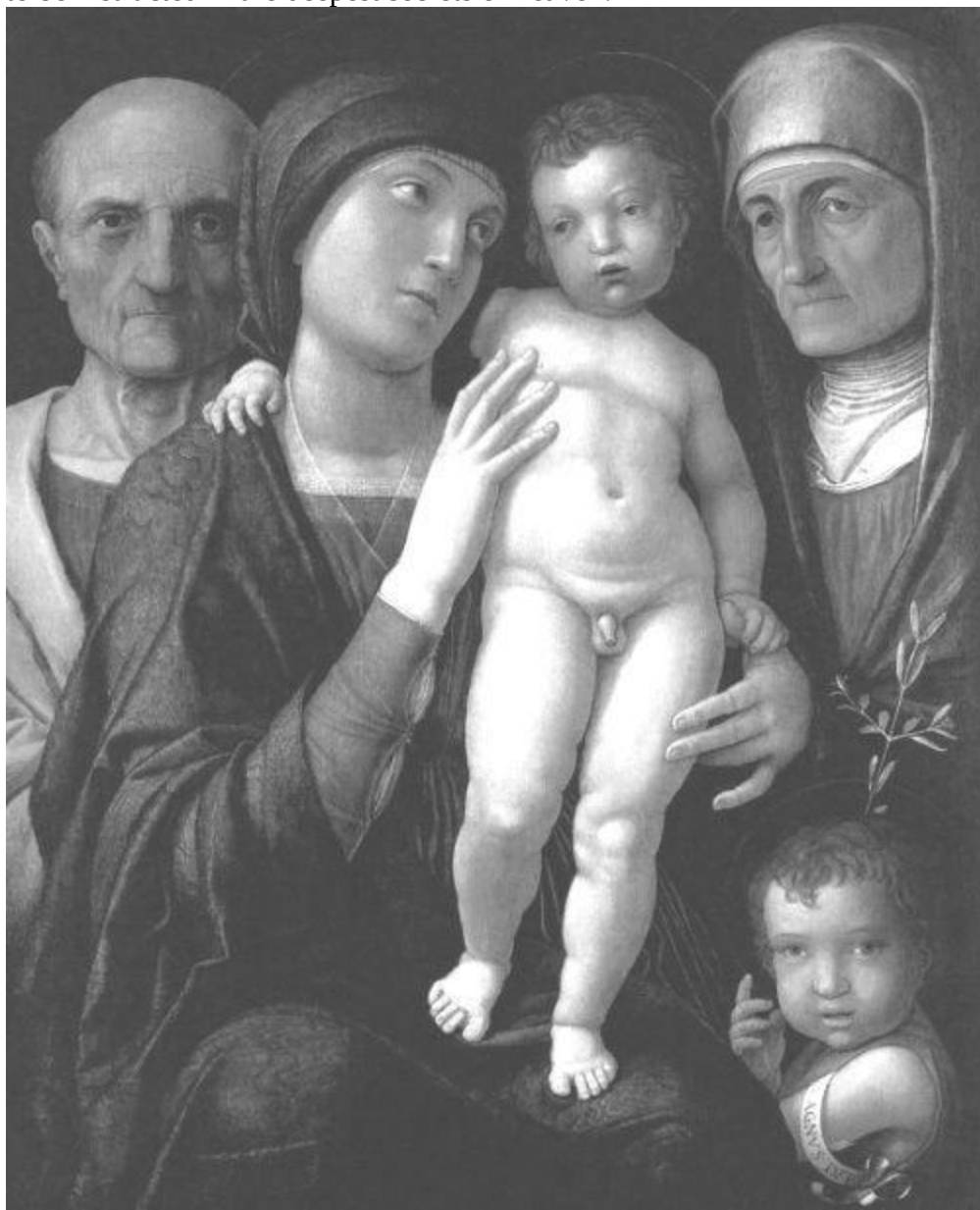


Plate 4. Andrea Mantegna, *The Holy Family*, 1495, Dresden

In popular culture, however, the “John gesture” always had a well recognized meaning. Customarily given for emphasis -- “mark my words” -- an upright forefinger also conveys the message, ‘number one,’ or ‘first.’ Thousands of cartoon raised forefingers, waved by spectators at sports events in the United States, prove that the “John gesture” made publicly, is still used to assert supremacy. In Renaissance art, this sign was contrived by heretics to show that John the Baptist was superior to Jesus. John was *first*,

the original and true Christ, and the fount of all knowledge.

Jesus, on the other hand, was the false Christ. Though schooled by John, he not only betrayed his teacher but usurped his birthright to claim everything for himself. It was fraud on the grandest scale, and the Roman Church was a co-conspirator.

Leonardo Da Vinci produced two separate paintings of the same scene. Known as *The Virgin on the Rocks*, one currently hangs in the Louvre Museum in Paris, the other in the National Gallery in London. The subject matter is a non-canonical Christian myth, in which the Holy Family flees to Egypt to escape Herod's legendary "Massacre of the Infants." On the journey, they meet the infant John and his protector angel Uriel, in a remote mountain cave. According to the Church, this was the time when Jesus bestowed upon John the authority to baptize him in later life. This was supposed to explain why the adult Jesus, as a member of the Holy Trinity, had allowed himself to be baptized.

The Virgin on the Rocks was originally commissioned by Milanese monks as a celebration of the "Immaculate Conception," but Leonardo contemptuously mocked that idea in his finished work. His first canvas was rejected, and only after a lengthy dispute mediated by Leonardo's sponsor, King Louis XII of France, was a later second version deemed acceptable.

In the original artwork, Jesus and John were painted to resemble brothers. Indeed their features are so similar that they could be taken as identical twins. Mary sits with her arm around Jesus. The angel Uriel sits with John. However, Jesus directs his prayer toward John, who blesses him in return. This inversion of their customary roles would have horrified Leonardo's customers [Plate 5].

In the later version of the painting [Plate 6], the infant with Mary appears exactly as in the original except that he has been given the familiar staff of John the Baptist to hold. His identity was switched, so that Mary is now understood to be holding John, not Jesus. The baby formerly known as John the Baptist, and who sits with the angel Uriel, is now Jesus. The face of Jesus, however, has been radically altered from the original to be less cherubic and not as appealing as John.

Although he featured prominently in the original myth on which the commissioned artwork was based, Joseph does not figure in either painting. As it was Joseph who purportedly received the instruction to take Jesus and Mary to Egypt, his omission from the scene is strange. However, the father of Jesus is represented in *The Virgin on the Rocks*. In both versions, towering above Mary and emanating from behind her, is a huge phallic rock formation. To compensate for changing the positions of Jesus and John, Leonardo highlighted the rock in the second painting to replicate the correct proportions of a phallus. This rock structure cannot have been accidental or copied from nature. It is not a crystalline stalagmite, and is impossible to find inside caves. Besides, nothing was accidental in Leonardo's work. Even the cave itself is symbolic of the womb. Rather than affirm Mary's virginity, the phallus behind Mary was an outrageously bold statement to contradict it. The phallus symbolized the real, or biological, father of Jesus.



Plate 5. Leonard Da Vinci, *Virgin on the Rocks*, Louvre Paris

John and Jesus have identical features. Jesus (left) prays to John. But for reasons of theological correctness, their positions were later reversed (Plate 6). Jesus was given the

staff of John the Baptist and thus became John. The new Jesus (right) lost his blonde curls and cherubic face, replaced with a much less attractive and darker look. The large phallic rock formation is highlighted more in the second version.



Plate 6. Leonardo Da Vinci, *Virgin on the Rocks*, National Gallery, London

Two smaller phallic rock formations in the background of the painting are noticeably patterned after the large central phallus. As Leonardo originally depicted John and Jesus as brothers, he assumed Zacharias was Jesus' father. The two background rock formations, therefore, represented Zacharias' two male offspring. Presumably, John and

Jesus both fathered children.

Before Leonardo, Fra Filippo Lippi (1406-1469) was the prototype of the rebellious Florentine Renaissance artist. Lippi was raised in a Carmelite friary and took vows as a friar in 1421. Following an affair with a nun, he was released from his vows and married shortly afterward. Celebrated today as an innovative and accomplished painter, his work was widely respected in his time, receiving constant patronage from the wealthy and powerful Medici family. He specialized in Cathedral frescoes, including one famous series of scenes depicting the life of John the Baptist. One section, *The Birth of John the Baptist* [Plate 7], shows a young woman staring disconsolately at the floor and away from the newborn baby, as midwives take him from Elisabeth. The aggrieved woman is Mary. Even though Luke's gospel stated that Mary left Zacharias' home before John's birth, she was often included in birth scenes of John. Lippi's sympathies are clearly with Elisabeth, who wears a halo, and not Mary.

In 1490, Domenico Ghirlandaio painted the *Naming of John*, with even less ambiguity [Plate 8]. On the right, Elisabeth holds the baby John, but she gazes, ashen-faced, away from the scene. Zacharias looks at her as if to say, "What is the problem?" Above Elisabeth, is an obviously pregnant woman with a similar face. She is also downcast, and clearly unhappy, as a friend advises or consoles her. This is a depiction of the spurned Mary. Elisabeth's refusal to acknowledge Mary and her child had left Mary distraught and fearful. The painting makes sense only if Zacharias was the father of Mary's child.

The Italian Parmigianino (1503-1540), like most Renaissance masters, painted scenes of the Holy Family. Though it was commonplace for artists to omit Joseph, it was not standard practice to include Zacharias. *The Holy Family* [Plate 9] shows Zacharias casting a watchful eye over Mary's shoulder at the young Jesus and John, which taken by itself might not be especially meaningful, were it not for the astonishing boldness of the *Madonna and Zacharias* -- another of his Holy Family paintings [Plate 10]. In this picture, Mary sits outdoors with Zacharias, as she holds Jesus. A young girl kisses Jesus, who is generally believed to be Mary Magdalene, as a maid holds a jar of anointing oil over their heads. A concerned looking Zacharias watches the scene. A certain level of familiarity between Mary and Zacharias is clearly observable. Mary's attire is extremely inappropriate for a woman in Jewish society, even if the man with her was supposed to be her brother-in-law. Only in the privacy of the home, and with her husband, could a woman be so dressed. The intent behind Parmigianino's picture was to imply that they were as a conjugal couple, and Zacharias was the father of her son.



Plate 7. Fra Fillipo Lippi, *The Birth Of John*, c. 1460



Plate 8. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Naming of John*, 1490



Plate 10. Parmigianino, *Madonna and Zacharias*, 1535



Plate 9. Parmigianino, *Holy Family*, 1535

Zacharias was often the only man in depictions of the “Holy Family.” In this scene, Zacharias’ wife, Elisabeth, is conspicuous by her absence.

As he casts a watchful eye over Mary’s shoulder at John and Jesus, is Zacharias checking on the welfare of his sons?

Jewish women were required to wear veils and to cover themselves unless in private with their husbands.

In his paintings, Parmigianino portrayed a familiarity between Mary and Zacharias that was inappropriate. What was his purpose?

Inside the Museum of Fine Arts in Dijon, France, is an anonymous fifteenth century wood carving believed to be of south German origin. It is an astonishing wood sculpture of Zacharias holding a type of shrine in the form of a miniature house or room. Inside the shrine is a bed [Plate 10a]. On the exterior, the figures of Elisabeth and Mary are painted

together in greeting -- the famous *Visitation* scene from Luke. Zacharias looks down at the two women, as he holds the bedroom 'shrine.' The meaning implied by this sculpture is self-evident, as is the reason why the artist remained incognito.

PRESENTATION AT THE TEMPLE

November 21 is the Feast Day of the Roman Catholic Church to commemorate the Virgin Mary's non canonical 'Presentation at the Temple.' In the Orthodox Church, this day is one of the twelve holiest in the calendar. The Presentation was also a common theme for artists during the Renaissance. Usually, Mary was depicted as being prompted by her parents, Joachim and Anna, to climb the Temple steps as Zacharias waited for her. Certain artists, however, chose *not* to portray Mary as the three year old girl mentioned in the Protovangelium, the sole source for this tradition. Instead, they painted Mary as a young woman.



Plate 10a. *Wood Carving of Zacharias*, Anonymous, c. 15th

The Venetian artist Vittore Carpaccio (1455-1525) painted a cycle on the Life of Mary that included a scene of Mary's Presentation [Plate 11]. As a teenage Mary approaches, Zacharias's arms are outstretched in greeting. Beneath Mary, a horned antelope rests tethered to a young boy, and to the right of him sits a rabbit. Above the archway in the background, an alchemical sun symbol is depicted with the customary hermetic/mystical representation of Adam and Eve at either side.



Plate 11. Vittore Carpaccio, *Presentation at the Temple*, 1505

The sexual or reproductive principle is implied by the rabbit, and the horned antelope emphasizes the same point. As previously stated, horns were used as symbols of fertility in a variety of ancient cultures. In medieval art, Adam and Eve, as the primordial man and woman, were often represented together with horned animals (rams, deer, goats, and so on) to symbolize their role as the original ancestors of humankind [Plate 12]. Carpaccio's illustration of Adam and Eve, and his inclusion of the rabbit and the horned antelope, was to signify that Zacharias and Mary had the same responsibility to reproduce.



Plate 12. Anonymous twelfth century woodcut Adam and Eve were a recurrent theme in esoteric medieval imagery. Depicted here with horned animals, which signified their destiny as the original ancestors of all humankind.

Horns were symbols of fertility and lineage in diverse cultures.

Vikings, for example, displayed their ancestral pride, by attaching horns to their battle helmets.



Dionysus, the Greek fertility god, with female worshippers who hold a rabbit and a horned deer (center right). Vase, 6th century BCE

Domenico Ghirlandaio's version of the *Presentation of the Virgin* is even more demonstrative [Plate 13]. Mary, as a fully developed woman, hurries enthusiastically up the Temple steps to greet Zacharias. She holds a book of Scripture to signal her actions are the fulfillment of prophecy. At the top of two broad columns in the center, is a statue of the naked Adam and a partly obscured Eve with the serpent. Beneath then, at the top of each column, babies are carved into a decorative trim. Zacharias waits to receive Mary with open arms, as pregnant young women scurry behind him, suggesting her immediate destiny should she enter his orbit. In the bottom right, a forlorn John the Baptist watches the scene with obvious misgivings. In the bottom left, three female spectators watch as Mary ascends the steps. Ghirlandaio loaded their physical postures with palpable meaning [see note, Plate 13a].

The Spanish artist Juan Sevilla (1643-1695) painted a *Presentation at the Temple* that currently hangs in the Museo del Prado in Madrid [Plate 14]. In his version, Mary has clearly reached child-bearing age. As Zacharias is set to embrace her, Mary offers him

her hand. However, people in the foreground seem troubled by the scene. And although Mary's mother holds an obligatory scroll to signal the fulfillment of scripture, she and her husband have worried, not joyful expressions. Meanwhile, an androgynous looking character in the bottom left of the canvas, turns away from the scene to face the viewer. He or she displays a highly ornate jar, the type used to hold something precious. In other words, a container for anointing oil or ointment.

Such a blatant insertion in the picture must have been intended as a reference to Jesus' anointing by Mary Magdalene/Mary of Bethany as described in all four gospels. The overt message of Sevilla's painting was that the union of Zacharias and Mary produced Jesus.

Artists such as Carpaccio and Sevilla knew that the general public saw in a painting only that which it was preconditioned to see, and disregarded the rest. This maxim is as true as ever today.





Plate 13. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *Presentation of the Virgin*, 1486

The girl on the left makes a gesture with her fingers that can only be construed as a crude reference to the sex act. The girl in the center puts her hands together, to represent the

union of two bodies coming together. The girl on the right stands with her knee bent and hand on hip, in a classic coquettish pose. The only reason to incorporate these characters and gestures into the picture was to suggest that Mary's relationship with Zacharias was sexual.

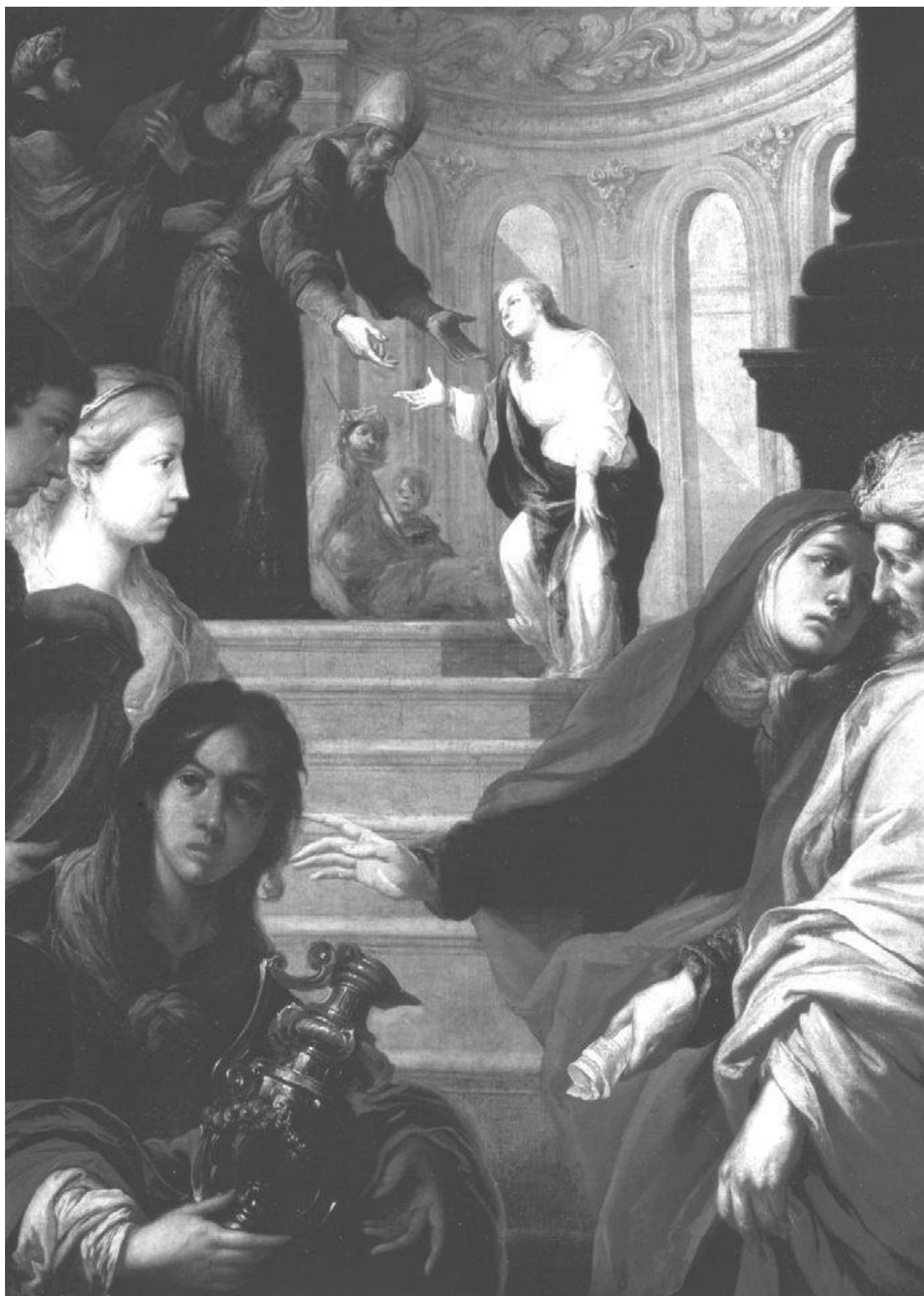
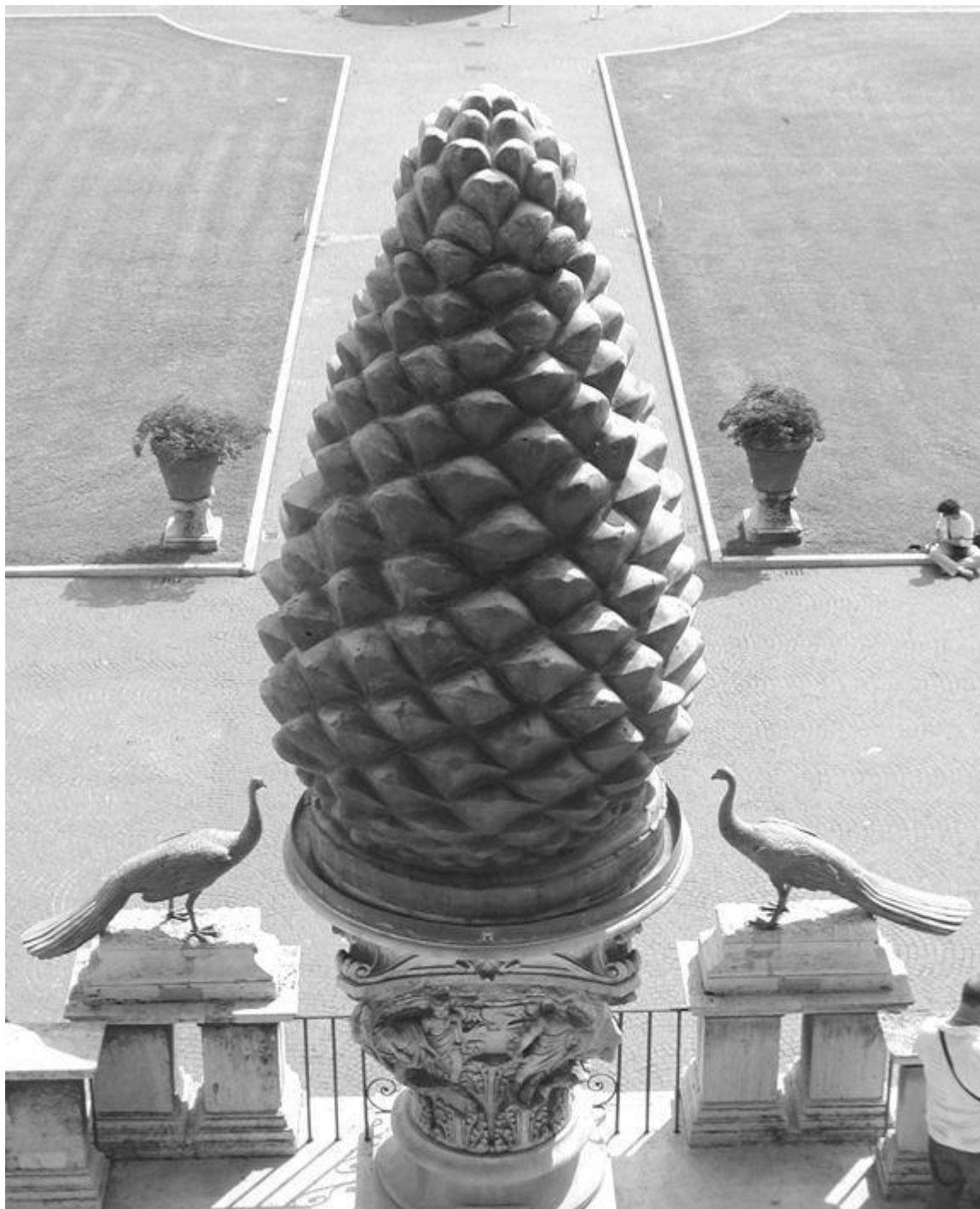


Plate 14. Juan Sevilla, *Presentation of Mary at the Temple* (Art Resource).

THE PINE CONE

Within the Vatican's museum complex is a courtyard known as the Giardino della Pigna,

or Place of the Pine Cone, named after a four meter high bronze statue of a pine cone that stands there (below). The cone was modeled and cast during the first or second century C.E. by Publius Cincius Calvus whose signature is on the base. Historians understand that it was originally used in the pre-Christian era as a water fountain and was confiscated several centuries later by the Papacy who used it for ornamental purposes. The provenance of the two bronze peacocks that flank the pine cone is unknown.



Pine cones became an important element in Catholic iconography. Decorative cones were sculpted into Church and Cathedral masonry, and were incorporated into the designs of candlesticks and ceremonial artifacts. The Pope's staff still includes a silver pine cone. The official Church explanation is that the pine cone, as a symbol of regeneration, represents new life in Christ. But this was not its original meaning.

All ancient cultures had male fertility deities who it was believed could increase the rate of child birth, improve the livestock count, and make the land more productive. In Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Indian, Greek, and Roman art, these fertility gods or their cultic priesthood were often depicted with pine cones (below). So much so, that the pine cone was universally understood as the symbol of a divine or especially blessed bloodline.



Assyrian bas relief, dating from the 6th century B.C.E. The bearded winged figure holds a pine cone in his right hand. The bucket is thought to hold water, or a special fluid, with which he purified the devotees. Note the horns of fertility on his cap.

Greek vases, dating between the sixth and fourth centuries B.C.E., feature the fertility god Dionysus (the Roman Bacchus) with his female consort Ariadne. In the example below, which is a typical illustration, Dionysus holds the cornucopia or “horn of plenty” with his left hand and a sprig of pine cones with his right.



Although historians still debate the suitability of the term “Renaissance,” it is undeniable that artists with heretical leanings drew inspiration from ancient sources. In *The Presentation at The Temple*, Andreas Mantegna painted Zacharias and Mary after the model of Dionysus and Ariadne [Plate 14a]. Zacharias wears a robe decorated with pine cones, and Mary wears a dress with a similar five-pointed floral motif to that which Ariadne wears. In this non-canonical scene, reminiscent of Hannah giving the infant Samuel to Eli the priest, Mary hands over the baby Jesus to Zacharias. The pine cone symbolizes the aged Zacharias’ virility and the sacred nature of his lineage.

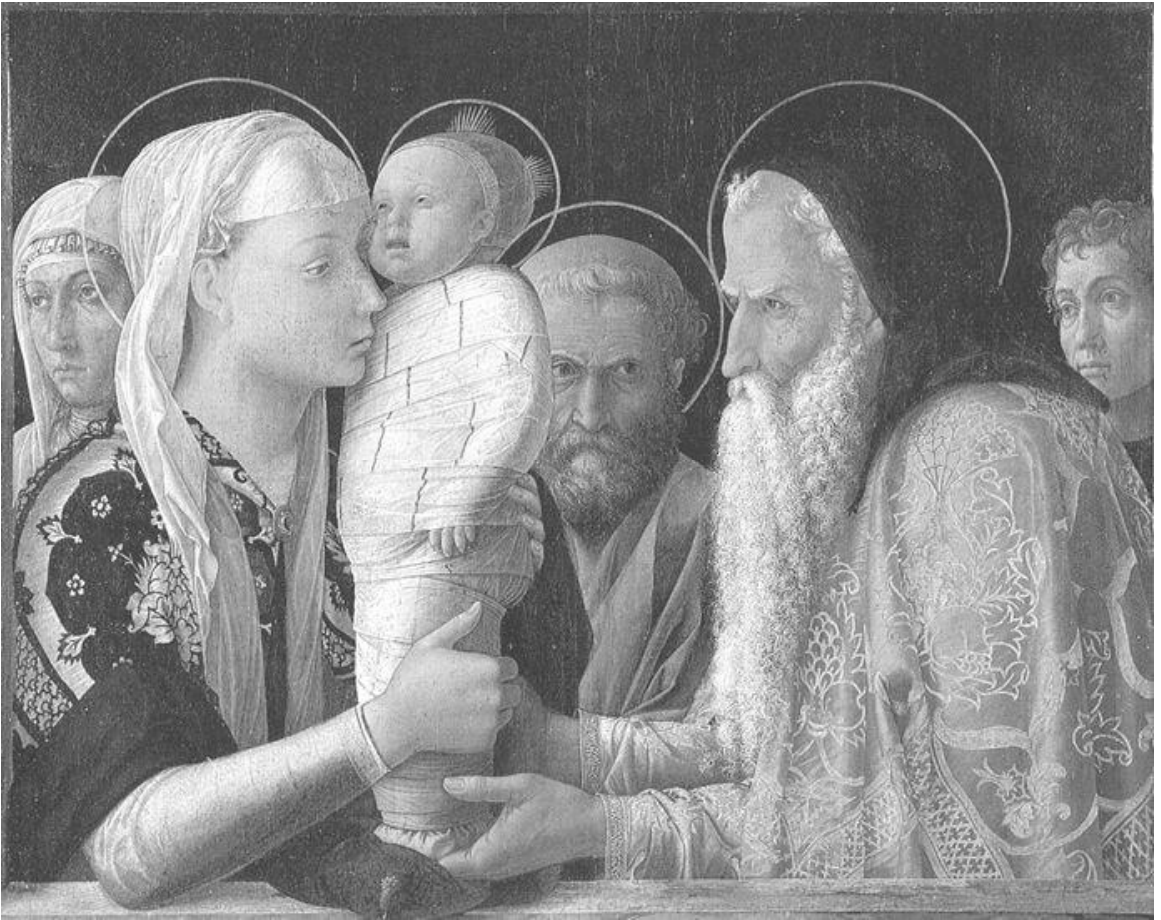
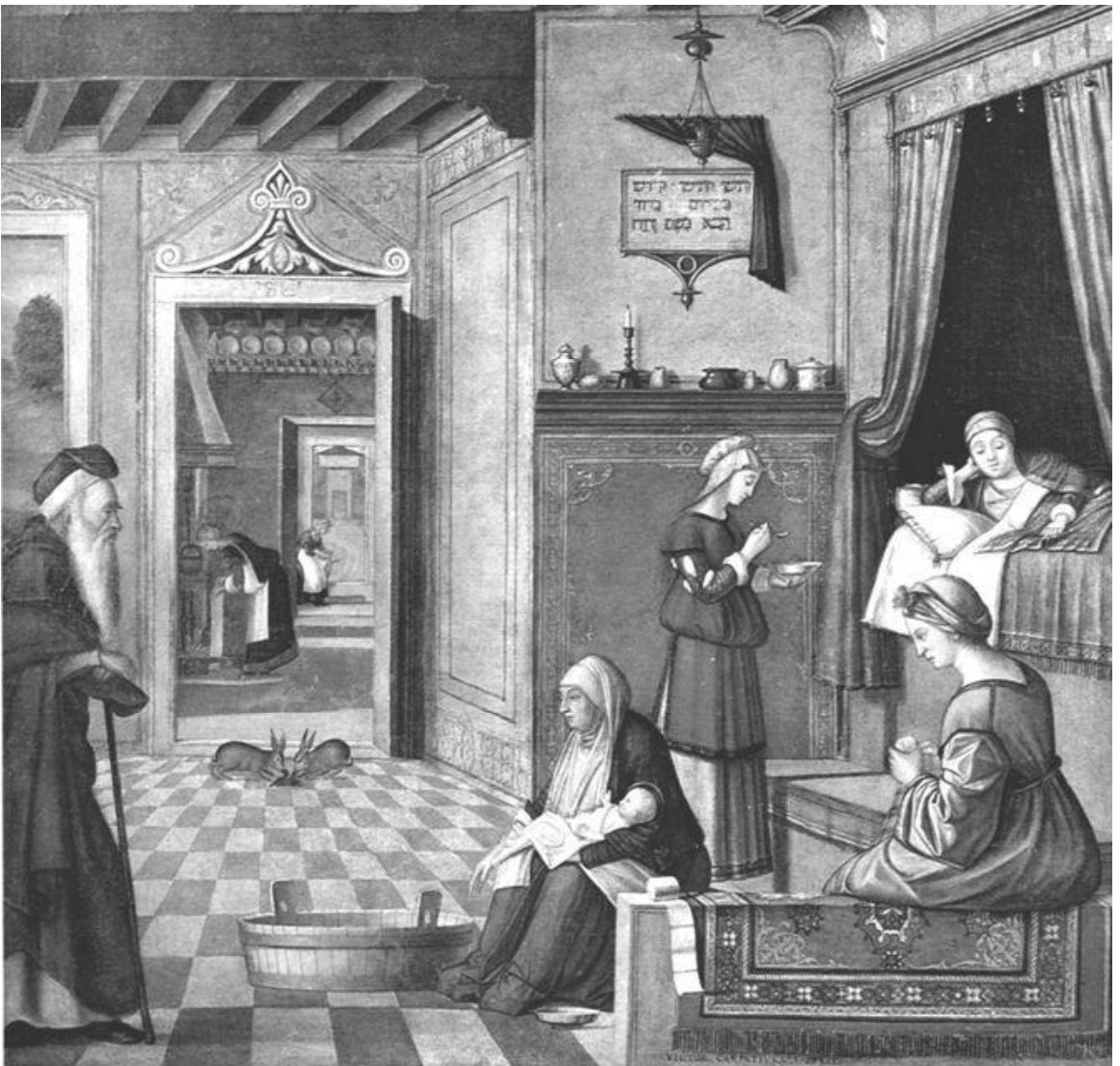


Plate 14a. Andreas Mantegna, *The Presentation at the Temple*, 1460.

In his *Birth of The Virgin*, Vittore Carpaccio used the pine cone to signify Mary's special status in the messianic bloodline but also to refute the theological notion that she was conceived "immaculately." Accordingly, he painted a pine cone motif above the door of her parent's bedroom. Furthermore, two rabbits were painted on the bedroom floor, in front of the doorway. Needless to say, rabbits were not typical items of decoration or background detail, especially indoors. Known popularly for their unrestrained breeding, Carpaccio inserted rabbits into the scene to subliminally suggest sexual activity and thus ridicule the doctrine of Immaculate Conception.

Conventional historians blithely assume that Renaissance artists promulgated mainstream Roman Catholicism, but this contradicts the evidence of the artwork itself. Moreover, the Church did not, and could not, brainwash everybody. By nature and tradition, intellectually astute artists everywhere tend to hold antiestablishment views, especially in tightly controlled societies as existed in medieval Europe where freedom of expression was severely restricted. Art was censored by the Inquisition, so heretical messages had to be cloaked by the artists so as to be unrecognizable to unsubtle minds.



Vittore Carpaccio, *Birth of The Virgin*, 1504

Fertility gods were always venerated in the Middle East, even among the Israelites. During the Second Temple era, Jews living in rural areas clung to traditions that predated formal Judaism. Ezekiel complained that Jewish women cried for Tammuz, a Babylonian fertility deity, outside the gates of Jerusalem. Later, as Christianity and Islam emerged, Zacharias was adopted by women in the region as a fertility “god,” over the claims of Abraham, Jacob, and other patriarchs with seemingly better track records of producing offspring.

The Grand Mosque at Aleppo, the largest city in northern Syria, is known as ‘Jami'a Zakariyyeh.’ According to legend, a shrine located inside the mosque contains the head of Zacharias interred within a wooden pulpit after his martyrdom. On most days, it is surrounded by large numbers of female pilgrims kneeling in prayer, touching and kissing the outside of the shrine, because it is widely believed that women who pray there will improve their chances of a successful pregnancy, especially of having a boy [Plate 50]. This is clearly a legacy from the pre-Islamic era. Evidence an oral tradition existed, before, during, and after the lifetime of Mohammed, that Zacharias was the father of John the Baptist and Jesus, beloved by God and admired by millions worldwide. Every mother wanted sons like these.

DEATH OF ZACHARIAS

Zacharias has no part in any accounts of Jesus' adult life. He might not have survived to witness his son's public ministry. Early Christians, however, had traditions that Zacharias was martyred. Several ancient cave churches in Cappadocia, Turkey, have frescoes on the walls and ceilings painted in a fashion similar to the Sistine Chapel. After centuries of neglect, the authorities have recently made efforts to preserve and restore them in recognition of the income potential they represent. The oldest church in the area, the Church of St. John the Baptist at Cavusin, and its paintings, date back to the 5th century.

Western tourists might be surprised to see among scenes from the New Testament, a depiction of sword-bearing soldiers attacking an elderly priest, titled *The Killing of Zacharias*. The image is based on an episode from the Protovangelium. Herod hears of John's birth, and decides to kill him. Elisabeth takes John into the mountains to hide. Herod's men ask Zacharias for John's whereabouts, but he claims not to know. For his defiance, Zacharias is slaughtered while performing his duties at the Temple. The other priests search but, as with Jesus, Zacharias' body was never found, but as he delayed to come, they were all afraid: and one of them took courage and entered in: and he saw beside the altar congealed blood: and a voice saying: Zacharias hath been slain, and his blood shall not be wiped out until his avenger come. And when he heard that word he was afraid, and went forth and told the priests. And they took courage and went in and saw that which was done: and the panels of the temple did wail: and they rent their clothes from the top to the bottom. And his body they found not, but his blood they found turned into stone.⁸

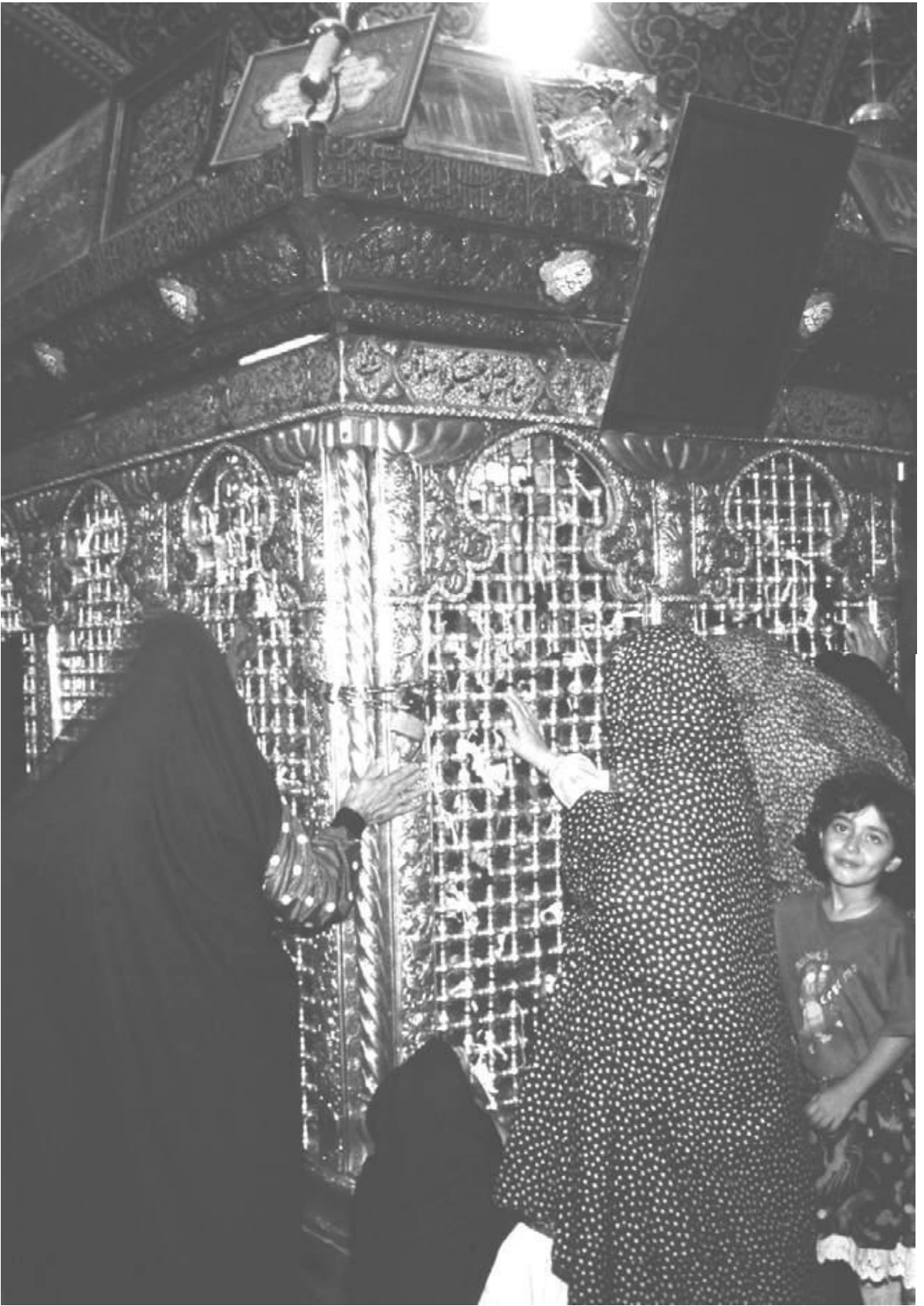


Plate 50. Women Pilgrims at the Shrine of Zacharias, Grand Mosque, Aleppo Syria

Why was a non-canonical scene painted alongside recognized episodes from the New Testament? The answer lies partly in the geographical location of the cave churches, because for an indeterminate period, the cult of John the Baptist was strong in the region. Their numbers dwindled over time, but doubtless many joined the growing Christian

church and brought with them a legacy of veneration for John, and the death of Zacharias was preserved in their works of art. The Orthodox Church, therefore, believes that the killing of Zacharias is canonical and is a part of New Testament tradition. It was mentioned by Jesus during a heated confrontation with scribes and Pharisees:

The blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it shall be required of this generation.

Luke 11:50

According to the Orthodox view, Jesus referred to Abel and Zacharias to signify the span of all historical time. From Adam's family to the present day. Jesus was bringing *all* salvation history to fruition, so restitution for *all* wrongdoings of the past had to be made. By this definition, Zacharias must have been a contemporary of the current generation. Abel's death was a murder in the first dispensational family. Zacharias' death was a murder in the final dispensational family.

The Orthodox interpretation of Luke 11:51 was rejected by the Western Church on the grounds that the story of Zacharias' death originated from the Protovangelium, a dubious non-canonical text. The Catholic Church, however, maintains that Joseph was a widower when he married Mary, and still celebrates Mary's Presentation at the Temple -- concepts whose only source is the same Protovangelium.

Catholic and Protestant biblical scholars argue that the Zacharias whom Jesus mentioned was as an obscure figure from the distant past. The Second Book of Chronicles records the story of a priest, Jehoida, whose son Zacharias was stoned to death in the Temple by an angry crowd, after he demanded they change their ways. This took place during the First Temple era, before the exile and return from Babylon, and over seven hundred years before Jesus. Theoretically, both Jesus and his audience would have understood that the slaying of the ancient Zacharias was the last known or recorded event of its kind.⁹ Accordingly, even though Jesus excoriated the current generation, he considered it responsible only for murders that occurred before, and not after, the death of the Zacharias in 2 Chronicles.

This argument does not merit serious consideration. The Hebrew Bible as a unified form did not even exist in the time of Jesus, and the chronology of events was obscure. Luke had already identified Zacharias earlier in his gospel, so there was no reason for him to do so again. Clearly, the details of Zacharias' death as described in the Protovangelium are questionable, as the story patently owes its source to a devotional Baptist tradition. But Jesus' saying is likely to be authentic, as there was nothing to gain by its inclusion. Critics have suggested that these verses were invented to explain the slaughter of Jews that accompanied the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 C.E. But that event followed two generations after Jesus. If indeed his father had been murdered, then his harsh words resonate. Jesus demanded justice.

Other legends of Zacharias' passing have survived, and one cannot help but get the distinct impression from them that he did not die of natural causes. The church father Epiphanius (c. 320-403 C.E.), was a renowned heresiologist¹⁰ who traveled extensively to track down and record unorthodoxies wherever he discovered them. He quoted an account of Zacharias' death from a lost book known as *The Descent of Mary* that originated from a Christian Gnostic sect in Egypt. According to Epiphanius, this sect

believed that God appeared in the shape of an “ass.” This was a common allegation thrown at Jews by their enemies.

In *The Descent of Mary*, Zacharias was offering incense at the Temple when he had a vision that shocked him. He wanted to disclose it to the people, but he had been struck dumb. What he had seen was a vision of a man, standing in the form of an ass. And the figure that appeared to him took away his power of speech. Once verbal communication had been restored, Zacharias declared what had happened, and the people killed him for blasphemy. Gnostics viewed Zacharias as a martyr because Gnostics themselves believed God often materialized as an ‘ass.’ In point of fact, many cults in antiquity represented God as an ‘ass.’ Evidently, these Gnostics reinvented the story of Zacharias’ death to serve their own purposes, as John the Baptist’s followers also built a fanciful myth around it.

Tertullian (c. 155-230 C.E.) was one of the earliest Church fathers and a giant of the pre-Nicene period. He lived in Carthage all his life, from where he wrote at length against heresies and paganism, and advocated the strictly disciplined religious life. Although married, he saw no contradiction in that. His reputation was for scrupulous honesty, practicality, and commitment, which is apparent in his writings. Toward the end of his life, he broke with the Catholic Church and joined the stricter Montanist movement. His quest for perfectionism eventually forced him to leave the Montanists and found his own church. The name of Tertullian was restored to its former glory by future Church leaders, but his defection always prevented him from attaining sainthood.

In a letter to his wife, Anastasia the Deaconess of Antioch, Tertullian addressed the issue of the identity of Zacharias slain in the Temple. He rejects the notion that it was Zacharias from 2 Chronicles, forcefully makes the case that Jesus was concerned with contemporary events, and concludes that Zacharias was the father of John the Baptist. To support his argument, he relates an oral tradition that Zacharias was killed because he had allowed Mary into the Temple while she was pregnant, which was in violation of the Law:

Whom a tradition not contained in Scripture relates that the Jews slew between the temple and the altar, because he plainly prophesied or rather showed the God-bearer to be a virgin, and him that is born of her, the great God and Savior Jesus Christ, like some King and chief and Lord over their people, and did not remove the holy Virgin herself after the incomprehensible conception by the Holy Spirit from the virgins' place in the temple, between the temple and the altar, as one that was married, but knew her to be still a virgin, and allowed her to stand in the same accustomed place as usual. For this reason (they say) those who heard of it fell into a rage and took weapons in their hands against him.

The final sentence is instructive, “for this reason (they say) those who heard of it fell into a rage and took weapons in their hands against him.” The insinuation is that Tertullian did not think Zacharias was killed for the reason given. That is not surprising because it was clearly a fabrication. Under no circumstances would a priest have allowed a pregnant girl into the sacred Temple area, and neither would a pregnant girl have wished to go there. Death at the hands of a Jewish mob was almost always for reasons of adultery and fornication. But as Tertullian believed in the “incomprehensible conception” of Jesus, he had no desire to publicize details of the accusation against Zacharias. Nevertheless, Zacharias, as a Jewish priest, could not have proclaimed the Gentile doctrine of the virgin birth, as Tertullian states.

The meaning behind this story is clear. Zacharias was accused of adultery. He had impregnated Mary while she was betrothed to another man. For breaking the Law of Moses, he was punished accordingly. Mary herself would only have escaped capital punishment if she were considered an innocent victim, and not a willing participant in the sexual act.¹¹ Zacharias sealed his own fate by prophesying to the crowd that the child of his unlawful tryst would be their future king and redeemer. Although Tertullian stated that this tradition was not “contained in Scripture,” Zacharias’ made precisely the same prophecy about Jesus in the *Benedictus* (see Page 39).

The story of Zacharias’ death spread far and wide. It traveled eastward to reach Persia, and was recorded in *The Prophets, Their Lives, and Their Stories*, by Abdul-Sâhib Al-Hasani Al-âmilîis, a Shiite work from the early Middle Ages that is a collection of biographies of the prophets of Islam based on much earlier sources.¹² Zacharias is honored as both the father of John the Baptist and the guardian of Mary. Even though both Sunni and Shiite branches of Islam accept the doctrine of the virgin birth, the author detailed a sexual accusation made against Zacharias:

They say that when Mary the daughter of Imram got pregnant with Jesus and her pregnancy showed up, they accused Zacharias and that the Satan made them imagine and induced them to believe so and made them think truly that the one who made her pregnant was Zacharias because no one can enter her place except of him because he is her guardian...

This matter was carried in their hearts and they never saw a woman that gets pregnant without a man, so the silly folks of the Jews chased him until he left Jerusalem. When he went out, the evil got even greater and the charge got bigger in the hearts of the bad people and they talked about the sin of Zacharias, so their silly folks chased him, and he went to a valley and they followed him, and when he was in the middle of it he saw a tree so he went to it and it opened up for him and he went inside it and then it closed upon him, and then the Satan came chasing him with the others until he reached the tree and he said to them: he is inside it here, and he put his hand on the position of his (Zacharias’) heart, so he ordered them to saw it and so they did and he was sawn with the tree from the middle, and then they left him apart. Then God sent the angels to wash him up and pray upon him for three days before being buried, and then the good people of the Israelites took him and buried him, and the details about that shall come later by God’s will.

The biographer refers twice to Zacharias’ accusers as “silly folks,” presumably because they failed to recognize that Mary’s conception of Jesus was miraculous. Evidently, these Jews did not share the peculiar Gentile theology that insists God exists apart from the laws by which He creates. But in stating that Zacharias was the only man with access to Mary, “no one can enter her place except of him because he is her guardian,” the writer gives enough reason to doubt the validity of his thesis. Despite being a mythological account of Zacharias’ death, two realities were at its heart. First, Zacharias fathered Jesus, and second, he was murdered because of it.

PHARISEES

To some extent, the killing of Zacharias might account for Jesus’ antipathy toward the Law. In his confrontations with Pharisees, there is a hint that both sides were distrustful of each other because of past events. Pharisees, who knew the circumstances of

Zacharias' death, would be apprehensive of Jesus because his followers included some who might easily be persuaded to violence. And Jesus might seek revenge. In that case, getting rid of him would have been a priority for some Pharisees.

In John 8:41, Jesus accused the Pharisees of trying to kill him; and their response was telling, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God." This could be interpreted as an accusation that Jesus was illegitimate, and if so, the Pharisees must have known details of his parentage to make that charge. As the family background of public figures was subject to a great deal of scrutiny, chances are that many could not accept lessons from Jesus because they considered him a *mamzer*, and worthy only of disdain. The charge of illegitimacy was the most damning of all because it summarily disqualified Jesus from leadership of the Israelite community. This, apparently, was a source of deep frustration,

Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning.
John 8:43-44

Abel's was the first murder, which Jesus had linked elsewhere with Zacharias' death. He now suggests that the Pharisees have the same fate in store for him. Assuming the saying is genuine, it betrays a profound resentment and, considering the numerous other instances where Jesus showed contempt for Pharisees, the underlying reasons must have been more than a difference of theological opinion. Jesus accused them of "shedding the blood of the prophets," but there is no record in scriptures of Jews killing any of their prophets. According to Josephus, Essenes were reputedly "prophets" during the Pharisaic era, but were expelled from the Temple and mainstream Jewish society around the turn of the century. Possibly, blood was shed over this event. Whether Jesus had the Essenes in mind is unknowable, but he charged the Pharisees,

You witness against yourselves, that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.
Matt 23:31-32

The simple explanation for Jesus' scorn was that Pharisees had killed his father, Zacharias, who he acknowledged as a prophet.

The Pharisees were a religio-political movement with diverse factions. Dissenters from the party line were tolerated so long as they did not threaten to overthrow the leadership. Although they were not a monolithic bloc, a hard-line fundamentalist Palestinian faction was dominant. The movement had its origins in the Temple, and many priests were Pharisees. One of the main aims was to spread practice of the purity laws among the general population as well as the priesthood. By the time of Jesus, their opposition to the puppet Herodian dynasty and the aristocratic rule of the Sadducees had built the Pharisees a reputation as champions of the people. As a result, the general public trusted their leadership, and if encouraged to do so, would doubtless have supported the killing of a recalcitrant priest who had transgressed the law on adultery.

If Mary were in her period of betrothal, then she would not have been recognized as a concubine, so by definition Jesus was born a *mamzer*. As the illegitimate son of a priest, he would have been barred from holding priestly office. Pharisees were strong advocates of this principle, and in the past had demanded that High Priests resign on account of

their presumed illegitimacy.¹³ A family register kept in Jerusalem recorded details of births, and it is certain that illegitimate births were registered for the sake of the purity of the community.¹⁴ The genealogy of the priesthood was of the utmost importance and the relevant documentation could be accessed by anyone with appropriate credentials. Families with this blemish would of course have tried to keep it secret whenever possible, and the genealogies of Jesus given in Matthew and Luke were formulated with this in mind.

There is a mention of this family register, and a possible corroboration of John 8:41, in a reference to Jesus in the Mishnah, the oldest and most authoritative part of the Talmud. In rabbinic literature, Jesus is habitually referred to as *peloni*, usually translated as “so and so,” an expression reserved exclusively for Jesus and for no one else. One passage revolved around a Simeon ben Azzai, who according to tradition was one of most respected holy mystics of Israel before the destruction of the Temple. He read the birth of “so and so” recorded in Jerusalem and he was clearly a “mamzer,”

Simeon ben Azzai has said: I discovered a family register in Jerusalem; in which it was written: That so and so is a mamzer (bastard), son of a married woman.¹⁵

Today the English equivalent of *mamzer* -- ‘bastard’ -- is a strong insult, but it had far more serious ramifications in first-century Palestine. Anyone using the word incorrectly was sentenced to thirty-nine lashes with the whip. So the “mamzer” charge was not made lightly. Based on Deuteronomy 23:2, the stigma of *mamzer* marked a man’s descendants forever, “Those born of an illicit union shall not be admitted into the assembly of the Lord. Even unto the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord.”

Jesus’ birth status was the obsession of rabbis, but Jewish Christians would have strongly contested any *mamzer* charge. In the Mishnah, there is a reference to a dispute over an unnamed *mamzer*:

He who says, “This, my son, is a mamzer,” is not believed. And even if both parties say concerning the foetus in the mother’s womb, “It is a mamzer,” they are not believed. Rabbi Judah says, “They are believed.”¹⁶

Frequent references in rabbinic literature claim that Mary admitted her adultery, so the “foetus in the mother’s womb” was most likely a reference to her child. The first line reads as though Zacharias -- “He who says,” -- publicly acknowledged Jesus’ status, which gels with the oral tradition Tertullian recorded. Those who refuse to believe Jesus was a *mamzer*, despite both parent’s confession, are the Christians whose theological arguments failed to impress Rabbi Judah. The facts speak for themselves. The parents corroborate them. The child is a *mamzer*.

The circumstances behind Zacharias’ death must surely have influenced the relationship between the Pharisees and John the Baptist. Despite his widespread popularity, John did not have much support from them. Jesus was even reported to have used the fact that the Pharisees did not believe in John to score a point against them. John was also not well disposed towards the Pharisees:

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?”

Whether or not John took his hereditary right to the priesthood is uncertain. As a rule, the son of a priest would be ordained at the age of twenty, but first his legitimate descent would first have to be proved, and that could have been problematic in John's case. He was probably not ordained because the judgment against his father had disqualified him in the eyes of the Pharisees who controlled the Sanhedrin. One thing seems certain -- the Pharisees were well aware of both John and Jesus, and kept track of their activities in adult life. As Jesus had a much smaller support base than John, he was the more cautious in public.

Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), he left Judea and departed again to Galilee.

John 4:2-3

SUMMARY

The notion that Jesus had a biological father no longer belongs in the contemplative realm -- where many would prefer it remain. It has crash landed with a resounding thud, and is narrowed down to one distinct individual. But knowing that Zacharias was the father of Jesus is much more than just another interesting tidbit of information. Not only does it turn two thousand years of Christian theology upside down, the truth of Jesus' parentage opens up the possibility to understand other aspects of his life.

Although the Church always denied him a genuine father-son relationship, awareness of Jesus' origins was not detrimental to the faith of early disciples. The Lucan school of Christianity explained events through the prism of Abraham's family. But what about the branch of Christianity to which Matthew belonged? How did Matthew reconcile Jesus' messianic status with the apparently sordid details of his birth? The answer is so simple as to be inconceivable. And though Matthew was unaware of Luke, in essence he told the same story.

4 Angel of the Lord

Matthew is considered the most “Jewish” gospel. The author displayed extensive knowledge of Hebrew Scriptures and traditions, which he used liberally throughout the narrative.

Written in Greek, possibly in translation from a Hebrew original, it was aimed primarily at Greek-speaking Diaspora Jews. The gospel’s unique record of Jesus’ instruction to his disciples to “Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” suggests that it was not written for Romans. It is ironic, therefore, how much the Roman church derived from it.

The introduction of Matthew is a genealogical listing designed to provide a theological explanation for Jesus’ conception. Most readers skip these seventeen verses for two reasons. First, it does not make for scintillating reading (so and so begat so and so, etc), and second, the common presupposition that Jesus had no human father makes a list of his ancestors meaningless. This is unfortunate. Only after the reader has digested the contents of the first seventeen verses, can he appreciate the sequential aspect of the eighteenth verse, “now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way.” In other words, Jesus’ birth happened the same way as his predecessors.

To prove purity of blood descent, it was not necessary for a genealogy to go back as far as Matthew had done for Jesus. People were not expected to possess accurate records of ancient history, nor would they be believed if they produced them. Besides, since the narrative stated that Joseph was not Jesus’ father, it was taken for granted that the names of Jesus’ ancestors were given purely for pedagogical reasons.

To prove that Jesus’ birth took place according to heaven’s tradition, Matthew had to break with the established custom of listing only male names in a genealogy. In addition to Mary, he mentioned four other maternal predecessors -- Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba) -- all of whom produced forefathers of Jesus. As their stories were recorded in Scripture, each was celebrated in popular folklore as a matriarch of the Jewish nation, despite having had questionable relationships with men.

The reason why Matthew included only the names of these four women, and no others, has often been debated. There is a general agreement that somehow they were analogous to Mary, but exactly how remains a mystery.

THE FOUR MATRIARCHS

Tamar

Tamar’s story is the subject of Genesis 38. She was married to Er, oldest son of Judah, from whose descendants the Messiah was to come. Er died childless, and Tamar was given to his brother Onan, according to the custom of levirate marriage, where the brother of a dead husband took his widowed wife. Not wanting children by Tamar, Onan “spilled his seed on the ground.” As this “was displeasing to the Lord,” Onan was put to death. Consequently, Judah’s third son, Shelah, was betrothed to Tamar by the same marriage custom.

Judah was reluctant to allow a consummation of this union due to his suspicions that Tamar was somehow responsible for the death of his two other sons. So Tamar took

matters into her own hands. Disguising herself as a prostitute, she wore a veil, and waited in the appropriate location. Unaware of her true identity, Judah approached Tamar for sexual favors. For payment, she asked for his signet, cord, and staff.

Three months later, news of her pregnancy reached Judah. “Tamar your daughter in law has played the harlot; and moreover she is with child by harlotry.”¹ In righteous indignation, Judah demanded that she be burned in public for betraying her husband.

Tamar produced Judah’s signet, cord, and staff to identify him as the man responsible. Judah acknowledged them, and his statement that Tamar “is more righteous than I, in as much as I did not give her to my son Shelah,” was made in reference to Jacob’s prophesy that the Messiah would come from a descendant of Judah, “the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”² Since Judah’s sons were childless, he had no male heir. Therefore, his relationship with Tamar was essential to guarantee the prophecy. Tamar gave birth to twin boys, Zerah and Perez. King David was descended from Perez.

Rahab

In Jesus’ genealogy, Rahab is listed as the wife of Salmon, although their child-bearing union has no biblical source, and does not feature in any other known Jewish tradition. It may be exclusive to Matthew and his school of Jewish Christianity. Rahab’s story is in the Book of Joshua. Before the Israelite army attacked Jericho, two spies were sent to explore the city and report back. In Christian tradition, Salmon, a prince of the tribe of Judah, was one of the two spies sent by Joshua.

While in Jericho, the Hebrew spies stayed with Rahab, who is described as a “harlot,” which presumably attracted them to her. The King of Jericho soon discovered their whereabouts, but his plan to capture the spies was thwarted by Rahab’s cunning. In gratitude, the victorious Joshua spared Rahab’s family from the devastation of the city. Boaz, the son of Rahab and Salmon, was the great grandfather of King David. *Ruth*

Ruth was a Moabite woman married to an Israelite. When her husband died leaving her childless, she left her homeland and returned with Naomi, her mother-in-law, to settle in Bethlehem. This was a bold move, as she would probably have been labeled a prostitute in her new land. Moses had forbidden the Israelites sexual relations with Moabite women on account of their reputation for loose morals.

Nonetheless, Ruth soon attracted the attention of Boaz, a wealthy older relative in Naomi’s family. Naomi persuaded Ruth that Boaz would make her a good husband, and his responsibility as a kinsman was to marry her. One night, acting on Naomi’s instruction, Ruth sneaked into Boaz’s bed, and asked him to marry her. Although Boaz wanted her to stay, he tried to wriggle out of marriage by suggesting that another kinsman was more eligible than he.

And now it is true that I am a near kinsman, yet there is a kinsman nearer than I.
Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will do the part of the next of kin for you, well; let him do it.
Ruth 3:12-13

If the kinsman refused, Boaz promised to marry Ruth. The next day, Boaz gave Ruth a

payment of “six measures of barley,” and instructed his staff that “it not be known that the woman came on the threshing floor”. Aware Naomi was the instigator, he told Ruth she “must not go back empty handed to your mother-in-law.” So Boaz paid Ruth and Naomi for his evening, and tried to keep it a secret.

At a meeting of the city elders, the nearer kinsman rejected an offer to take Ruth as his wife. Boaz honored his promise and married Ruth. Witnesses to his acceptance speech declared, “May your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.” Both women put themselves at considerable risk to entrap men of high standing in the community, and produced male heirs in the messianic lineage. Obed, the son of Ruth and Boaz, was the grandfather of David.

Bathsheba

The legend of Bathsheba, from the Second Book of Samuel, is the most well known of the four women. She is not mentioned by name, only as “the wife of Uriah,” because Matthew wants to draw attention to her adulterous relationship with King David, and not her subsequent marriage to him.

As David was “walking upon the roof of the king’s house”, he noticed a beautiful woman bathing [Plate 15]. On inquiry, he was told that she was Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite, a soldier in the king’s army. All the same, David summoned her to his presence and “he lay with her.” She conceived a child from this union and sent news of her pregnancy to David. His immediate reaction was to recall Uriah from the frontline so that he would sleep with his wife and believe he was the child’s father. The plan backfired when Uriah, out of a sense of solidarity with troops still fighting, refused to have sexual relations. David ordered him to be sent back and placed in the forefront of the battle to be killed quickly. This plan succeeded.



Plate 15. Jan Massys, *David and Bathsheba*, 1562, Louvre, Paris Most artists depicted Bathsheba as a seductress, not as David’s submissive victim

After a period of mourning, Bathsheba married David and gave birth to a son. But the child died because “this thing that David had done displeased the Lord.” Later, Bathsheba gave David a second son, Solomon, listed by Matthew as Jesus’ ancestor.

Typically, commentators on this story regard Bathsheba as David’s unwitting victim, and for this reason she is not categorized with the other women in Jesus’ genealogy. However, the custom of Middle Eastern women was to be covered from head to toe whenever in public. Women in Jerusalem did not bathe naked outdoors, and have never done so. Even within the family compound, women took the greatest care possible to be out of sight. Matthew would not have referred to Bathsheba if he understood her as an ingénue. Knowing that David took regular walks on the palace rooftops, she deliberately positioned herself to be in his line of view. Bathsheba manipulated David’s weakness in order to seduce him; not the other way around.

PATTERN OF CONCEPTION

The specific details in the accounts of the four women differ, but they were listed because of the common themes they shared with Mary. These may be briefly summarized as follows:

- (1) The woman was the initiator of a sexual relationship that led to the birth of a forefather in the messianic line. She was proactive, using different techniques of seduction, risking her life and reputation in the process. Tamar dressed as a

prostitute to deceive Judah; Rahab drew the Hebrew spies into her house, and married into the Israelite community; Ruth went directly into Boaz's bed and propositioned him; Bathsheba bathed naked in full view of David to spark his passion.

(2) The father of her child was of considerable status in the community; most definitely of a higher social rank than the woman (at least three and possibly all four women were of Gentile origins). Judah was the wealthy and powerful head of his clan; Salmon was a leader in the tribe of Judah, trusted by Joshua; Boaz was a wealthy businessman and an elder of Bethlehem; David was the King of Israel.

(3) Another man, intended for or married to the woman, failed to consummate a sexual relationship with her. Shelah and Tamar had no conjugal relations while betrothed. The nearer kinsman had first refusal on marrying Ruth, but declined to do so. Uriah turned down the opportunity to sleep with Bathsheba, his wife. In the case of Rahab, there is a lack of clear supporting information in the narrative, but she deceived the King of Jericho. Matthew most probably understood that the King had unrequited designs on Rahab, perhaps from the same source by which he knew Salmon was her husband.

At first, only the third premise seems to apply to Mary. She was betrothed to Joseph, and their relationship was not consummated either before or during her pregnancy with Jesus, "but knew her not until she had borne a son." But once Mary's pregnancy was established, Joseph, "being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce Mary." None of the matriarchs had conceived miraculously, and the likelihood never occurred to Joseph. As Mary's child was described as being of the "Holy Spirit," the father ranked higher than Mary. The second premise, therefore, also applied.

Matthew's use of Isaiah 7:14, "behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel," implied Mary was proactive toward her child-bearing mission. It did not explain a miraculous birth, but that an unmarried woman would sacrifice herself for the sake of God's Providence. The man's role was perfunctory. As with her maternal precursors, Mary put herself in a precarious, even life-threatening situation to conceive a messianic child.

The circumstances of Jesus' birth were prefigured by the births of his illustrious ancestors. His father's name was a delicate and controversial matter, so it was withdrawn to protect those not qualified or able to accept it. But Matthew informed like-minded Jewish Christians that Jesus' father was an Essene priest.

ANGEL OF THE LORD

Matthew held the most advanced angelology of all the New Testament writers. His gospel alone contains twenty-eight angelic references. Three times, the "angel of the Lord" appeared in a dream to give Joseph instruction. While he mulled over the fate of his pregnant fiancé, the angel told Joseph that the child was 'conceived of the Holy Spirit.' After Jesus was born, the angel revisited with a direction to take the Holy Family to Egypt to escape Herod. After Herod's death, the angel informed Joseph that it was safe to return the family home.

Considering that Jesus' family did not support his ministry and disapproved of his public speaking,³ it is extremely unlikely that Joseph testified to having received a series of

divinely inspired messages about Jesus. More likely, Joseph's association with the "angel of the Lord" was a device to explain events in the narrative.

The conventional understanding of an angel is as a spirit, normally invisible to the human eye. Angels that assume a physical form, usually remain incognito while doing so. Occasionally, they appear to saints or prophets bringing messages from God, but the rest of us have to take the existence of angels on faith.

In works of art, angels are normally depicted with wings, which is not to suggest that they fly like birds, but that they are not subject to the normal restrictions of time and space. In ancient literature, angels were regularly mistaken for or confused with people. For example, in the early books of the Bible, angels were described as men. Jacob wrestled a man, and not an angel, at the Ford of Jabbok, and three men, not angels, visited Abraham and Sarah. Later translations changed them into angels as the popular culture was influenced by Hellenism. The root of "angel" is the Greek word *angelos*, which means 'messenger.' Significantly, angels only have male gender in Judaism.

Matthew's fascination with angels was symptomatic of a particular strand of Jewish thought that flourished during the later stages of the Second Temple period. This is best described as Enochic Judaism, after the angel-obsessed non-canonical literature known collectively as the Book of Enoch. Until recently, historians assumed that the origins of the Book of Enoch were in the beginning of the Christian era, because so much of its content was paraphrased, even quoted, in the New Testament. This theory was shattered by the discovery of Enoch manuscripts among the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran in 1947. Although the roots of Enochic literature remain shrouded in obscurity, the New Testament did not influence it. The Book of Enoch influenced the New Testament.

PRIESTS AND ANGELS

Much of Second Temple angelology derived from Zoroastrian influences during the period of exile in Babylon. Angels were central to the religion of the Persian rulers of Babylon, but the perception of angels was not as beings living only in the spirit world. An important tenet of Zoroastrianism was the concept of angelomorphism. Specifically, angels and priests (Magi) were interchangeable. Magi were priestly angels, or *Yazads*, who took part in the sacred liturgical rites that reconciled God and man. They interacted between the physical and spiritual worlds to mediate between the occupants of both [Plate 16].



Plate 16. Classic depiction of a Zoroastrian Priest-Angel, mediator between earth and heaven

The same idea of angels was expressed in the literature of the Second Temple period. The Book of Malachi stated that, “the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger (*angelos*) of the Lord of Hosts.”⁴ Scribes used messenger or “*angelos*” only in the masculine form, because the priesthood was an entirely male institution.

In the Book of Jubilees, literature treasured by the Qumran sect, Isaac is described blessing Levi, from whom the priesthood descends, and likening his “seed” to the angels.

May the Lord give you and your seed greatness and great glory. May he draw you and your seed near to him from all flesh to serve in His sanctuary as the angels of the presence and the holy ones.⁵

The Qumran community had Judaism’s most sophisticated view of angels. In a fragment of the “Blessings” scroll, the priests were given an angelic blessing by the Master at Qumran,

May you be as an angel of the presence in the Abode of Holiness to the glory of God of the hosts... May you attend upon the service in the Temple of the Kingdom and decree destiny in company with the angels of the presence.⁶

An angelomorphic Qumran liturgical scroll, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, found during excavations at the fortress at Masada, thirty miles south of Qumran, suggests that angelic rites were still being performed during the second half of the first-century C.E., when Matthew’s gospel was written.

In the rabbinic writings, the Jerusalem Temple was portrayed as an earthly reflection of

heaven, a holy sanctuary where angels, organized in hierarchical ranks, worshipped God. The earthly hierarchical Temple priesthood was the physical counterpart of the heavenly angelic priesthood.

Essentially, if an “angel” performed normal human actions then he was an earthly priest. For that reason, Matthew’s “angel of the Lord,” who gave Joseph religious guidance and instruction, a customary duty of the priesthood, must be understood as a priest. He communicated with Joseph because he was directly responsible for his predicament. As with Judah and Boaz before him, the priest/angel fathered a son in the sacred bloodline. As ancestral forefathers in the messianic lineage, Judah and Boaz gave prophetic blessings to their progeny. Likewise, Matthew’s “angel of the Lord” gave a messianic prophecy for *his* child, “he will save his people from their sins.”

ZACHARIAS AS ANGEL

In the Protovangelium, Mary receives news of her impending pregnancy from the angel of the Lord, and asks if she would conceive directly from God;

And she, when she heard it, questioned in herself, saying: Shall I verily conceive of the living God, and bring forth after the manner of all women? And the angel of the Lord said: Not so, Mary, for a power of the Lord shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of the Highest. And thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.⁷

The angel’s response was unequivocal -- ‘Not so, Mary’ -- she would *not* be impregnated miraculously. “A power of the Lord” would “overshadow” her, but the child would be conceived and delivered naturally. When Joseph returned home to find Mary pregnant, he compared himself to Adam, “Is not the story of Adam repeated in me? For as at the hour of his giving thanks the serpent came and found Eve alone and deceived her, so hath it befallen me also.” This was a problem for Joseph.

And Joseph was sore afraid and ceased from speaking unto her (or left her alone), and pondered what he should do with her. And Joseph said: If I hide her sin, I shall be found fighting against the law of the Lord: and if I manifest her unto the children of Israel, I fear lest that which is in her be the seed of an angel, and I shall be found delivering up innocent blood to the judgment of death. What then shall I do?⁸

His concern was that Mary’s child might be “the seed of an angel.” Alternatively, he wondered if a priest was the father, and thus the child was the result of a divinely ordained union. The father could only have been the angel/priest Zacharias, in whose home Mary had stayed while Joseph was away. In the gospel of Thomas, Jesus asked his disciples to describe him.

Jesus said to His disciples, “Compare me to someone and tell Me whom I am like.” Simon Peter said to Him, “You are like a righteous angel.” Thomas 13

In the same scene in the synoptic gospels, Peter testified that Jesus was the living Christ; but “righteous angel,” or priest, may have been a more authentic response. And by definition his father must have been a priest. Bearing in mind that Peter denied knowledge of him shortly afterward, and that the other disciples scattered after his arrest,

it is unlikely Jesus was viewed by them in cosmic Christological terms.

GABRIEL

The angelic priesthood was a hierarchical order, and the name Gabriel was a rank designation for an archangel or high ranking priest. In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the priestly/angelic leadership is described as being “in the presence of the Lord,” and Luke introduced the angel of the Lord in the same manner, “I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God.” Luke used Gabriel to suggest that a priestly authority figure orchestrated the dual births of John the Baptist and Jesus. The angel displayed only human characteristics, so there was no reason to interpret him in terms of a supernatural being.

Zacharias was instructed to keep his counsel until the appropriate time: “And behold, you will be silent and unable to speak until the day that these things come to pass.” Zacharias complied because “when he came out, he could not speak to them...and remained dumb.”⁹ As a ranking priest, Zacharias himself would have qualified as a Gabriel.

In his last years, Leonardo Da Vinci made a sketch of Gabriel in preparation for a painting to be titled *Angel of the Annunciation*, which was never completed [Plate 17]. The posture is remarkably similar to his portrait of John the Baptist. And Gabriel’s features, facial expression, and hair resemble an elderly version of John. Apparently, Leonardo suggested a connection between Gabriel and John the Baptist.

The depiction of a phallus on Gabriel is the giveaway. Leonardo would not have received a commission to show an angel with an erect penis. Despite the likelihood that Leonardo was homosexual, he was hardly a producer of homo-erotic art. This drawing was part of his alternative religious iconography. What it proves is that Leonardo did not consider the angel a purely spiritual being. He had an overtly sexual or reproductive function. Previously, Leonardo used the phallic motif in *The Virgin on the Rocks* to symbolize Zacharias, the father of Jesus and John. The sketch of the angel bears an uncanny likeness to John the Baptist was because Gabriel was his priestly father, Zacharias.

The face on the most famous portrait in history, Leonardo’s *Mona Lisa* [Plate 18], has similarities to his portrait of John the Baptist and the drawing of Gabriel. All have the same mysterious smile, as though they shared the same secret -- we know something that you will *never* know.

The title *Mona Lisa* was first mentioned thirty years after Leonardo’s death by Giorgio Vasari, who wrote a biographical *Life of the Artists*. *Mona Lisa* was an abbreviation of ‘Madonna (my lady) Elisabeth.’ Leonardo worked on the painting for a decade, but he left no references on it, and *Mona Lisa*’s identity remains a mystery to art historians. Her dress is plain and timeless, and she wears no contemporary jewelry. Who then, was the anonymous Elisabeth to whom Leonardo was so obviously devoted? Contracts exist for all Leonardo’s commissioned works, but not for the *Mona Lisa*. Art “experts,” speculate that as *Mona Lisa* was a labor of love, it must have been a portrait of the wife or daughter of a contemporary Italian merchant or nobleman, for whom Leonardo had a soft spot. This idea is plausible only if one disregards Leonardo’s true spiritual passion.

On his deathbed, Leonardo was found with three of his works, the *Mona Lisa*, *John the Baptist*, and the *Madonna and child with Saint Anne*. None were commissioned. These paintings were deeply personal. *Mona Lisa* was his riposte to the ubiquitous Virgin Mary,

for whom he had little regard. She was Elisabeth, mother of his beloved John the Baptist, and the true 'Holy Mother.' *Mona Lisa* had given birth to the genuine Christ. This explains why Leonardo kept her portrait close at hand, carried it with him on his travels, and constantly reworked it. It was sacred. It was never intended for sale.



Plate 17. Leonardo Da Vinci, *Sketch of the Angel Gabriel*



Leonardo Da Vinci, *John the Baptist*

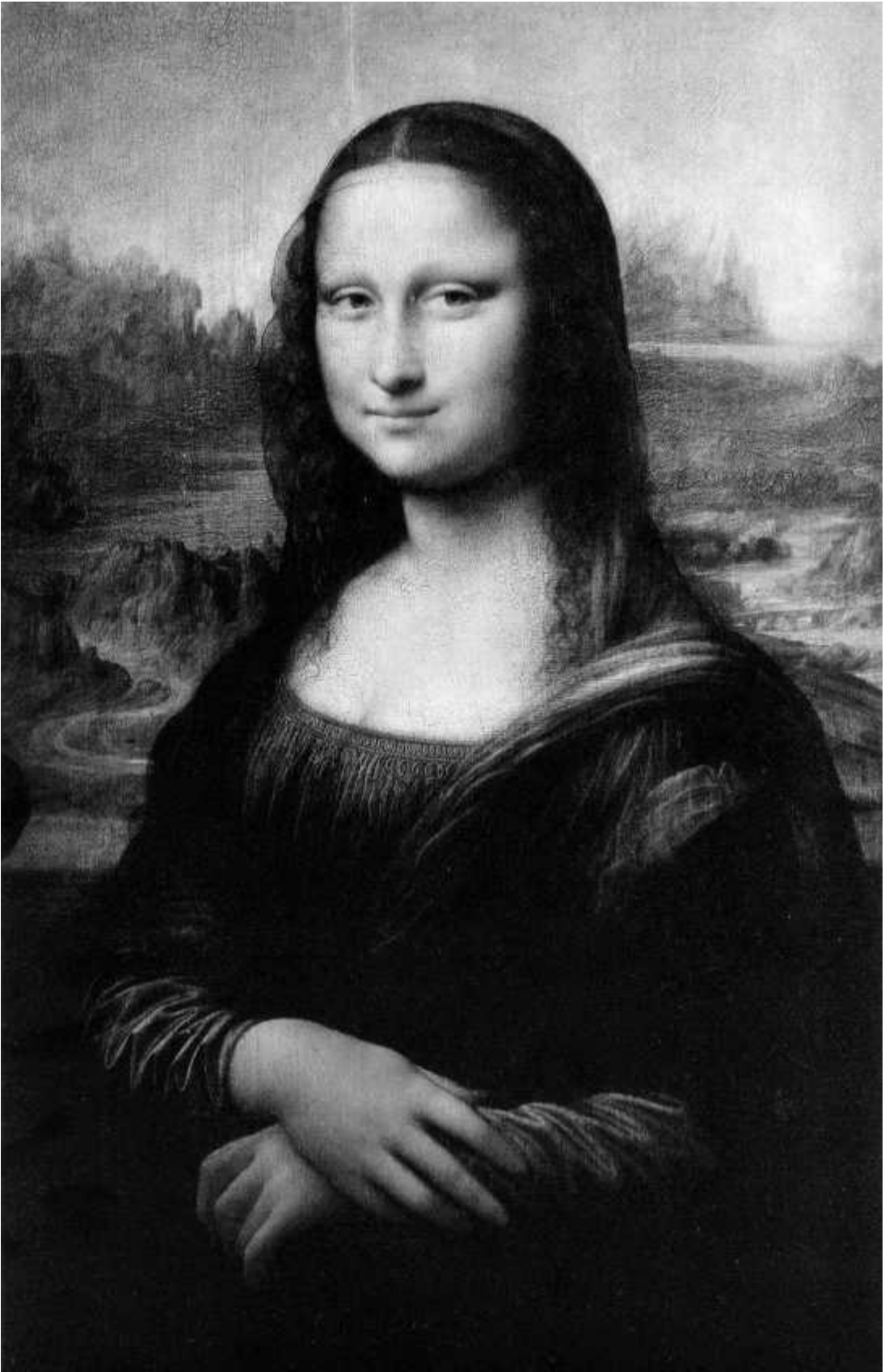


Plate 18. Leonardo Da Vinci, *Mona Lisa*

THE PEACOCK ANGEL

In representations of the annunciation to Mary, Gabriel was sometimes depicted as a “Peacock Angel” [Plates 19 & 19a]. Or alternatively, peacocks were painted in the

background. Worship of the Peacock Angel is an integral part of the secretive Yazidi religion of ethnic Iraqi Kurds, and is mentioned in the sacred books of the Iraqi Mandeans, but its origins are believed to be Zoroastrian. Reverence for the Peacock Angel has led outsiders to accuse Yazidis of ‘Satan’ worship because both are identified with an archangel, assumed to be Lucifer. But the anthropologist E.S. Drower, who lived with both the Yazidis and the Mandeans, was convinced that the meaning of the “Peacock Angel” is as a symbol of man in perfection and not an external supernatural entity.¹⁰



Plate 19. Fra Fillipo Lippi, *The Annunciation*, 1450, National Gallery, London

The beautiful luminescent colors of a peacock's tail feathers derive from different angles of light and not from pigmentation, so made an ideal symbol for high spiritual status in a part of the world where “light” was commonly used as a metaphor for godliness and truth. Within the same context, medieval alchemists used the peacock as a symbol of generation into one of the transformative stages.

In Indian mythology, peacocks are vehicles for the Hindu gods. The golden throne of the former Kings of Delhi was known as the peacock throne. Kings of Babylon and Persia sat on peacock thrones, and today an ornate peacock throne in Golestan Palace, Teheran, remains a symbol of the former Shah of Iran. Ancient Egyptian priests were depicted wearing peacock feathers hats, and Renaissance artists often portrayed the Magi similarly attired. Gabriel's peacock feathers showed that he was of an advanced spiritual level; a ranking priest/angel in the Magi/Essene tradition. They also suggest royalty.



Plate 19a. Fra Filippo Lippi, *Annunciation*, 1443, Munich, Germany

A depiction of the *Adoration of the Magi* was *de rigueur* for early Renaissance artists. Many painted several versions, and some incorporated peacocks into the scene. Art historians explain that the peacock was meant as a symbol of Christ's Resurrection. But the reason given -- that the ancients believed that peacock flesh never died -- is far-fetched. Even if bodily renewal were the message intended by the artists, peacocks would have been featured in crucifixion scenes when Jesus' death was imminent, not at the moment his life was beginning.

In a Botticelli version of the *Adoration of the Magi*, a huge peacock was painted in the top right-hand-corner observing events below [Plates 20 & 20a]. Jesus' father is absent from the picture, but the peacock symbolized his paternal descent from the peacock lineage of Zacharias. In a collaborative painting by Fra Angelico and Fra Fillipo Lippi [Plate 21], an exaggerated peacock looms over Mary and her child. As the Magi genuflect, a peahen swoops down from the rooftop, as the male bird watches. The peahen represented Elisabeth, wife of Zacharias. The demeanor of the female bird signified Elisabeth's resentment toward Jesus.

In the Hora Church in Istanbul, Turkey, a fourteenth century Byzantine mosaic shows Mary's parents, Joachim and Anne, preparing to hand her over to Zacharias. As they hold Mary lovingly, a large peacock stands to the right, next to a building representing the Temple. The peacock symbolizes Zacharias and the messianic lineage that was to be Mary's destiny [Plate 24].



Plate 24. Mosaic, *Scene from the Life of Mary*, 14th century, Hora Church, Istanbul, Turkey (Art Resource)

FORBIDDEN FRUITS

One of the boldest Renaissance artists was the Venetian master Carlo Crivelli (c.1435 -- c.1495). Crivelli painted numerous versions of the 'Madonna and Child,' and most share the same distinctive feature -- branches of oversized ripe fruit, more often than not apples, painted above Mary's head, and beneath her feet. Usually, the baby Jesus sits in Mary's lap, holding an apple. Art historians suggest that apples symbolized Mary's special fertility, and that Jesus was the 'fruit' of her womb. But Crivelli also liked to include another 'fruit' in his paintings. It resembled a zucchini or cucumber in appearance, but was usually upright, which is not how these vegetables grow naturally. Neither, of course, do they grow in trees [Plates 22 & 23]. Technically, such 'fruit' does not exist, but was used by Crivelli because of its conspicuously phallic shape. It is not difficult to guess what his purpose was.



Plate 20. Sandro Botticelli, *Adoration of the Magi*, 1485, National Gallery, London

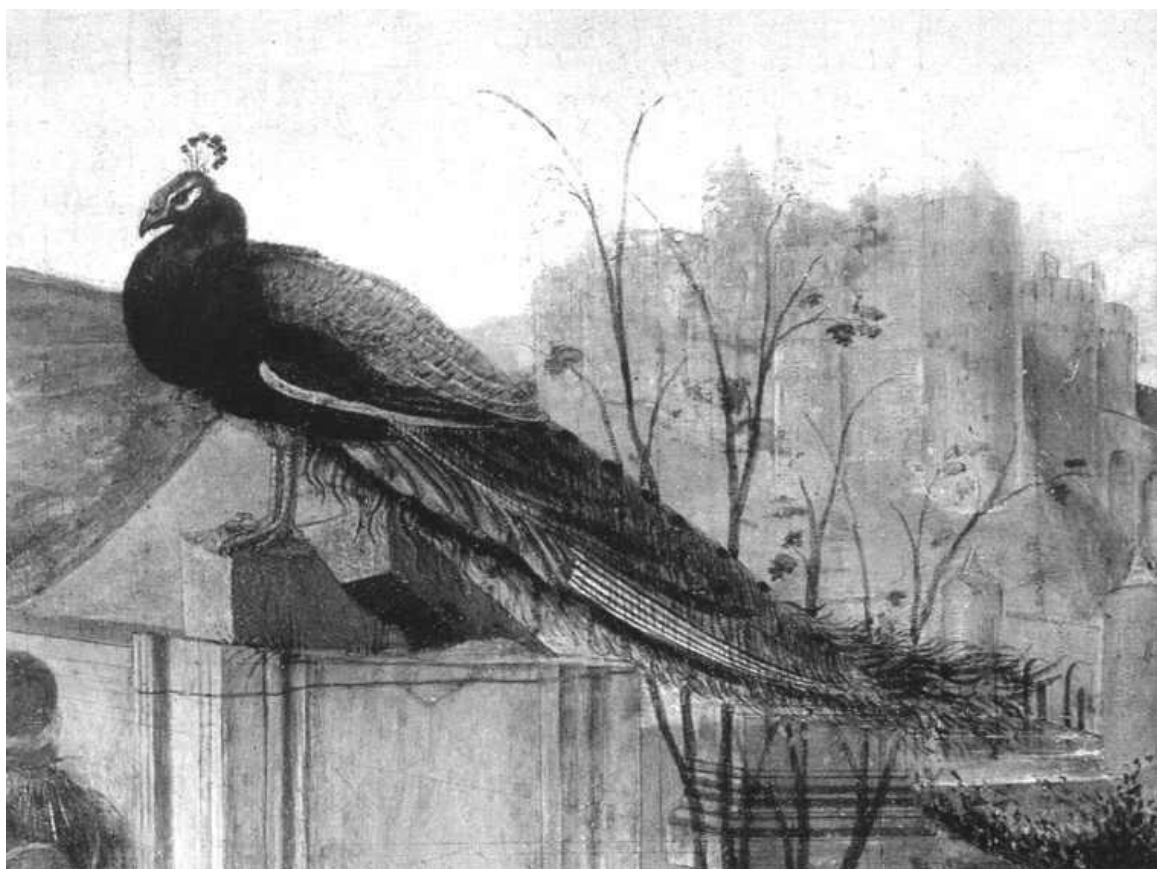


Plate 20a. Detail of Peacock



Plate 21. Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi, 1445, *Adoration of the Magi*, National Gallery of Art, Washington.

Traditionally, the apple was designated as the sexually suggestive 'forbidden fruit' of the Garden of Eden, 'eaten' by Eve. The Church claimed that the apple signified that Mary had restored Eve's sin. For Crivelli, a zucchini paired with an apple represented the masculine and feminine reproductive principle by which Jesus was created.



Plate 22. Carlo Crivelli, *Virgin and Child*, c. 1480



Plate 23. Carlo Crivelli, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1485

In his painting, *The Madonna of the Swallow*, Crivelli painted a lone swallow in the top left-hand corner [Plate 25]. Predictably, the Church interpretation of the swallow, which often featured in Renaissance art, was as another symbol of the resurrection. Swallows disappeared every year and nobody knew where they went. Jesus similarly departed before he too returned. This notion conveniently overlooks the popular connotation of a solitary swallow, derived from Aesop's fable and expressed in the aphorism, "one swallow does not a summer make." Things are not what they seem. Beware of false assumptions. Crivelli used the swallow to convey a specific message about the Virgin Mary. She was *not* a virgin.

In Crivelli's *Annunciation with St Emidius* [Plate 26], a ray of light, showing Mary's divine calling, descends from the skies and rests on her head, while a large peacock is perched overhead. At the base of the picture, in the center foreground, are the two ever-present fruits, an apple and a zucchini. Representing male and female, they symbolized the sexual relationship between the peacock/Zacharias and Mary that fulfilled her divine mission.

MISCEGENATION

The idea of miscegenation, or inter-species breeding, between supernatural beings and humans has been around a long time. In ancient Palestine, it may have held some currency among the common population, but not among the scribes and intellectual elite. Only man was made in the image and likeness of God. Adam was the son of God, and as such only he had the divine spark that made him a co creator.

In the Second Temple era, the greatest care went into aligning families by marriage for the sake of lineage and the purity of the community. This elaborate and painstakingly built foundation would be rendered obsolete if beings from other dimensions or other worlds could create human children.

References to sexual relationships between angels and women were made in the Enochic literature, in the sixth chapter of Genesis, and also by early Christian writers.¹¹

Apparently, these angelic liaisons produced offspring that caused havoc in human society. The first thirty-six chapters of the Book of Enoch, known collectively as the *Book of the Watchers*, contain details of how these fallen angels taught women the secrets of makeup and jewelry in order to beautify themselves. These angels seduced, married, and even had children by earthly women.

The meaning of this type of religious literature, when taken only at face value, can never be fully grasped. Inevitably, it is classed as imaginative fiction, having little, if any, basis in reality. For Jewish scribes, however, the religious and the secular were indistinguishable one from the other. And the often neglected political component of sacred texts was usually the driving force behind their composition.

When read as a polemic against a sexually corrupt priesthood, the *Book of Watchers* makes sense. “Fallen angels” were priests who had married Gentile women or taken Gentile concubines, and had illegitimate children by them. As a result, they were judged to have ruined the sexual and racial purity of the Israelite community.



Plate 25. Carlo Crivelli, *Madonna of the Swallow*, 1480, National Gallery, London



Plate 26. Carlo Crivelli, *Annunciation with St. Emidius*, 1485, National Gallery, London

This was a betrayal of heaven's purpose, for which these rebellious priest/angels incurred the wrath of God.

The Enochic writings were composed after the return from Babylon, when it was determined that a sexually corrupt priesthood had been responsible for previous Israelite

misfortunes. Misbehavior by the Temple priesthood was probably a concern ever since the days of Solomon, but reformers during the Second Temple period consistently blamed society's trials and tribulations on the priestly leadership's failure to follow the laws on sexual purity. The Qumran sect, who greatly revered the Enochic literature, was a prime example of a dissident movement that believed a morally corrupt Temple priesthood had betrayed the nation.

SON OF BARACHIAH?

The theological formula that Matthew wove into Jesus' genealogy was intended to prove the same thing as the Lucan nativities -- the father of Jesus was a respected priest. Zacharias qualified as a man of high standing in the community, older and wiser than Mary. Mary was proactive in their relationship in that she visited the house of Zacharias while still betrothed to Joseph. And to complete the triangulation model, Joseph was described as a chaste innocent. Matthew definitely knew of Zacharias, because he referenced the same 'Q' saying that Luke used.

Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zacharias the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly, I say to you, all this will come upon this generation.

Matthew 23:34-35

The insertion of the extra identifier, "son of Barachiah," is suspiciously out of place. As previously noted, Zacharias was a contemporary figure, bracketed with Abel to cover the span of chronology in its entirety. The author of the Book of Zechariah (Hebrew spelling of the Greek 'Zacharias'), a minor prophet in the Old Testament, was known as the son of "Berechiah."¹² The introduction dates its composition as the second year of the reign of Darius I, which was 520 B.C.E.

Jesus, therefore, had no interest in this particular Zacharias. Moreover, there is no record anywhere of him being murdered. So why then, did Matthew add "son of Barachiah" to the original quotation? He didn't. It was a clumsy attempt by a later Christian editor to alter the meaning of the original to derail unwanted speculation on the identity of Zacharias.¹³ There are several instances of this practice in the gospels, and the prime motivation was usually to cover up potential embarrassments. Those who knew the facts were determined, for reasons of theological necessity, to keep them hidden.

Although Jesus' genealogy was composed from a particular esoteric viewpoint, Matthew was not necessarily being theologically wise after the event. Even if this privileged information had been widely known and accepted among the scripturally educated, it does not follow they would have believed in Jesus. In ancient Palestine, political expediency always trumped a theological claim, whatever its merits. Without powerful backers and widespread popular support, no messianic candidate would be taken seriously by the religious leadership, regardless of his credentials.

His interpretation of illicit sexual triangles did not originate with Matthew. It was an ancient oral tradition inherited by the Essene movement. But certain Essenes, who understood the dispensation of holy births, had an extraordinary commitment to the messianic ideal. Convinced they were God's agents, they meticulously planned to

‘create’ the Messiah. At the root of their philosophy was the opinion that God would not do everything for the Jews. Rather than wait for the Messiah, people had to take responsibility. The Messiah had to be brought into the world and nurtured for his life’s mission. And that was the task of the Essene elite.

5 The Kingmakers

No one can accurately date all the books of the Old Testament. All we know for sure is that ancient writers produced works of poetry, prose, and law over many centuries based on oral traditions, which later editors used as sources to fashion the books of the Bible. There is agreement from experts in various disciplines, based on internal evidence from the texts and supported by archeological discoveries, that this process was begun in earnest during the period of enforced exile in Babylon. Scrolls from the library of the First Temple, which had managed to survive the destruction of Jerusalem, were taken into Babylon by the exiled Jewish leadership.

Over time, the scribes structured the literature into a coherent and non-contradictory format, and the Law was officially recorded. This was the period in history when the importance of Jewish scribes was first established. And though the general consensus is that the exiles, far from home and without their beloved Temple, were united by the written word of Holy Scripture, the evidence of history suggests this was not the case.

ROOTS OF DIVISION

When the opportunity to return to Jerusalem was given them by Cyrus the Great, a great many Jews, perhaps even a majority, preferred to stay in Babylon. No doubt some had developed successful businesses and established themselves in the community, so were reluctant to leave. Others might have felt that it was simply too dangerous to go back to Palestine, considering its violent and unstable reputation. But the chief reason was that they did not relish the prospect of life under the strict ideological regime of Ezra and his supporters. Foreknowledge of the intended purge of the priesthood would have been reason enough for some priestly families to remain behind.

Ezra returned from Babylon with the recently overhauled sacred books, which now included lots of legalistic rules and regulations on animal sacrifices and cultic rites -- all supposedly dictated by God directly to Moses. Under the new government of the priestly reform faction, the rebuilt Temple, as God's dwelling place on earth, was made the absolute focus of national life. The Temple priesthood was the undisputed mediator between God and the rest of the population. Ezra did not advocate a return to the glory days, because he did not believe any had existed. On the contrary, he demanded that returnees, especially the priesthood, forget the past. Peace and prosperity would come solely through the disciplined practice of Temple ceremony and the strict prohibition of sexual contact outside the limits of the Law.

This period of Jewish history witnessed the beginnings of biblical fundamentalism, when the written word was held to be the literal expression of the unchanging, eternal, and absolute truth of God. A place for oral tradition existed only if it did not contradict the written Law. The priesthood developed into a hereditary ruling class that controlled both the religious and political aspects of society. The High Priest, which was also an inherited office, was essentially the head of state.

Only the tribes of Judah and Benjamin had survived the wars with Assyria and Babylon - that is why the ten other tribes are known as 'the lost tribes of Israel.' But as most Israelites claimed to belong to the tribe of Judah, their religion became known as Judaism, or Judah-ism. "Jews" became the catch-all word for the Israelite nation, used indiscriminately by Gentiles. But the priesthood was not descended from the tribe of Judah.

Ezra was a scribe and a priest, but not all scribes were priests. Key sections of the Torah and other books were composed by scribes from the tribe of Judah. No one but descendants of Judah would have made such an elaborate effort to trace King David's ancestral line back to Judah. And no one else would have written Jacob's deathbed prophecy that the future salvation of Israel and the whole world will come from a descendant of Judah.

As far as the Palestinian priesthood was concerned, deliverance for the Israelites would come only with the blessing of the Temple authority. They had the final word. One can easily imagine, therefore, that most priests would have raised no objections to the thirty-eighth chapter of Genesis. Its representation of Judah is far from flattering. The description of how he cemented the messianic lineage showed not only that he was a whoremonger, but he was duped by his own daughter-in-law into having an incestuous relationship with her. On the face of it, he was an unworthy ancestor for the tribe of Judah and an unsuitable role model for Israelites in general.

Famous stories of families in the messianic/patriarchal line that were insinuated into Holy Scripture have nothing to do with the Law of Moses, and have no connection whatsoever to the Temple. These narratives prove the existence of a parallel form of Judaism that rejected the supremacy of the Law and the Temple. Judaic scribes communicated this tradition using different techniques of plot, symbol, analogy, and metaphor which, for the most part, rendered their underlying message unintelligible to the fundamentalists.

Babylonian Jews who remained behind co-existed peacefully with the Zoroastrian Persians, and continued to thrive. Babylon became the world's second-most important Jewish community outside Jerusalem. Babylonian Jews did not have the same enthusiasm for the Temple cult as their Palestinian counterparts, and did not regard the Law of Moses in the same absolutist terms. They emphasized other aspects of their religion. For example, the Book of Esther, which is indisputably a work of Babylonian scribes, is the only book in the Hebrew Bible that does not mention God, the Law, or the Temple. Esther, a Babylonian Jewess and the heroine of the story, conspires with her scribe 'uncle' to marry the world's leading Gentile -- Xerxes, king of Persia. The Law was violated for a higher purpose. From her exalted position as Queen, Esther prevented the wholesale slaughter of Babylonian Jews planned by the king's prime minister.

During the reign of Herod the Great, many Babylonian Jews came to live and study in Jerusalem. The most famous was Rabbi Hillel, known today as the spiritual father of modern Judaism, and regarded as one of the most important figures in Jewish history. After the Temple was destroyed, and the priesthood eradicated, the philosophy of the famous "School of Hillel" was adopted as mainstream rabbinic tradition. With the benefit of hindsight, Hillel's liberal and inclusive interpretation of the Law was considered the most appropriate.

SEPARATE TRADITIONS

Ezra and the priestly leadership were backed financially and militarily by the Persian authorities, happy to use Palestine as a buffer zone on their western borders. After the Greeks conquered the Persian Empire, things began to slowly change. Whereas the Persians were content to leave the Jewish culture alone, the Greeks constantly sought opportunities to Hellenize them.

Among Palestinian Jews who benefited from trade and business in the Greek world, some had grown skeptical of the Jerusalem priesthood and the trappings of its religion. In these people, the Greeks found an ally to their cause. Wherever possible, sympathetic Jews were installed in positions of power. But change was slow, and eventually the Greeks grew impatient. Antiochus IV (175-164 B.C.E.) attempted to wipe out the Jewish religion, and this triggered a huge popular backlash, recorded in the Books of I & II Maccabees.¹ The Greek rulers were overthrown, and an independent Jewish state was established that lasted for a hundred years.

Different religious sects emerged during this time whose precise origins are still ambiguous. The Pharisees, whose philosophy epitomized the legalism of Ezra, were one such group. The main source of information on the Pharisees comes from Josephus and the New Testament. But even though both are considered historically unreliable by modern scholars, Josephus' description of the Pharisees harmonizes with the gospel accounts. Josephus claimed to have been a Pharisee at one time, which might explain why he called them "accurate interpreters of the Law." In the New Testament, they are portrayed as sticklers for cultic minutiae, and obsessed with matters of bodily purity. From the evidence of later rabbinic writings, Pharisees also had many "extra" oral laws and customs not found in the written Torah, which were similarly oriented at purification through ritual observances. The Pharisaic movement represented the rise of fundamentalism, and their opposition to the rule of Herod the Great raised their stock among ordinary Palestinian Jews.

The other significant religious group was the Essenes. According to the available sources -- Josephus, Philo, and the Dead Sea Scrolls -- Essenes were comparable in many aspects to Pharisees. Personal purity was paramount and achieved through ceremonial practices. Both were regimented to a degree, but the Essenes were more idealistic, more revolutionary, than the Pharisees. They believed that the Essene community itself was the true Israel. Under the Essene umbrella, an influential school emerged with a prophetic and mystical bent that owed a great deal to Babylonian Judaism.

Josephus stated that during Herod's reign, Essenes were the king's advisors and his most favored religious faction. Herod was the natural enemy of the ruling priestly aristocracy represented by the Sadducees, and he was only tolerated by the Pharisees. Naturally, their popularity with Herod tainted Essenes in the eyes of some Palestinian Jews. And the antipathy toward them was heightened by the fact that their leader was a foreigner. Menahem was a Babylonian Jew.

MENAHM

Josephus recorded that Menahem was an Essene prophet who met Herod, who was still a schoolboy, and told him that he would be king of the Jews and rule for at least thirty years. When the prediction eventually came true, Herod accorded special privileges to the Essenes.

Herod was satisfied with these replies; and gave Menahem his hand, and dismissed him with a friendly gesture; and from that time he continued to honor the Essenes.²

The Jerusalem Talmud refers to Menahem as a member of the king's court,³ and the Mishnah states that he was president of the Sanhedrin.⁴ The Essenes, under Menahem's leadership, were the establishment party. Consequently, they wielded considerable

influence on Herod's policy of outreach to Diaspora Jews, who were encouraged to make financial contributions to the general reconstruction of Israel. Herod was known to give estates or manors to those who supported him, and the Essenes were surely rewarded with the Qumran estate. As they lived ascetically, and shunned the pursuit of personal wealth, it is difficult to imagine how else they could have owned such a strategically important piece of real estate. According to Josephus, Essenes specialized in prophecy, "in which they are seldom wrong." The focal point of all prophecy was the Messiah, and messianic prophecy was the obsession at Qumran.

Toward the end of the Second Temple period, common Israelites had come to believe that they could be united together into a powerful nation only by a king. They yearned nostalgically for the time when David ruled, when Israel was a strong nation feared and respected by its neighbors. Prophecies circulated that predicted the Messiah would come in the tradition of a Davidic warrior king. The emergence of Herod as king of the Jews, even if he was installed by the Romans, was taken as a sign by many that the time was close when Israel would be ready to accept a genuine king. Although Herod was considered an Arab imposter, he served to presage the real thing.

No doubt Herod the Great had his own views on the subject. But if he believed himself the Messiah, as some historians suspect, then he must have known that Palestinian Jews did not and never would. Herod rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem into arguably the world's most impressive construction outside of the pyramids, not to earn the respect and admiration of the locals, but to impress the much wealthier Diaspora Jews, whose population easily doubled that of Palestine.

Contemporary Jewish scholars calculated that seventy-six generations had passed since the Creation, and a prophecy in the Book of Enoch, a favored Essene text, foretold that the Messiah would deliver Israel in the seventy-seventh generation since the fall of the angels.⁵ The time had now arrived. By reputation, Menahem was a kingmaker, and the Essenes were accurate prophets, but the simplest way to answer the most important questions -- the when, where, and who of the Messiah -- was to have inside information. By adhering to the dispensational timetable, selecting the qualified personnel, and following the conception formula of holy births in the messianic lineage, Menahem's Essenes conspired to fulfill prophecy. The plan depended upon, and was rationalized by, Judaism's messianic code.

THE MYTH OF JUDAH

The story of Judah and Tamar is probably the most neglected chapter in the entire Book of Genesis. Bible commentators typically describe the content as sordid and objectionable. Martin Luther even questioned the validity of its inclusion in the Bible, as he also did with the Book of Esther. Modern skeptics say that it proves the Bible is just an amalgam of meaningless fabrications and legends. Two thousand years ago, an elite group of Essenes held a radically different view of Genesis 38. It held the secrets of the messianic code -- the explanation of how God initiated the sacred bloodline, and thus how the Messiah would come to the Jews. Based on the opening chapters of Matthew and Luke, the same thing was understood by early Christians.

The legend of Judah is totally out of sync with the narrative flow of Genesis, and reads as a stark interruption into the story of Joseph. But even if it was inserted later, that does not explain why Judaic scribes composed such an apparently damning indictment of their own forefather. Here is the full text:

It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers, and turned in to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah. There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua; he married her and went in to her, and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. Again she conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. She was in Chezib when she bore him. And Judah took a wife for Er his first-born, and her name was Tamar. But Er, Judah's first-born, was wicked in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord slew him.

Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife, and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so when he went in to his brother's wife he spilled the semen on the ground, lest he should give offspring to his brother. And what he did was displeasing in the sight of the LORD, and he slew him also.

Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house, till Shelah my son grows up" -- for he feared that he would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went and dwelt in her father's house. In course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died; and when Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," she put off her widow's garments, and put on a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage.

When Judah saw her, he thought her to be a harlot, for she had covered her face. He went over to her at the road side, and said, "Come, let me come in to you," for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, "What will you give me, that you may come in to me?" He answered, "I will send you a kid from the flock." And she said, "Will you give me a pledge, till you send it?" He said, "What pledge shall I give you?" She replied, "Your signet and your cord, and your staff that is in your hand." So he gave them to her, and went in to her, and she conceived by him.

Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood. When Judah sent the kid by his friend the Adullamite, to receive the pledge from the woman's hand, he could not find her. And he asked the men of the place, "Where is the harlot who was at Enaim by the wayside?" And they said, "No harlot has been here." So he returned to Judah, and said, "I have not found her; and also the men of the place said, 'No harlot has been here.'" And Judah replied, "Let her keep the things as her own, lest we be laughed at; you see, I sent this kid, and you could not find her."

About three months later Judah was told, "Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; and moreover she is with child by harlotry." And Judah said, "Bring her out, and let her be burned." As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, "By the man to whom these belong, I am with child." And she said, "Mark, I pray you, whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff." Then Judah acknowledged them and said, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah." And he did not lie with her again.

When the time of her delivery came, there were twins in her womb. And when she was in labor, one put out a hand; and the midwife took and bound on his hand a scarlet thread, saying, "This came out first." But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out; and she said, "What a breach you have made for yourself!" Therefore his name was called Perez. Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread upon his hand; and his name was called Zerah.

Genesis 38 replicated the pattern of previous Genesis myths. The introduction matches Judah’s family with those of Adam and Noah. Genesis began with Adam, Eve, and their three sons -- Cain, Abel, and Seth. After the flood, only Noah, his wife, and their three sons -- Ham, Shem, and Japheth (and their wives) survived. Similarly, Judah, his wife, and three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah represented a new beginning in God’s Providence. But whereas Adam and Noah had previously failed, and their descendants were cursed, Judah succeeded and his descendants were blessed. The fraternal dynamic that featured in the story of Adam’s family, whereby the second-born son is preferred over the first, is also repeated. As Abel was accepted by God, so Perez, the younger brother, became the progenitor of the messianic line. As the offspring of Cain were banished, the Bible explains that the descendants of the first-born Zerah were cast into exile.

The triangular relationship between Judah-Tamar-Shelah prefigured a similar link between a priest (Zacharias), Mary, and Joseph. When Judah discovered Tamar’s pregnancy, he called for her to be burnt, and not stoned to death, which was the prescribed punishment for adultery. Death by burning was reserved for daughters of the priesthood.⁶ This detail explains that that in the pre-Mosaic era, Judah and his sons were the original priests, because Tamar, who had married into Judah’s family, was a daughter of the priesthood.

Priestly Father	Mother	Fiancé	First Son	Second Son
Judah	Tamar	Shelah	Zerah	Perez
Zacharias	Mary	Joseph	John	Jesus

THE ETERNAL TRIANGLE

The scribes who wrote Genesis 38 understood that Tamar’s deception and adultery were evidence of the divine hand. The reasons why derive from the Genesis story of Adam, Eve and the Serpent -- Judaism’s version of how evil began. This book does not have space for an in-depth investigation into the relevance of the serpent in ancient civilizations. But the Sunday school lesson about a talking snake that tricked Eve into biting from an off-limits apple is for children only. The real story was for adults. The identity of the serpent in the Garden of Eden was referenced in the Book of Revelation.

And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Rev 12:9

In this case, the serpent was a fallen angel, Satan, known elsewhere as Lucifer, “bringer of light.” The implication of the Latin “Lucifer” (*lux* = light, *ferro* = to bring) is one who teaches the truth. In the iconography of pagan religions and fertility cults in the Mediterranean region, serpents were central, and the pagan priesthood was known as ‘serpent priests.’ For Jewish anti-pagan polemicists, the serpent made the perfect symbol for Lucifer. Revelation drew on traditions from the Book of Enoch,⁷ and in Enochic Judaism the crime of the angels/priests was fornication. Within this context, Lucifer’s

original position was priestly. He became the fallen angel after he seduced Eve.

The literature of the Jewish mystical tradition, the Kabbalah, was compiled in the early Middle Ages, but the scribes claimed that the roots of the esoteric wisdom they represented went back far beyond the time of the First Temple, and that parts of the teaching originated from mystical visions of the Garden of Eden. The *Bahir* or *Sefer HaBahir* (“Book of the Brightness”) is a collection of midrashic verses on the first chapters of Genesis, attributed pseudipigraphically to the first-century rabbinic sage Rabbi Nehunya. The *Bahir* states that the angel Sammael (Lucifer) conspired to destroy Adam and Eve because he feared God intended them to become the new masters of creation, and he would lose his status. Lucifer understood Eve was destined to be Adam’s mate, so he made a pact with other angels and sexually seduced her. Afterward, Eve realized that what she had done was wrong and feared for her future. She yearned for the purity she had lost, but which Adam still had. She had sexual relations with Adam so that they would share the same fate. Adam and Eve were intended to be a couple, but as they were not yet developed, their sexual relationship was premature.

The soul of the female comes from the Female, and the soul of the male comes from the Male. This is the reason why the Serpent followed Eve. He said, “Her soul comes from the north, and I will therefore quickly seduce her.” And how did he seduce her? He had intercourse with her.

Bahir 199

The wicked Sammael made a bond with all the host on high against his Master. This was because the Blessed Holy One said [regarding man] (*Genesis 1:26*), “And let him rule over the fish of the sea and the flying things of heaven.”[Sammael] said, “How can we cause him to sin and be exiled from before God?”

Bahir 200

Woe is to me. Now I will die and the Blessed Holy One will make another woman and give her to Adam. I will therefore cause him to eat with me. If we die, we will both die, and if we live, we will both live.”

Bahir 200

The archetype of Adam, Eve, and the Serpent was the blueprint for all future triangles. In the Protovangelium, Joseph compared his predicament to the Fall, “Is not the story of Adam repeated in me? For as at the hour of his giving thanks the serpent came and found Eve alone and deceived her, so hath it befallen me also.”⁸ Judaic scribes believed that when the direction of the Fall was reversed, its negative hereditary results were counteracted and a pure or messianic lineage was established. This explains sexual ‘transgressions’ by the matriarchs in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus. A younger woman, who was intended for another man, always seduced an older authority figure.

Having declared Mary a perpetual virgin, the Church painted itself into a corner. So Mary atoned for Eve’s sin by dint of being a nonsexual being. By the same token, the celibate Jesus restored Adam. This is how the Christian religion eradicated genealogy from the salvation ethic. Blood lineage might have been the obsession of ancient Jews, but the Christian fixation with the blood of Jesus, though wrapped in theological explanations of his crucifixion, betrays the same legacy.

PLANNED PARENTHOOD

Elisabeth was already pregnant with John the Baptist, but the messianic code required Zacharias have two sons. It is unlikely that the Essenes put all their eggs in one basket, but what is certain is that Mary was schooled. Luke described how Gabriel explained the program to her. The conversation between them reads exactly as one might expect between a young girl and an experienced mentor.

You will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there will be no end.” And Mary said to the angel, “How shall this be, since I have no husband?” And the angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswoman Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.” And Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.
Luke 1:30-38

Gabriel succinctly outlined to Mary the ancient scribal method to purify the messianic bloodline. She must be proactive to get a male child from a man who has special significance, but is not betrothed to her... The child will grow to be the Messiah. The man will father another son from his wife, and he will be the first-born.

Priest	Woman	Betrothed	First	Second
Serpent/Angel	Eve	Adam	Cain	Abel
Judah	Tamar	Shelah	Zerah	Perez
Zacharias	Mary	Joseph	John	Jesus

The scheme was audacious, but necessary to fulfill prophecy. So-called wise men who came to visit the infant Jesus already knew the time and place. They had no need of miraculous signs in the night sky. As co-conspirators in facilitating Jesus’ conception, they already knew where to go.

THE WISE MEN

Matthew’s story of the wise men is one of the most-loved and best-known elements of Jesus’ nativity. To make sense of the narrative, however, the wise men need to be identified. They are described as “Magi,” plural of “Magus,” which was originally a term for an ancient Mesopotamian shaman, and was used later to mean a Zoroastrian priest. Matthew was a Jew, writing for a Jewish readership. He would hardly bracket the Gentile priesthood with the newborn king of the Jews. Christian apologists explain that Zoroastrian prophecy predicted a worldwide savior figure. Matthew included Magi in his account to show that Jesus’ mission was targeted on the whole world, and not Jews alone. Irrespective of Zoroastrian beliefs, the overwhelming evidence of Matthew’s gospel is that Jesus did not have an inclusive philosophy:

“And if you salute only your brethren, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?”
Matt 5:47

"And in praying do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them."
Matt 6:7-8

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things."
Matt 6:31-32

"I have come only for the lost sheep of the House of Israel;"
Matt 15:24

"Go nowhere among the Gentiles, enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."
Matt 10:6-7

If the Magi were Persian or any nationality other than Jewish, they were wasting their time. Matthew featured them in the storyline because they were Jewish priests who specialized in prophecy. The reference to a star, which supposedly hovered above Jesus' birth place, did not imply that the Magi were Zoroastrian astrologers. Astrology and astronomical phenomena were the fascination of all peoples in the ancient world, especially Jews. Sun, moon, and stars were constant themes in Jewish prophetic tradition. Matthew's star simply indicated that the time and place of Jesus' birth was in accordance with heaven's timetable.

Zoroastrians were renowned for their refined angelology, a trait they shared with Essenes. Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.E. -- 50 C.E.), the Jewish philosopher-historian, compared the Essenes to Indian Gymnosophists and to Persian Magi.⁹ He appears to have held Essenes in high regard.

Myriads of his disciples has the lawgiver (Moses) trained for the life of fellowship. These people are called Essenes.¹⁰

Reverence for Moses was a characteristic of Josephus' Essenes and is also apparent in the Dead Sea Scrolls literature. The Greek geographer and historian, Strabo (c. 63 B.C.E. -- 23 C.E.), wrote of the Persian Magi that, "Moses was such a person as these."¹¹ Obviously, a tradition existed during the first century that identified Moses and his most dedicated Essene followers with Magi. Matthew used the word "Magi" to make a clear distinction that these priestly visitors were Essenes. Coming from the "East," signified that they were Babylonian Jews.

PAYMENT FOR THE CHILD

The Magi, we are told, left gifts of "gold, frankincense and myrrh." It appears that their mission was just to drop off some valuables. Formalities over, they departed the scene, satisfied with only a glimpse of the savior baby, and never surfaced again. These Essene priests knew Herod's plan to kill the child, but put their own safety first. Jesus was abandoned, not adopted by them. They brought a payment. This could have been for one or several of the following reasons:

- 1) To Mary for having the child
- 2) To Joseph for not going public on Mary's extra-marital conception

- 3) For the child's upbringing
- 4) To buy the child.

According to Josephus, certain Essenes adopted children of special merit, and raised them in the Essene way of life. In the gospel portraits, although Jesus is detached from his family, he does not appear to have been an orphan. Evidently, Mary raised him, and he was recognized as her son.

Joseph did not divorce Mary after she had been impregnated by another man. This means either he was a saint, or he was well compensated. Throughout the entire ordeal, Joseph took instructions from "the angel of the Lord," who is already identified as a priest. As with Elkanah, who handed over Samuel to Eli the priest, Joseph would have had few objections to handing over a child that was not his own. Luke recounted an incident when the twelve years old Jesus went missing after a trip to Jerusalem. His "parents" waited three days before searching for him. Most probably, as the child of another man, Jesus was resented by Joseph. Though he was canonized by the Church, Joseph is never mentioned by Jesus.

The Essenes did not take Jesus. Presumably, Herod's discovery of their plot meant it was too dangerous for them. For the protection of the messianic child, Joseph and Mary were instructed to go to 'Egypt.' The payment they received would take care of expenses.

MASSACRE OF THE INNOCENTS

Herod reportedly called a meeting of priests and scribes to ascertain the Messiah's birthplace, so that he might worship the newborn king in person. But the prophecy of Bethlehem was well known, and did not warrant a commission of inquiry. Everyone knew the only future king of the Jews that Herod wanted to meet was one of his own sons. He rebuilt the Temple into the world's foremost religious shrine not out of devotion, but to ingratiate himself with the worldwide Jewish population, and thus ensure a messianic status for his bloodline. Herod had big plans, and much depended on his surviving sons to carry on his unfinished work.

In his final years, Herod fell horribly sick, and factional strife broke out in his family over the succession. No doubt he was vulnerable, susceptible to manipulation. People with scores to settle took advantage of the situation. Enemies of Menahem and the Essenes, revealed the treason unfolding at Qumran. Like most dictators, Herod suspected those in his close circle of plotting against him. He had notoriously ordered the murder of two of his sons, Aristobolus and Antipater, in 7 and 4 B.C.E. because he believed they had joined forces with their mother in a conspiracy against him. So the news only confirmed what he was already thinking. The traitors who supported an alternative royal lineage were his Essene advisors.

A weakening, paranoid Herod lashed out violently. He ordered the killing of all male children, two years of age and younger, in the Bethlehem area. This mass murder was later branded the "Massacre of the Infants," for which Herod is mostly known today. Historians, however, consider this episode to be pure invention. Slaughter on such a scale could not have occurred in Bethlehem at this time, without at least some corroborative evidence surviving. Even Josephus, who delighted in listing Herod's atrocities, failed to include this one, which would have been the biggest indictment of them all.

The general consensus is that this story was a combination of a famous Jewish legend,

and the well-known murder of his sons, which inspired the comment that “he would rather be Herod’s pig, than his son” from the Roman Emperor Augustus. The large-scale infanticide theme was lifted from the story of Moses. The Pharaoh’s attempted to kill Moses at birth by sentencing to death all Hebrew male children. This served Matthew’s theological purpose of likening Jesus to Moses. But in presenting his gospel, Matthew did not invent elaborate falsehoods. He put theological spin onto actual events and explained them in the language of his school.

Bethlehem was cited simply because prophecy required that the Davidic king was born there. It was not the location of Jesus’ birth; neither was it attacked by Herod’s soldiers. Nevertheless, young children kept by Essenes, were sought after and murdered.

Archeological evidence proves that the settlement at Qumran was attacked and destroyed by fire between 8-4 B.C.E.,¹² the period when John and Jesus were born. Graves for women and children discovered in the Qumran cemetery, all date in the period shortly before and after the turn of the first-century C.E.¹³ The Qumran Essenes are presumed to have been a strictly all-male adult society, which may or may not have been true at one time, but the existence of the graves confirms that a community of women and children also lived there. Child adoptees were not raised in desert caves. Children were placed in an Essene community orphanage, where women would take care of them. Herod believed that if he could destroy the orphanage and kill the children, he would remove any future threat posed by a messianic child-king harbored there. Luke’s statement that John the Baptist was “in the wilderness” is generally taken to mean he was adopted. “In the wilderness” is a phrase used repeatedly in the Dead Sea Scrolls to describe the Qumran location.

In the Protogospel, Herod’s men were instructed to kill the infant John the Baptist, so Elisabeth hid him in the mountains. There was no mention of any attempt to kill Jesus. The author was unaware of Matthew’s version of events, and knew this story from the same Baptist source that claimed Zacharias was murdered for protecting John. No Christian writer would knowingly transfer glory away from Jesus. Regardless who the architects of Zacharias’ murder were, they would have also targeted his children. Zacharias’ sons escaped the attack on Qumran. Later, both sets of their disciples would claim ‘credit’ for the event.

THE KING-BREAKERS

No information exists on the Essenes prior to the time of Herod the Great. Possibly, they were a breakaway faction of Pharisees, who rose to prominence during the Herodian era. But one thing was certain; the Essenes had plenty of enemies. Many Palestinian Jews resented the excessive influence of foreign Babylonians and took exception to their exalted status in Herod’s administration. Above all, Palestinian Pharisees were indignant. They wanted power. Most emphatically, they wanted to wrest control of the Sanhedrin from the outsider faction.

The Koran’s statement that “Thou wast not present with them when they threw their pens to know which of them should be the guardian of Mary, nor wast thou present with them when they quarreled thereupon,” reveals that certain people were unhappy with the scheme to create a messianic child. The dissenters leaked word of the plot to Herod.

By this time, Essenes had insinuated themselves into positions of authority in Herod’s government, which included sections of the military. So when news of the Essene

treachery reached Herod, his response was violent but not reckless. As a dying man with many enemies, he did not want to trigger an all-out civil war. As it was a soft target, he struck the orphanage, and Essene leaders were purged from office.

Herod died in 4 B.C.E., shortly after the attack on Qumran, and revolts broke out in various parts of the country. Josephus wrote that people who had formerly been close to Herod were directing the uprising.¹⁴ Menahem and the Essenes were not named, but this was likely to maintain the consistency of his description of them as pacifists. The turmoil provided their Palestinian opponents with further opportunities for revenge. Josephus alluded to an exclusion of Essenes from certain parts of Temple life, and the rabbinic literature makes a specific reference to an Essene expulsion from Jerusalem during Menahem's time.¹⁵ According to the Mishnah, Menahem was exiled or he resigned for reasons unspecified. A list of religious leaders in pairs was given until the early first century C.E:

Yose b. Yoezer says not to lay on hands. Yose b Yohanan says to lay on hands
Joshua b Perahyah says not to lay on hands. Nittai the Arbelite says to lay on
hands Judah b Tabbai says not to lay on hands. Simeon b Shatah says to lay on
hands Shemayah says to lay on hands. Abtalyon says not to lay on hands Hillel
and Menachem did not differ. Menachem departed, Shammai entered Shammai
says not to lay on hands. Hillel says to lay on hands

The first named were patriarchs, and the second to them were heads of the court.¹⁶

The "heads of the court" were presidents of the Sanhedrin, which proved the extent of Menahem's power. This was Menahem from the time of Herod of the Great, as he was paired with the famous Pharisee Hillel, who spent the last forty years of his life in Jerusalem, 30 B.C.E. -- 10 C.E. Especially noteworthy, is that the "patriarch" was always at odds with the "head of the court," except in the case of Hillel and Menahem, who "did not differ." Both men shared the common bond of Babylonian origin. Hillel is acknowledged to have authored the "golden rule," which is thought to have influenced Jesus' teaching. But Menahem, rather than Hillel, was most probably the source of Jesus' inspiration.

When Menahem "departed," Shammai (50 B.C.E. -- 30 C.E.) replaced him. Rabbinic tradition described Shammai as a contemporary rival of Hillel, in that his school of thought was far more legalistic and conservative. Shammai was a Palestinian Pharisee. The Talmudic writings show his followers to have been consistently preoccupied with matters of purity and ritual cleanliness. During Jesus' public life, and until the destruction of Jerusalem, the School of Shammai was dominant in Palestine.

The Babylonian Talmud lionized Hillel, but the Jerusalem Talmud of the Palestinians was much less effusive. Hillel was unlikely to have forced out Menahem. That would have been the work of Shammai's Palestinian faction.

The Jerusalem Talmud also referred to Menahem's exile. It quoted the line from the Mishnah, "Menahem departed," and asked, "Where did he go?" The response is exceptionally illuminating.

Some say he went from one way of behaving to another And some say he turned round and left;

He and eighty pairs of Torah scholars clad in golden armor, Whose faces were painted black as pots

Because they told them

“Write on a bull’s horns that you have no part in the God of Israel.”¹⁷

Menahem was banished along with a hundred and sixty fellow Essenes. They were warriors, not only religious scholars. If Menahem led an exclusive military unit or private army, it could not have been part of the mainstream Essene movement as it is generally understood. The reason why the Essenes were exiled is explained in the line of excommunication -- “Write on a bull’s horns you have no part in the God of Israel.”

“Bull” was the age-old Jewish symbol for the false god, reminiscent of Baal, and the golden calf worshipped by unfaithful Israelites in the time of Moses. Bulls were sacred to many pagan contemporaries, especially in the military dominated cult of Mithraism. Inevitably, Jews used the word “bull” to denote falsehood, which is also its meaning in modern vernacular.

“Horn,” as previously mentioned, was a common symbol for fertility, lineage, and bloodline. Greek mythology had the “horn of plenty,” and animal horns were connected with sex and fecundity in many cultures. Zacharias described the messianic bloodline as a “horn of salvation,” in reference to Jesus. But when “bull” is used with “horn,” the meaning is the direct opposite. “Bull’s horns” signified a false bloodline or ‘satanic lineage.’ The Palestinian Pharisees knew of the plan to produce a Messiah child, and condemned Menahem’s Essenes because of it. They had cynically manipulated tradition to serve blasphemous ends. In doing so, they had created a ‘devil’ child.

The gospels explain that scribes were sent from Jerusalem to explain to people that Jesus “is possessed by Beelzebub, by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.”¹⁸ Denouncing the circumstances of his birth, Palestinian scribes used the Law of Moses to denounce Jesus as ‘son of Satan.’

The phrase, “No part in the God of Israel” meant that Menahem’s Essenes were expelled from the Temple and mainstream Jewish society. Many went to the Qumran estate. Military training continued there, and the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal that the membership harbored military ambitions and was preparing for battle. The Essene scribes had contempt for the Temple leadership, and more significantly, they were consumed with messianic expectation.

PROPHECY

Prophecy is one of the most controversial aspects of religion. One of the main problems is that many prophecies were recorded after, and not before, events that they predicted. In the world’s monotheistic faiths, believers tend to regard events in the formation of their religion as the enactment of God’s will. For example, Christians understand that everything that occurred in Jesus’ life -- recruited fishermen, taught in parables, rejected by Jews, and crucified by Romans -- followed the script of a divine plan, based simply on the fact that it happened. Jews and Moslems basically follow the same concept.

Prophecy in Judaism was a two edged sword. If you do well, you will be blessed. If you do badly, you will be cursed. The implication being that humans have responsibility in

the process of fulfilling the divine will. This is generally overlooked. But the realization of a prophecy is not a given. *X* will only happen if people do *Y*, otherwise *X* will not happen.

Menahem did not wait for prophecy to happen. He *made* it happen. The same was true for Jesus. They shared the same philosophy. For example, because the public were slow to catch on to his core message, “the kingdom of God is at hand,” Jesus sat on a donkey and rode into Jerusalem. This event was unlikely to have been fabricated as it was included in all four gospels. But he rode on a donkey to substantiate a famous messianic prediction that would have been recognized by onlookers;

Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Lo, your king comes to you; Triumphant and victorious is he, Humble and riding on a donkey.

Zech 9:9

The earlier prophecy had created the event. Jesus made the conscious decision to actualize it, solely that people might identify him. This reflected the narrow parameters to which people restricted God, but Jesus had to relate to them on their own terms. Ultimately, he did not succeed. They did not recognize him as king. Probably, some people are still waiting for that prophecy to come true. But the time of donkeys has long passed. It was not fulfilled because, even though Jesus did his bit, he could not do it for others. The dilemma for Jesus was that his intention was not to be a spiritual teacher. That was the task of the Elijah figure, who would prepare the population to receive their king. The spotlight now returns to John the Baptist.

6 Sibling Rivalry

The reason for the reluctance of gospel writers to make clear that John the Baptist was Jesus' older brother is self evident. It would have raised too many difficult questions. Later, the Gentile Church was at ease with the notion that their relationship was as cousins. Anything closer than that would have destabilized the whole foundation of its theology.

As brothers on their father's side, John and Jesus probably shared similar physical traits. As there was supposedly only six months age difference between them, they might even have resembled twins. This would explain why, after he entered the public domain, Jesus was confused with John the Baptist. When Jesus asked Peter, "Who do people say that I am?" the initial response was "some say John the Baptist." John cast a long shadow from which Jesus could not easily escape.

BLOOD BROTHERS

John's decapitation was recorded by Mark and Matthew. Mark's account ended with the line, "when his disciples heard of it, they came and took his body, and laid it in a tomb." Matthew made an addition that provides a further clue to the true nature of Jesus' relationship with John. John's disciples gave Jesus the news of his death,

And his disciples came and took the body and buried it; and they went and told Jesus.
Matthew 14:12

On the previous occasion when John's disciples visited Jesus, they were sent packing with a condemnation of John, "blessed is he who takes no offense at me." So it is safe to say that the relationship between the two was not close. Although John was dead, his disciples were not about to join forces with Jesus. So why then, did they visit him?

It was Jewish custom that a body was buried as soon as possible after death. Afterward, the immediate family of the deceased would observe a seven-day mourning period or *Shiva*, which is still practiced by traditional Jews. John's death was reported to Jesus because he was the closest adult male next of kin. Matthew stated that the period of mourning had begun, "when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a lonely place apart." Mark also implied that Jesus observed the *Shiva*.

And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while"...And they went away in the boat to a lonely place by themselves.
Mark 6:30-32

OLDER VERSUS YOUNGER

The recurring biblical theme of sibling rivalry has never been a hot topic of theological debate.¹ Nevertheless, as an undeniable aspect of Hebrew tradition, it requires explanation. First established in the story of Cain and Abel, it resurfaced on several other occasions in Genesis, and in other books throughout the Old Testament. The plot structure follows a basic formula. To review, there are two brothers; the younger is favored by God or the father, in opposition to the accepted tradition whereby priority is always given to the first born son. As a result, the older brother is resentful of the younger. Opportunities to resolve their differences are seldom taken, and the rift between

them escalates into a conflict.

Modern folklorists have suggested that this particular motif was repeated so often by Jewish scribes because it signified Israel's position as the younger brother to the older pagan cultures that surrounded it. As God favored Israel, the older nations were indignant and therefore wished to destroy Israel.² This makes sense to a certain degree. But the details of these fraternal relationships were so finely tuned, and so crucial to the messianic bloodline that they must have had an explicit function in the salvation process.

JESUS VERSUS JOHN

New Testament scholars have long been aware of a semblance of discord between John the Baptist and Jesus in the gospel accounts, but it has remained an insignificant issue. As both men proclaimed the coming kingdom of God, it is assumed that they were on the same side. It was curious, then, that they did not work together. Apparently, after John baptized Jesus, they never even met again. What's more, the distance between them was confirmed by their respective followers, who were at odds over questions of lifestyle.

While John was in prison, he had time to reflect. We are told that he dispatched some of his disciples to ask Jesus if he "was the one to come or should we wait for another?" Though adamant about his messianic status, Jesus struggled to gain popular recognition. So he did not appreciate the question. John's incarceration might have given him cause to reconsider, but it was too late. He was already lost.

Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has risen no one greater than John the Baptist; yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

Matt 11:11

This quote is commonly misinterpreted as an expression of Jesus' profound admiration of John, not only for his paramount position in the pantheon of Jewish heroes, but as the ultimate paragon of humility. The problem with this reading, apart from its sheer absurdity, is that Matthew had earlier clarified what Jesus meant by "least in the kingdom";

Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Matt 5:19

In the kingdom of God, John the Baptist ranked beneath the lowest of the low. His crime, therefore, was far worse than simply rejecting Jesus. So instrumental was John in shaping public opinion that Jesus held him personally responsible for his failure to gain popular acceptance. No one had "risen" greater than John the Baptist because he was born to be the Elijah -- a prophet who would lead the people to their Messiah. For some reason, he reneged on this destiny. And as John's immense popularity gave him a much greater audience than Jesus, this had serious repercussions. Jesus' reported statement that, "he who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters," revealed his opinion of the independent Baptist movement. In cosmic terms, John the Baptist had become the anti-Christ.

THE PRODIGAL SON

To appreciate the significance of the sibling-rivalry paradigm, it is worth reading in full Luke's *Parable of the Prodigal Son*:

And he said, "There was a man who had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that falls to me.' And he divided his living between them. Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took his journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in loose living. And when he had spent everything, a great famine arose in that country, and he began to be in want. So he went and joined himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would gladly have fed on the pods that the swine ate; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have bread enough and to spare, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me as one of your hired servants.' And he arose and came to his father. But while he was yet at a distance, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to make merry. "Now his elder son was in the field; and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants and asked what this meant. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has received him safe and sound.' But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Lo, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command; yet you never gave me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your living with harlots, you killed for him the fatted calf!' And he said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.'

Luke 15:1-32

The standard analysis that the younger brother represents everyman is misguided. The *Parable of the Prodigal Son* is an articulation of the fraternal dynamic in the messianic line. The younger brother is Jesus. The tale was a synopsis of his relationship with John the Baptist.

The elder son lived the spotless life; which fits with what we know of John. The younger son disappeared for a while and lived as a wastrel. No information exists on Jesus' early adult life, but he was accused of being a drunkard and of associating with undesirables. He was unlikely to have drunk heavily during his public ministry, so this charge must have been made in reference to his past.

Realizing the error of his ways, the younger son repents and returns to his father's house. The overwhelmingly positive reaction of the father (analogous to God) was responsible for the negative reaction of the older brother. The father dons the younger son with the best robe and gives him a ring -- traditional symbols of authority, even of royal

investiture. So God instituted Jesus as his king. This was too much for John the Baptist to bear

JESUS AND JACOB

If Jesus considered himself as the Prodigal Son, then he must have understood the centrality of sibling rivalry in the salvation plan. Cain and Abel were models for all subsequent pairs of brothers, so Jesus saw himself as a type of Abel. So he demanded vindication for ‘the blood of Abel.’ Early Christians saw Jesus’ crucifixion as prefigured by Abel’s death. The Letter to the Hebrews explained that salvation was due “to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.”³

Because God accepted Abel and rejected Cain, the natural position of the brothers was reversed. This set up a challenge for Cain to overcome his hostility. God warned him that “sin was crouching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”⁴ Abel was killed because Cain failed to rise above his resentment. This same test presented itself to all future older siblings.

Isaac gave the birthright of the first-born son to Jacob, who was his second-born son. The older Esau wanted to kill Jacob. He did not do so because Jacob managed to win him over. Genesis explained that Jacob returned after twenty-one years of self-imposed exile, offered Esau his prized possessions, bowed down seven times before him, and even told him that, “to see your face is like seeing the face of God.”⁵ Esau was melted. To say this story was well known in first century Palestine would be a gross understatement.

The brothers overcame sibling rivalry because Jacob loved his enemy Esau. This unity allowed the foundation of the Israelite nation. To be reconciled with John the Baptist, Jesus followed Jacob’s model. Only when the messianic brothers were united could the kingdom of God be substantiated. “Love your enemy,” therefore, was a cornerstone of Jesus’ teaching, and submitting himself to John’s baptism was its practical application.

The famous baptism scene has always been theologically contentious. By all accounts, John’s baptism followed repentance, and represented the conditional forgiveness of sin and the start of a new life. Christian apologists struggle endlessly with why the ‘sinless’ Son of God, second person of the Holy Trinity, needed to be baptized by John. But Matthew explained it.

John resisted at first, saying he should rather be baptized by Jesus. He relents after Jesus says mysteriously, “Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.” Whether this conversation was fictional or not is secondary to the meaning implied by it. The words paraphrased how Jesus’ baptism was explained by Matthean Christians. To ‘fulfill all righteousness’ was to repeat the successful precedents of the Hebrew patriarchs. By surrendering to John’s baptism, Jesus had literally and figuratively bowed down to his older brother, as Jacob did before Esau. The motivation was to win John’s heart.

What took place immediately afterwards is unknown. The synoptic gospels state that only Jesus saw “the Spirit of God descending on him like a dove.” The fourth Gospel, which was written to convert followers of John the Baptist, claims that only John saw it. In any event, John was presumably unmoved, because Jesus went directly into the desert to complete a forty-day fast, and John continued with a separate agenda.

Emerging from the desert, Jesus recruited twelve disciples to represent Jacob's twelve sons. But though he began his mission as Jacob, he finished as Abel. Moreover, John did not repeat Esau, but Cain. In the end, Jesus blamed his crucifixion on John the Baptist.

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

Nothing concentrates the mind, as they say, like impending death. A condemned man's final utterance is sometimes his most revealing. All four gospels describe the crucifixion scene, but they attribute different last words to Jesus. In John's gospel, Jesus simply says, "it is finished." Luke records, "Father, into thine hands I commit my spirit." Mark and Mathew both report his last words as: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" They cannot all be genuine, but that does not mean they are all false.

It is widely acknowledged that John's gospel is closest in theology to the Gentile Church. Accordingly, Jesus is portrayed as being totally in control of every situation. The events of his life, including his death, were planned from the beginning of time. So his final statement, "it is finished," is hardly surprising, but its authenticity is seriously suspect.

Luke's Jesus was resigned to his fate. Even though the narrative describes a terrible miscarriage of justice, the crucifixion was inevitable. Jesus had done all he could do. The ball was in God's court, "into thine hands I commit my spirit." A great deal of Luke was lifted from Mark, but Luke chose not to copy Mark's anguished Jesus who cried in desperation from the cross.

"My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" has been described as the most theologically embarrassing verse in the entire New Testament. It serves no Church doctrine, provides no comfort for believers, and flies in the face of the traditional Christian interpretation of the crucifixion. What is even more perplexing is that nothing whatever is gained by including it. Defenders of orthodoxy have attempted to subvert the notion that Jesus was embittered by suggesting that he quoted an obscure line from the Book of Psalms.⁶ Critical scholars, who recognize the perversity of this idea, argue that Mark injected his own theology by putting this phrase into Jesus' mouth. Theoretically, his readers would recognize the line of scripture, and realize that the crucifixion was the fulfillment of prophesy, and not the disaster it appeared to be.

The problem is that Mark wrote, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" in Jesus' original spoken language of Aramaic, "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" Matthew made a slight alteration and changed it to, "*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*" But the Aramaic version of Psalm 22:1 is markedly different, "*Eli elahi metul ma shabaktani.*" The meaning is similar, but Mark had no reason to change the wording of the original. That would only hinder its recognition, and contradict his supposed intent. More likely, the reason Mark quoted Jesus in the original tongue was to stress the authenticity of his words.

Matthew rarely missed an opportunity to let the reader know his familiarity with scripture, but he neglected to do so at the most opportune moment -- when Jesus was about to die on the cross. As he did not identify Jesus' last words, presumably Matthew understood them as genuine.

Jesus' cry was heard by witnesses, and the memory of it was kept alive through oral tradition. Mark, whose gospel was the earliest, could not leave it out because it was so

well known. The gospel writers, or later editors, translated the Aramaic into Greek for the benefit of Greek-speaking readers, but their translations were incorrect. There is nothing in Jesus' character, as described anywhere in Christian literature, to suggest that he would have accused God of betrayal. Let us re-examine the gospel narratives.

CALLING ELIJAH

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." And one ran and, filling a sponge full of vinegar, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed his last.
Mark 15:34-36

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "This man is calling Elijah." And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.
Matthew 27:46-49

Jesus' speech was neither garbled nor muffled. He "cried with a loud voice." Witnesses heard a yell from the depths of an anguished soul, not a calculated delivery. But the words did not convey "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" to the Aramaic speakers who heard them. They heard him call out to Elijah.

Mark used "*Eloi*," but no such word exists in Aramaic or Hebrew. Even later Christian Aramaic speakers did not consider "*Eloi*" to be Aramaic. The Syriac (Aramaic) version of the New Testament (written about 200 C.E.) translated the Greek text of "My God" (*ho Theos mou*) as *Elahi* and not *Eloi*. So Mark was either ignorant of the correct Aramaic, he purposely mistransliterated, or his text was amended.

Matthew recognized this 'confusion' in Mark, so he changed "*Eloi, Eloi*" to "*Eli, Eli*," but kept the rest of the verse intact. "*Eli*" is a Hebrew expression for "My God," and is sometimes used in Aramaic as a derivative from "*El*", which means God in both languages. But *Eli* was most commonly used in the vernacular as an abbreviation for the popular name Elijah, as it is today.

Of course, the gospel writers managed to make the Jewish bystanders appear stupid, which was a much favored ploy. Even in Jesus' final moments, the Jews were still incapable of discerning the true meaning of his words. All the same, the bystanders probably expected Jesus to blame his own followers for abandoning him, or the priests who allegedly stirred the crowd to demand Pilate crucify him. Yet Jesus held Elijah responsible.

ELIJAH THE PROPHET

The only evidence we have for the historical Elijah is written in Hebrew Scriptures. They claim Elijah lived during the first half of the ninth-century B.C.E. in the northern kingdom of Israel. Many centuries later, the writers of 1 Kings and 2 Kings incorporated

existing Elijah legends into their accounts, and described him as an idiosyncratic, ascetic holy man called by God to cleanse Israel of Baal worship. There is no account of Elijah's death, and there is no tomb for him. He was taken up to heaven in a fiery chariot; an event which created all manner of speculations about his return.

Extensive Jewish folklore featured Elijah as a heroic and magnanimous figure who lived in disguise among the Jewish people, keeping a watchful eye on events. In times of crisis or special need, he would appear as a stranger to bring comfort and resolution to those in distress. Elijah was a precursor of Santa Claus. Even today, books of inspirational Elijah tales are published for young Jewish children. Spectators at Jesus' crucifixion, who suggested that Elijah might come and rescue him, were not necessarily being sarcastic.

In first-century Palestine, Elijah expectation reached its peak. He is mentioned more times in the New Testament than Moses, Abraham, or any other revered Jewish figure. Elijah's return was fueled by prophecies that he would announce the Messiah in the last days. The final verses of the Book of Malachi summed up this expectancy.

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

Mal 4:5-6

Similar to the Christian belief that Jesus will return, Orthodox Jews still wait for Elijah to come back. Most Jews everywhere keep the tradition of leaving an empty chair at the Passover meal in case Elijah should come to visit. But what is relevant here is whether or not Jesus imagined that a nine-hundred-year-old prophet would materialize, whisk him off the cross, and proclaim him the Messiah. If one resists the temptation to view biblical events through the lens of a Hollywood special effects department, then the notion of Elijah's return is plainly fantastic.

Jesus believed that John the Baptist was the returning Elijah. Not a literal reincarnation of the original prophet, any more than he understood himself a reincarnation of David, Moses, or Jacob. In Jesus' understanding of God's dispensation, John was a *type* of Elijah. There was nothing extraordinary in this concept. In Jewish tradition, every providential figure was seen in terms of those who prefigured him.

JOHN THE ELIJAH

Jesus' disciples were mostly illiterate. They did not follow Jesus because of their knowledge of scripture. Apart from his "miracles" and that he was a better fisherman, what persuaded them most was the strength of his conviction. Consequently, when testifying to Jesus to those more educated than themselves, they ran into difficulties. A common response must have been along the lines, "If Jesus is who you say he is, then where is Elijah?" Being unaware of Malachi's prophecy, the disciples floundered.

And the disciples asked him, "Then why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?" He replied, "Elijah does come, and he is to restore all things; but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they pleased. So also the Son of man will suffer at their hands." Then the disciples understood that he was speaking to them of John the Baptist.

Matt 17:10-13

On another occasion, Jesus stated that “all the prophets and the law prophesied until John; and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.”⁷ Although he was unequivocal, apparently nobody else shared this opinion. For educated Jews, Elijah was an absolute prerequisite. Without Elijah first, there could be no Messiah. Jesus knew his dilemma and foresaw the inevitable outcome, “so also the Son of man will suffer at their hands.”

The multitudes that came to be baptized by John did not think he was Elijah. In their opinion, he was the most likely candidate for Messiah:

As the people were in expectation, and all men questioned in their hearts concerning John, whether perhaps he were the Christ.
Luke 3:15

John did not teach that he was Elijah. He even denied it. In the Fourth gospel, a delegation of priests and Levites are sent from Jerusalem to question him,

When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not."
John 1:21-22

In an effort to educate Baptists, the prologue of the fourth Gospel stated that John the Baptist was “not the light, but came to bear witness to the light.” This also explains why John volunteered he was not the Christ without even being asked. But his contradiction that he was Elijah went against the grain of the narrative. The likelihood is that John’s denial was historical and well understood by Christians and Baptists alike. Furthermore, it served the writer’s theological purpose. Jesus did not explain that John the Baptist was Elijah in the fourth Gospel. The essence of Jesus’ portrayal is more cosmic Christ than Jewish Messiah. And as the author had a particular Hellenized theology of Jesus, wherever possible, references from mainstream Judaism were kept to a minimum. Elijah was a Jewish passion and the issue was basically immaterial to Gentile Christianity, as it remains today.

SUMMARY

Jesus held John the Baptist responsible for his execution. John had deserted his Elijah mission, sabotaged Jesus’ destiny, and thwarted God’s Providence. Therefore, Jesus had to assume the task of Elijah. As the original prophet Elijah fasted forty days before starting his public crusade, likewise Jesus fasted forty days fast to inherit Elijah’s assignment. So he adopted John’s rallying cry “repent, the kingdom of God is at hand” and began to campaign.

The odds were heavily stacked against him. The Messiah could not proclaim himself. A recognized prophet had to do it. Samuel had anointed Saul, the first king of Israel, and anointed David as his successor. In Jewish tradition, the end of history meant the culmination of all prophecy. It was a unity which allowed no loose ends. If Jesus declared himself king, without first having the popular support that a prophetic anointing would have given him, then he would have had a serious credibility problem. On several occasions, he asked others not to reveal his identity. Now we know why. The timing was not yet right. It was not, as some Christian theologians insisted, because too much public

acceptance would hamper his duty to be crucified.

Early Christians, seeking to evangelize Baptists, could not risk portraying John too negatively in their written materials. The New Testament does reveal the intensity of Jesus' frustration with John, but there is little to show John's opinion of Jesus. The best source for that, of course, would be the literature of the early Baptists.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in hillside caves at Qumran in the middle of the twentieth century, has presented us with a collection of original and unedited manuscripts. Archeological evidence found at the site proves that the sect who produced the scrolls were contemporaries of Jesus and John. Furthermore, the location of the caves is close to the river Jordan where John baptized, and is only fifteen miles east of Jerusalem.

Many books have been published on the Dead Sea Scrolls. Most writers regard them as having no direct connection to the historical figures of either Jesus or John the Baptist. But so far, no academic theory to explain them has come close to satisfying the general public's fascination with the Dead Sea Scrolls. Rightly identified as the most important archeological find of the twentieth century, the real story of the scrolls is long overdue. Even more than the Gospel writers, Qumran scribes left behind clues to unlock vital information on the origins of Christianity -- knowledge hitherto cloaked in darkness, unwittingly or otherwise, by institutions of faith and education for two thousand years. Not only did the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls know of Jesus and John the Baptist, they were *obsessed* with them.

7 Dead Sea Scrolls

By now the particulars of how, when, and where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered have become the stuff of legend. In 1947, ancient scrolls and fragments written on animal skins were found hidden in desert caves off the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. The original scrolls were discovered accidentally by a Bedouin shepherd boy in search of a lost goat, and over the following years local tribesmen found more of them in the surrounding area. In total, over eight hundred manuscripts were found in eleven caves. They fall into two distinct categories. The greater part are copies of Hebrew Scriptures; canonical, apocryphal, and pseudipigraphical. The rest of the literature is the sectarian writing of a hitherto unknown religious cult. This collection includes sectarian rule books, commentaries on Scripture, poetry, prayers, liturgies, calendars, and even a book on military strategy.

Once it was determined that the scrolls were the handiwork of ancient Jewish scribes, members of a sect which co-existed with Jesus and the earliest Christians, the Dead Sea Scrolls attracted the attention of powerful religious and political interests. Many suspect it was the machinations of these parties that delayed full publication of the scrolls for over forty years. According to cynics, restrictions on the scrolls were lifted in 1991, only when it was believed nothing in them threatened those interests. Now, apparently everything is in print, save a few obscure or unimportant fragments.

Archeological excavations in Qumran, the nearest point on the map to where the scrolls were found, unearthed a complex of several buildings, generally believed to be an Essene monastery or compound of some kind. Chiefly because its location agrees with specifications mentioned by the Roman writer Pliny the Elder, who described a secluded Essene community sometime before his death in 79 C.E:

On the west side of the Dead Sea, but out of range of the noxious exhalations of the coast, is the solitary tribe of the Essenes, which is remarkable beyond all the other tribes in the whole world, as it has no women and has renounced all sexual desire, has no money, and has only palm-trees for company. Day by day the throng of refugees is recruited to an equal number by numerous accessions of persons tired of life and driven thither by the waves of fortune to adopt their manners.¹

The archeological evidence, which includes Roman arrowheads and over 450 bronze coins, suggests the settlement was destroyed or evacuated during in the Roman-Jewish war of 66-73 C.E. At some stage of the conflict, members of the commune climbed nearby cliffs, and hid their precious library of manuscripts to prevent them falling into enemy hands. No one ever returned to retrieve them.

It is not conclusively proven that the ruins at Qumran belong to the sect responsible for the scrolls. Several credible alternatives have been offered in recent years, but the community's physical location is secondary to the undisputed fact of its existence. The general desert region around the Dead Sea was traditionally the place where ascetics and holy men gathered. And even if the sect's core membership did not reside in Qumran, they would probably not have lived far away. In the absence of an agreed name, they are referred to as the 'Qumran sect' or the 'Qumranians.'

ESSENES

Most of our information about the Essenes comes from the Jewish historian Flavius

Josephus (37 C.E. -- 100 C.E). Son of a priest, he gained the favor of the Romans at the end of the Jewish wars, and immigrated to Rome. His remaining years were spent writing an apologetic history of the Jews, including an account of the beliefs and practices of the three main sects of Judaism: Essenes, Sadducees, and Pharisees.

Josephus claims that between sixteen and nineteen years of age he spent time living with each group. Later, in apparent contradiction, he maintains he spent the same three years in the desert with an ascetic teacher called Bannus who, “used no other clothing than grew upon trees, and had no other food other than that what grew of its own accord, and bathed himself in cold water frequently, both by day and night in order to preserve his chastity.”² The close resemblance of Bannus to the popular image of John the Baptist may partly explain Josephus’ glowing portrait of John and his total neglect of Jesus.³ The main features of the Essene movement as described by Josephus are:

Practiced strict discipline to control sexual desires. Some were celibate, but others married. Those who were unmarried preferred to adopt the children of others and raise them in the Essene way.

[War 2:8,2]

Did not keep personal wealth. All their possessions were handed over to the community as a whole.

[War 2:8,3]

Resided in groups in different cities spread throughout the land. Traveled with nothing, no money or possessions, save weapons for self defense, and did no commerce between themselves. Everything was freely given, with payment neither received nor requested.

[War 2:8,4]

Dressed themselves in white loincloths and performed ritual daily ablutions before communal evening meals presided over by the priesthood.

[War 2:8,5]

Studied the sacred texts, and above all the Law of Moses, and had strict prohibitions against blasphemy and swearing.

[War 2;8,2]

New members underwent a probationary period. On acceptance, oaths were taken to preserve the ethical purity of the brotherhood, and to prevent disclosure of the sect’s secret teachings to outsiders.

[War 2:8,7]

Members were forbidden to reveal the “names of the angels.” Josephus does not articulate further on this point, but the obvious implication is that Essenes had a sophisticated angelology.

[War 2:8,7]

Josephus’ description of the Essenes reads as though it had been lifted directly from a Qumran community rule book. *The Community Rule* described the same practices: communal sharing of wealth, ritual bathing, probationary period for new recruits, prohibition against swearing, and strict separation from outsiders. The *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, a tract in which members of the sect are paralleled with a hierarchical

angelic priesthood, is one of several that reveal a complex view of angels.

All things considered, the people who secreted away the Dead Sea Scrolls must have been connected in some way to the broader Essene movement. The particular lifestyle of the Qumranians, however, was only for the most committed individuals. Membership required strict observance of numerous rules and regulations designed to purify the self through obedience, self-discipline, and study. This was not asceticism for its own sake. Personal holiness was essential to participate fully in the coming messianic kingdom. Prophecy was being fulfilled in their midst. Josephus refers to a similar faction of Essenes who gleaned prophesy from scriptures and performed purification rites:

There are also those among them, who undertake to foretell things to come, by reading the holy books, and using several sorts of purifications, and being perpetually conversant in the discourses of the prophets; and it is but seldom that they miss in their predictions.⁴

The prediction that most characterized the Qumran sect missed badly. Their messianic world order never materialized. Long before the Roman army arrived on their doorstep, the sect was torn asunder by an internal disagreement between its leader, the “Teacher of Righteousness,” and his former ally, the “Wicked Priest.” This led to an acrimonious parting of the ways from which the sect never recovered. Many scrolls were written in the aftermath of the breakup to provide a theological explanation for what had happened.

In the final analysis, the Qumranians appear to be just another sad redundancy of history. The best spin one could put on them was that they had badly miscalculated. The worst, they were deluded fanatics. About one forecast, however, they were half right. The scrolls successfully predicted a war against the Romans or “Kittim” as they were known. But they got the wrong result; the Romans won.

According to the *War Scroll*, members regarded themselves as an elite corps of fighting men, who would form the vanguard of future battles. The confrontation was described in theological language, but “war” was not used as a metaphor for a spiritual struggle. The group was prepared for both physical as well as spiritual combat. The complete battle plan and even its duration were meticulously detailed and fixed in advance.

Qumranians were the ‘sons of light.’ The Romans and their Jewish collaborators were the ‘sons of darkness.’ All the ‘sons of light’ were to participate and register in the army. The encounter would be the great grandmother of all battles; the final showdown between the forces of ‘light’ and ‘darkness.’

Despite the barrenness of its setting today, Qumran was not the popularly imagined secluded “wilderness” of biblical lore. Excavations of the ruins have shown the site was originally an ancient Israelite fortress, so unlikely to have been chosen at random. Its location was strategically significant; fifteen miles due east of Jerusalem, situated near a major crossroads that linked the west coast Dead Sea sites to Jericho in the north, and Jerusalem to the west. Qumran’s coastal position also meant that travel and trade to Jerusalem from the east coast Dead Sea sites would pass in close proximity to it.

Although irrefutable evidence that the settlement was a military installation is lacking, a fortified watchtower overlooked the entrance. Obviously, the relatively small number who lived at Qumran did not constitute an army. The compilers of the scrolls represented the dedicated elite; trained to provide leadership for the common Israelites, who it was

believed, would rise up and follow them when the time was right.

Pliny thought that a lack of better options in life forced people to join the cult; but members believed they had the highest calling of all -- handpicked by God to serve the Messiah. Pliny thought that they were 'tired of life,' but the members could hardly have been more enthusiastic. Pliny described them as "refugees;" but the members considered themselves the saviors of society. Pliny was a Roman historian. He was on the winning side. It was his prerogative to describe them as a bunch of crackpots and deadbeats -- ancient equivalents of Jonestown or the Branch Davidians.

ZEALOTS

Not widely known outside professional circles, text fragments identical to those found at Qumran, were discovered at Masada during excavations in the 1960s. Masada was a site for ancient palaces located on a high plateau on the southwestern shore of the Dead Sea, thirty miles due south of Qumran. According to Josephus, it was fortified during the reign of Herod the Great as a refuge in the event of a revolt. In 66 C.E., during the initial stages of the Jewish rebellion, it was captured by Zealots from the Roman garrison stationed there, and used as a base for operations against Rome and her Jewish supporters, until put under siege by the Roman army in 72 C.E.

Two years later, Masada finally collapsed, but when the Romans entered the fortress they discovered that the approximately one thousand inhabitants had committed mass suicide rather than face capture. When describing Roman sieges, Josephus usually gave anecdotes of counterattacks or brave resistance by the Jewish defenders, but he failed to do so in the story of Masada. These were clearly not regular Zealots.

No complete scrolls were found there because they were destroyed to keep them from the Romans. Pieces of manuscripts show that its defenders used the same solar calendar as used at Qumran, and not the lunar calendar of official Judaism. The largest fragment unearthed was part of *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*, a text of Qumranian liturgical worship. Mass suicides often coincide with extremist religious fervor, and Qumranians, not Zealots, were distinguished by their religious passion. Historians regard Jewish Zealots as either freedom fighters or terrorists, but they do not have a reputation for piety.

Should the Romans have captured the inhabitants of Masada, the men would have been crucified, and the women and children enslaved. For the Qumran sect, crucifixion was the most shameful and dishonorable form of death. *The Temple Scroll* explained the following circumstances where crucifixion was justified:

If a man slanders his people and delivers his people up to a foreign nation and does evil to his people you shall hang him on a tree and he shall die...If a man is guilty of a capital crime and flees abroad to the nations, and curses his people, the children of Israel, you shall hang him on a tree, and he shall die. But his body shall not stay overnight on the tree. Indeed you shall bury him on the same day. For he who is hanged on a tree is accursed of God and men.⁵

Zealots were frequently crucified throughout the Roman occupation, and considered it a badge of honor to be martyred by the enemy in this way. It was not a shameful death. Christians, of course, held a similar point of view. If Josephus was correct in saying that Zealots captured Masada, then at one point they must have joined forces with

Qumranians who subsequently formed the majority in the coalition.

In 1952, a scroll made of copper sheets was discovered in a partly collapsed cave just north of Qumran. *The Copper Scroll*, eight feet long and engraved in Hebrew, is an inventory listing of buried treasure, containing detailed references on where gold and jewels were hidden in secret locations in Jerusalem and around the country. The text of the scroll is not composed in the poetic or didactic styles of the sectarian literature, but in the dry manner of accounting. That it has been painstakingly engraved into copper sheets suggests that its content demanded something more permanent than leather or papyrus, and it was not the result of a whimsical fantasy or an elaborate hoax.

Some scholars assumed that the Copper Scroll represented the pooled resources of the Qumran community, but another explanation came from the late John Allegro, a controversial figure in the history of the Dead Sea Scrolls and one of the original team of translators. He suggested that the Zealots took control of the Jerusalem Temple before the Romans arrived, and they siphoned away considerable amounts of gold and silver. The treasure was hidden at various locations and the copper scroll record made accordingly.⁶ As it was deposited in a cave at Qumran, the Zealots must have had sympathizers in the area.

As yet no consensus has emerged on the origins of the copper scroll, and the precise nature of the connection between Qumran and Masada remains unclear. Even though the demise of the Teacher of Righteousness and the division caused by the Wicked Priest had devastated the sect, apparently it remained strong in the Dead Sea area. With the Romans on the warpath, and no messianic deliverance on the horizon, some chose to stay and throw in their lot with the Zealots. Others headed in opposite directions. But to understand what really happened at Qumran we need to identify the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest. First, we need to know when they lived.

DATING THE SCROLLS

No one disputes that the Qumran sect existed during the lifetimes of Jesus and John the Baptist. And it has not gone unnoticed, even among the general public, that the intense level of messianic expectation expressed in the gospels is matched, even surpassed, in the Dead Sea Scrolls. But hopes that they might provide a breakthrough in understanding the origins of Christianity have so far been in vain. Both the Church and professional scholarship consistently downplay this possibility. An agreement has been reached that the writings at Qumran have significance primarily because they track Jewish literary development during the inter-testamental period. They help fill the two hundred years gap between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and demonstrate possible stylistic influences on the gospel writers.

The aura of mystique that has always surrounded the Dead Sea Scrolls has been reinforced in recent times by the publication of books by dissenting scholars that attempt to link Jesus to them.⁷ But the majority view, including most of the original team of translators, is that all the historical personalities and events mentioned, or alluded to, in the sectarian literature belong to the Maccabean period of Jewish history, between the mid-second-century and mid-first-century B.C.E. Nothing in the texts, therefore, constitutes a direct or indirect reference to either Jesus or John the Baptist.

If the conventional interpretation of the scrolls is correct, then for the last hundred years of the sect's existence (30 B.C.E.-70 C.E.) the following premises must also be correct:

No contemporary events were considered worthy of interpretation or comment. If commentaries were made, then they were destroyed without trace.

Members were fixated only on events of the distant past. They maintained a deliriously high level of messianic expectation over several generations.

The Qumran sect was either unaware of the existence of Jesus and John the Baptist, or deemed them irrelevant.

None of these hypotheses are justified by the internal evidence of the written texts. They are defended by dating the scrolls through a combination of radioactive carbon testing and paleography, neither of which are exact sciences. The test results are then interpreted in accordance with the above suppositions.

The Dead Sea Scrolls were subjected to radioactive carbon tests at laboratories in Zurich, and at the University of Arizona during the 1990s. The results were far from conclusive [Table 7]. The margin of error is so wide that the results essentially proved nothing, and can be used to justify a variety of different arguments. Only one sectarian scroll, *The Habakkuk Commentary* 30 C.E., ... when Jesus and John the Baptist were publicly active. The rest of the sectarian literature could have been composed during their lifetimes or after their deaths.

Table 7. DATING OF SECTARIAN SCROLLS

Carbon Dating		
Damascus Document*	45 BCE -- 120 CE	100 -- 50 BCE
Damascus Doc Manuscript*	194 -- 45 BCE	50 BCE -- 0 CE
Habakkuk Commentary*	120 -- 5 BCE	30 -- 1 BCE
The Messianic Rule*	206 BCE -- 111 CE	100 -- 75 BCE
The Community Rule*	95 BC -- 122 CE	100 BCE
Commentary on Psalms*	5 -- 111 CE	N/A
Messianic Apocalypse*	93 BCE -- 80 CE	100 -- 80 BCE
Thanksgiving Hymns**	25 BCE -- 60 CE	50 BCE -- 70 CE
Temple Scroll**	100 BCE -- 0 CE	25 BCE -- 25 CE

* Tested at Arizona AMS Laboratory, University of Arizona, 1994

** Tested at Institut für Mittelenergiephysik, Zurich, 1991

Carbon dating only produces a date for the age of the tiny sample of animal skin tested, and not for the date on which it was written. And results may be influenced by a variety of other factors. For example, for many years the translators exposed the scrolls in cigarettesmoke-filled rooms, and cleaned them with oils to enhance the lettering. This kind of treatment can speed the aging process. Commenting on the complex and problematic nature of accurate radiocarbon dating, a leading scientist in the field stated that, “little reliance should be placed on an individual 14C date to provide an estimate of age for a given object, structure, feature, or stratigraphic unit.”⁸ This statement was validated by the results of carbon dating for *The Testament of Qahat*, a lesser known Qumran manuscript. A sample was carbon dated between 300 and 400 B.C.E., which nobody accepts is an even remotely possible date. The laboratory admitted its findings were questionable, and explained that ‘chemical contamination’ had affected the result, although they were unwilling to provide further details of what that meant.⁹

The principle behind paleography is that from a careful study of the shape and formulation of letters in a manuscript, paleographers are able to calculate the date of its composition. This method assumes an historical linear progression of writing techniques, which is the sole basis upon which its results are founded. The logic is sound enough when dealing with documents of an official nature such as inventories, oaths, registers, etc but cannot be applied with the same rigor to religious scripts. Scribes used traditional styles of writing which were not always the same as contemporary ones. In this way they could appeal to a heritage of inspired literature to give legitimacy to their own work. This was standard practice everywhere, and is the reason today why publishers of sacred texts use traditional type fonts and not contemporary ones. The results of paleographical testing, therefore, tend to be dated too early.

The best means of determining the date of composition and the chronology of ancient writings is by a thorough examination of the internal evidence of the actual written material, together with any associated archeological data. That so many 'impartial' experts think otherwise in the case of the Dead Sea Scrolls is both ironic and revealing. It strongly suggests they are ruled by desire to preserve and protect the same traditional belief systems held by those who are legitimately suspected of having delayed publication of the scrolls in the first place.

THE HABAKKUK COMMENTARY

Not surprisingly, scholars who prefer to date the sectarian writing in the pre-Christian era jumped on the early dating of the Habakkuk Scroll to justify their position:

Nevertheless, Arizona has scored on one highly significant point: the Habakkuk Commentary, chief source of the history of the Qumran sect, is definitely put in the pre-Christian era between 120 and 5 BCE. In consequence, fringe scholars who see in this writing allusion to events described in the New Testament will find they have a problem on their hands.¹⁰

The Habakkuk Commentary has become prominent because it is judged to be the main source of information on the dispute between the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest. Other writings, however, provide similar information, and they are all in agreement with each other. *The Habakkuk Commentary* merely echoes what is written in them and includes a few extra details.

Qumran scribes specialized in the 'pesher' form of interpreting current events in the life of the community from books of prophesy. A line or verse was isolated, and then reexamined as though it had been written in direct reference to the sect. In other words, they forced meanings onto ancient texts that were never intended by the original authors. A similar form of exegesis was used by early Christians to explain Jesus' life from the Old Testament. The book of Habakkuk, given the pesher treatment, was construed to be an accurate prediction of the dispute between the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest. This clash of personalities left deep scars, judging by the vitriolic hyperbole used against the Wicked Priest. Ultimately, it led to the death of both combatants, though not to the disbandment of their supporters.

The Wicked Priest is usually identified as Jonathan Maccabaeus, who served as the High Priest in Jerusalem from 153 to 143 B.C.E. without having the appropriate hereditary credentials. The name of the High Priest he usurped is unknown, but he is understood to

have been the Teacher of Righteousness. Jonathan had been a leader in the guerilla wars against the Seleucid Greek rulers, and received his appointment in line with the terms of a peace treaty. Eventually, Jonathan and one thousand of his men were lulled into a trap by Diodotus Tryphon, who had invaded Judea. Jonathan's men were slain, and he was held hostage before being executed shortly afterward.¹¹

From all the items unearthed at Qumran, the collection of coins has been the most conclusive. Four hundred and seventy six bronze coins were found, spanning the dates 135 B.C.E. to 136 C.E.¹² The bulk of the coinage comes from two specific periods: 143 coins date from 103 -- 76 B.C.E. and 254 coins date from the period 6 -- 67 C.E. This accounts for 397 out of a total of 476 coins -- over eighty percent of the total. Logically, the most occupation and activity at Qumran was during these two periods.

The first significant presence, 103-76 B.C.E., was at least forty years after the rule of Jonathan Maccabaeus. If he were the Wicked Priest, then not only did the sect successfully weather the storm he caused, but forty years after his death it moved to Qumran and ruminated on his battle with the Teacher of Righteousness for another 170 years, moving to an alternative location for eighty years in midstream. Eminently more plausible is the theory that the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest lived during the latter period of occupation at Qumran, 6-67 C.E.

When the Roman army approached, the Qumranians did not destroy the scrolls but carefully concealed them in hillside caves. This means that (1) they did not want the Romans to read them, and (2) they intended to return later to retrieve them. If the writing concerned incidents that took place over two centuries previously and more than a hundred years before the Romans ever set foot in Palestine, why was it so important to keep them from Roman eyes? Logically, it was because the scrolls contained contemporary references. If the Romans read about the Kittim and how they would be utterly destroyed -- it would have been a catastrophe. The Romans might even have sympathized with the Wicked Priest.

The word "Kittim" appears repeatedly throughout the sectarian literature. Originally it referred to the inhabitants of Kition, a Phoenician colony in Cyprus, but Jewish scribes used "Kittim" to signify the great world power of the day. In the book of Daniel, "Kittim" was already used to symbolize the Romans.¹³ But Daniel was written during the Maccabean era, mid-second-century B.C.E., and at that time Rome was not considered a hostile power to Israel.

The inescapable fact of history is that there was no direct Roman military involvement in Palestine until the invasion of Pompey in 63 B.C.E. After that time, Judea was incorporated into the Roman sphere of control as a client state. Taxes and tributes had to be paid of course, and no doubt Romans were resented by the bulk of the populace, but their rule was through Jewish proxies. The Roman army was only involved when civil disturbances could not be handled effectively by the local authorities. Roman-Jewish cooperation peaked during the reign of Herod the Great, 37- 6 B.C.E., when the Romans supported Herod's rebuilding of the Temple. After Herod's death, his kingdom was divided among three sons, but from 6 C.E. onward, Judea was ruled by a succession of Roman governors (including Pontius Pilate 26-36 C.E.), until the Jewish Roman war of 66-70 C.E.¹⁴ *The Habakkuk Commentary* described the Kittim in the following ways: ¹⁵

"quick and valiant in war, causing many to perish. All the world shall fall under the dominion of the Kittim."

“The Kittim who inspire all the nations with fear and dread.”

“The Kittim who trample the earth with their horses and beasts. They come from afar...and devour all the peoples like an eagle which cannot be satisfied, and they address all the peoples with anger and wrath and fury and indignation.”

“The commanders of the Kittim who...pass one in front of the other; one after another their commanders come to lay waste the earth.”

“They sacrifice to their standards and worship their weapons of war...they divide their yoke and their tribute over all the peoples year by year, ravaging many lands.”

These characterizations must have been written during the later period of Qumran occupancy (6 -- 67 C.E.). Mention of “Kittim” is unlikely to have been a reference to the Roman army of Pompey. Use of phrases such as “all the world,” “all the nations,” and “all the peoples,” point to an area of Roman control that covered much more territory than during the republican era. “Commanders of the Kittim who pass in front...one after another” implies that Roman leadership was by a succession of individuals -- Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Caligula, Nero, etc -- and not by decree of the senate as it was before the Empire. This argument is further strengthened in the *War Scroll*, where the leader of the Kittim is described as a *melekh* which means “king” or “emperor.”

“The king of the Kittim shall enter into Egypt, and in his time he shall set out in great wrath to wage war against the kings of the north, that his fury may destroy and cut the horn of Israel.”

“And all those who are ready for battle shall march out and shall pitch their camp before the king of the Kittim and before all the host of Belial gathered about him...”

That the Romans venerated their standards and weaponry was a well known feature of both Republican and Imperial armies, and is duly noted in *The Habakkuk Commentary*, “they sacrifice to their standards and worship their weapons of war.” Significantly, Josephus recorded that the first occasion this custom was brought to the attention of the Jewish people was at the start of Pontius Pilate’s governorship:

So he introduced Caesar’s effigies, which were upon the ensigns, and brought them into the city; whereas our law forbids us the very making of images... Pilate was the first who brought these images to Jerusalem and set them up there; which was done without the knowledge of the people, because it was done in the nighttime; but as soon as they knew it, they came in multitudes to Caesarea, and interceded with Pilate many days that he would remove the images.¹⁶

Consequently, the most probable date for *The Habakkuk Commentary* is sometime between 26 C.E., when Pilate took office, and before the Roman army leveled Qumran about 68 C.E. Therefore, the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest must have been active during this time period.

The Habakkuk Commentary shares with other sectarian scrolls an unmistakable sense of immediacy. The writing is emotionally charged. Events are not being described second or

third hand. The Christian gospels were written decades after the events they describe, so the narrative tones are measured and lack the same emotional connection with the subject matter. Both the scrolls and the gospels dealt with cosmic issues, but the writer of *The Habakkuk Commentary* differed in that he failed in his attempt at being rational and levelheaded. The sentiment is one of unbridled resentment, which suggests that events described were still fresh in the memory.

TWIN MESSIAHS

The Qumran sect expected two Messiahs; a priestly Messiah from the “House of Aaron” and a Davidic Messiah from the “House of Israel.” The Davidic Messiah would be a royal figure, who would rule the secular administration of his kingdom in tandem with the religious instruction of the Aaronic Messiah. The military prowess of the king allied to the spiritual power of the High Priest was the foundation of the new world order. The conventional expectation of Judaism was that a single Messiah would come as a Davidic king together with Elijah as a type of eschatological High Priest to anoint him. The essential difference is that the Qumranians ranked the priestly Messiah higher than his kingly counterpart. Traditions of dual leadership contained in the Hebrew Bible and in non-canonical texts may have influenced Qumran ideology,

“Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he shall grow up in his place and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord, and shall bear royal honor and shall sit and rule upon his throne. And he shall be a priest by his throne, and peaceful understanding shall be between them both.”

Zechariah 6:12-13

From the pseudipigraphical *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, believed to have been written about 150-100 B.C.E.,

My children, be obedient to Levi and to Judah. Do not exalt yourselves about these two tribes because from them will arise the Savior from God. For the Lord will raise up from Levi someone as a high-priest and from Judah someone as king. He will save all the gentiles and the tribe of Israel.

Testament of Simeon 7.1-2

To me, God has given the kingship, and to him, the priesthood. And He has subjected the kingship to the priesthood. To me He gave earthly matters and to Levi heavenly matters. As heaven is superior to the earth, so is God's priesthood superior to the kingdom on earth.

Testament of Judah 21.2-4a

In the above verse, the priest outranked the king, which was the understanding at Qumran. The hierarchy between the two Messiahs was explained in *The Messianic Rule*:

The Priest shall enter at the head of all the congregation of Israel, then are all the chiefs of the sons of Aaron, the priests, called to the assembly, men of renown. And they shall sit before him, each according to his rank.

Afterwards, the Messiah of Israel shall enter. The chiefs of the tribes of Israel shall sit before him, each according to his rank, according to their position in the camps and during their marches; then all the heads of family of the congregation,

together with the wise men of the congregation, shall sit before them, each according to his rank.

And when they gather for the community table, or to drink wine, and arrange the community table and mix the wine to drink, let no man stretch out his hand over the first-fruits of bread and wine before the Priest. For it is he who shall bless the first-fruits of bread and wine, and shall first stretch out his hand over the bread. And afterwards, the Messiah of Israel shall stretch out his hands over the bread. And afterwards, all the congregation of the community shall bless each according to his rank.
1Q28a 2.11-21

A fragment known as the *Florilegium* or *Midrash of the Last Days*, which explains verses in 2 Samuel, states that the “Interpreter of the Law,” a title for the Teacher of Righteousness, would rule with the Davidic king.

The Lord declares to you that He will build you a House. I will raise up your seed after you. I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father and he shall be my son [2 Sam 8:11-14]. He is the branch of David who shall arise with the Interpreter of the Law to rule in Zion at the end of time.
[4Q174,10-13]

‘The sons of Zadok’ was another self-designation for the Qumran membership. Zadok was a High Priest during the time of King David. The family line of Zadok occupied the High Priesthood from until the fall of Jerusalem and the exile into Babylon. The Qumran sect took the title “sons of Zadok” from the prophet Ezekiel, who wrote that the sons of Zadok were the most worthy priestly line and the most trusted by God. Zadok is the Hebrew word meaning “righteous.” The Teacher of Righteousness represented Zadok, and the Qumranians were the “sons of righteousness.” A King David was needed to rule with the High Priest Zadok. Everything in the sect’s messianic theology was predicated on the harmonious relationship between them.

THE TEACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

As the priestly Messiah, the Teacher of Righteousness was the principle agent of salvation:

The Teacher of Righteousness who expounded the law to his council and to all who freely pledged themselves to join the elect of God to keep the Law in the Council of the Community, who shall be saved on the Day of Judgment.
1Q14, 4Q168

But the righteous shall live by his faith...the men of truth who keep the Law in the House of Judah, whom God will deliver from the House of Judgment because of their suffering and because of their faith in the Teacher of Righteousness.
IQpHab, VIII, 1

He may have been viewed in messianic terms by his devotees, but in that respect, the Teacher of Righteousness was not unique at this time in history. Popular movements of social unrest often broke out in first-century Palestine, with the leader proclaimed king or Messiah by his followers. What connects the Teacher of Righteousness with Jesus and John the Baptist, and separates them all from other messianic figures of the period, is that

their disciples left behind a body of religiously inspired literature.

Even for conservative scholars, the probability that John the Baptist had an association with Qumran is high, if only because he reportedly baptized in close proximity. Jesus had a potential connection to Qumran, through his links with John. It is legitimate, therefore, to question whether one of them might have been the Teacher of Righteousness.

A great deal of confusion exists about exactly who wrote which scroll, but there is general agreement that the Teacher of Righteousness was responsible for some of them, particularly the *Hymns Scroll*, a collection of personal prayers and reflections, similar to the Biblical Psalms. They are not liturgical works intended for use in public worship, but resemble entries in a diary that chronicle the spiritual highs and lows of a deeply religious man. Some give thanks and praise to God for salvation and the gift of knowledge, but other express incredible bitterness and despair over perceived abandonment and betrayal. Fortunately, several details from the author's personal life are revealed, and they provide useful clues to track his identity. Comparing this information with what is known about John the Baptist is enlightening, because the data suggests both men lived the same life. The monikers 'John the Baptist' and 'Teacher of Righteousness' appear to have been aliases for the same man. [see Table 7.2]

As already discussed, Essenes were known to adopt children considered suitably qualified, and to raise them within the confines of the group. Graves of women and children that were excavated in the burial grounds near Qumran, so far unexplained by historians, prove that it was not a strictly all-male commune, and suggest that part of the compound housed families and/or functioned as an orphanage. Being of priestly descent, John the Baptist was precisely the sort of material the Essenes were looking for. Luke wrote that he was raised "in the wilderness," which is a phrase used repeatedly in the Dead Sea Scrolls to refer to the sect's location.

Qumranians referred to themselves as 'the poor,' but the Teacher of Righteousness made a separate distinction for the sect's orphan population, "the fatherless," which hints that he was among their number:

Blessed are thou O Lord, for thou hast not abandoned the fatherless or despised the poor.¹⁷

Poignantly, he describes the circumstances of his childhood,

For thou hast known me from the time of my father, And hast chosen me from the womb. From the belly of my mother. Thou hast dealt kindly with me... Thy grace was with me in the lap of her who reared me, And from my youth Thou hast illumined me With the wisdom of Thy judgment... Until I am old Thou wilt care for me; For my father knew me not, And my mother abandoned me to Thee. And as a foster father bearing a child in his lap So carest Thou for all Thy creatures.¹⁸

His father never knew him. His mother abandoned him. Plainly, the Teacher of Righteousness was orphaned and raised by the Essenes of the Qumran community.

In the Mandaean literature, the description of John the Baptist's early life matches that of the Teacher of Righteousness. The infant John is taken to a mythical place called Mount Paruan, "where those being breast fed and small children are nourished with holy water." Similar to Luke's "wilderness," Mount Paruan was an allegorical reference to Qumran.

The Teacher of Righteousness received his education at Qumran, “from my youth Thou hast illumined me with the wisdom of Thy judgment.” At Mount Paruan, the Mandaean John the Baptist stated that “I learned all my wisdom and I learned all my speech in its entirety,” before he was taken to Jerusalem, and Luke described that John “grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation to Israel.” John describes his time at Mount Paruan:

Until I was 22. There I learned all my wisdom and I learned all my speech in its entirety. They clothed me with clothes of radiance and covered with veils of cloud; they wrapped a waistband around me, a waistband of water that shone and was radiant beyond measure. They placed me in a cloud, a cloud of radiance, and in the seventh hour one Sunday they took me to the place Jerusalem.

Then a voice sounded in Judea, a shout announced in Jerusalem. They shouted, Which woman had a son, that was seized and taken from her? What woman took a vow for him and then took no further interest in him? What woman had a son that was seized and taken away? She should come and seek her son.¹⁹

When John reached the age of maturity, he was fitted with the priestly vestments and taken to Jerusalem. Sons of priests could be ordained by the Sanhedrin from twenty years of age, but only after establishing his legitimacy of descent. The sense of the Mandaean verses is that there was a problem with John’s pedigree. The Jerusalem authorities wanted to know about his mother, and the circumstances of his abandonment -- “what woman took a vow for him and then took no further interest in him? What woman had a son that was seized and taken away?” No doubt this was a reference to the scandalous events of the past. John was given away by his mother, just as the infant Teacher of Righteousness was given to the Qumran sect, “And my mother abandoned me to Thee.”

Initially, John’s public ministry was enormously successful. The gospels recount that “all the people” of Judea and Jerusalem were baptized by him; Herod Antipas protected John;²⁰ and the masses wondered if he were the Christ. Yet somehow it all went wrong. The New Testament claims that John was arrested because he condemned Herod’s unlawful marriage to Herodias, who was still married to Herod’s brother Philip. Josephus wrote, not necessarily in contradiction to the gospels, that Herod killed John because he feared his influence over the people would lead to open rebellion:

Now when many others came in crowds about him, for they were very greatly moved by hearing his words, Herod, who feared lest the great influence John had over the people might put it into his power and inclination to raise a rebellion (for they seemed ready to do anything he should advise), thought it best, by putting him to death, to prevent any mischief he might cause, and not bring himself into difficulties, by sparing a man who might make him repent of it when it would be too late.²¹

John was brought in chains to the fortress at Machaerus, in southern Perea, five miles east of the eastern shore of the Dead Sea, and executed there.

The life of the Teacher of Righteousness followed a similar pattern. A charismatic public speaker, he was adored by the multitudes. Then suddenly, disaster befell him. He was arrested, put in chains, and died while in prison. Prior to his imprisonment, the Teacher regularly heaped praise on God for the gift of inspired speech that allowed him to win the people and confound the sinners. From the his own words:

I give Thee thanks because of the spirits which Thou hast given to me! I will bring forth a reply of the tongue to recount Thy righteous deeds.²²

Blessed art Thou, O my Lord, who hast given to thy servant the knowledge of wisdom that he may comprehend Thy wonders, and recount Thy abundant grace!...Thou hast set hymns of praise within the mouth of Thy servant, and hast established for me a response of the tongue.²³

Evidently, his disciples visited him in prison, and brought writing materials with them. And the Teacher dictated several prayers that revealed his sense of agony and depression. His once wondrous powers of persuasion had deserted him,

As for me, I am dumb...my arm is torn from its shoulder and my foot has sunk into the mire. My eyes are closed by the spectacle of evil, and my ears by the crying of blood.²⁴

The tongue has gone back which Thou didst make marvelously mighty within my mouth; it can no longer give voice. I have no word for my disciples to revive the spirit of those who stumble and to speak words of support to the weary....the throes of death encompass me.²⁵

Incarceration had left him tormented, weak and sick.

My arm is torn from its socket. And I can lift my hand no more. My foot is held by fetters And my knees slide like water. I can no longer walk. I cannot step forward lightly. For my legs and arms are bound by shackles. Which cause me to stumble.²⁶

I am forsaken in my sorrow...My heart laments within me As in those who go down to Hell. My spirit is imprisoned with the dead. For my life has reached the Pit. My soul languishes within me day and night without rest.²⁷

Truly I am bound with untearable ropes and with unbreakable chains, A thick wall fences me in, iron bars and gates of bronze; my prison is counted with the Abyss as being without any escape...The torrents of Belial (Satan) have encompassed my soul leaving me without deliverance.²⁸

His formerly absolute conviction gave way to serious misgivings,

For my salvation is far from me. And my life is apart from me.²⁹

In the gospels, John the Baptist expressed doubts while in prison. The Christian interpretation that John originally believed in Jesus, but his faith wavered because he was, after all, only human, is not supported by the evidence of the texts. If John had understood Jesus as his savior, then he, and not Peter, would have been the leading disciple. Any reservations John experienced were concerned with his own position in the scheme of things. Chained in irons, with no hope of liberation, he questioned his infallibility. He wondered if he had lost his privileged connection to God. It must have felt so when he considered his pathetic situation and heard the stories about Jesus.

As the Teacher of Righteousness/John the Baptist wallowed in despair and self pity, there is no hint or admission in his writings that *he* might be the one responsible for his plight.

The popular image of John the Baptist as a cave-dwelling, fire and brimstone preacher does not gel with the notion of him as a devotional poet and man of letters. Yet during his lifetime, John earned a reputation for the potency of his prayers, so much so, that Jesus’ own disciples preferred them.

One of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples. And he said to them, "When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread; and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive every one who is indebted to us; and lead us not into temptation."
Luke 11:1-3

Millions of Christians take for granted that the Lord’s Prayer was Jesus’ unique instruction of how his followers should pray. Not so. The creator of history’s most famous communication with God was John the Baptist. He was also the author or main contributor of several texts at Qumran, especially those pertaining to the rules and regulations of the community, *The Temple Scroll*, *The Messianic Rule*, and *The Community Rule*. No precedent exists in any ancient Jewish writings for this type of instructional literature. Similar rule books, however, such as the *Didache*, the *Didascalia*, and *The Apostolic Constitution* were widely used by early Christians, which is further evidence that Qumran/Baptist traditions were incorporated into the Christian movement.

THE WICKED PRIEST

It was crucial to the Qumran sect that details of its internal affairs were never revealed to outsiders. The main protagonists in the scrolls are given titles or nicknames, and are never directly identified. If the Teacher of Righteousness was John the Baptist, then logically Jesus was his nemesis, the Wicked Priest.

Table 7.2 IDENTITY OF THE TEACHER OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Teacher of Righteousness	John the Baptist
Location	
Qumran desert settlement in Judea. Northwest shore of the Dead Sea.	River Jordan area, Judean desert. Northern shore of the Dead Sea.
Vocation	
Leader of a religious community, who practiced ritual baptism and strict discipline.	Lived as an ascetic preacher. Maintained own group of disciples who also baptized.
Message	
“The thickets of the forest will be cut with an axe and Lebanon by a majestic one will fall. And there shall come forth a stump of Jesse.” 4Q285,fr 7	“Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight....even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees.” Luke 3:4-9
Composed Prayers	
The Thanksgiving Hymns. He was praying in a certain place, Collection of Qumran community prayers authored by the Teacher of Righteousness.	and when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples.” Luke 11:1

1QH, 1Q36, 4Q427-3	
Childhood Imprisonment	
Until I am old Thou will care for me; for my father knew me not and my mother abandoned me to Thee. Hymn 18, XVII, 35	The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the wilderness till the day of his manifestation. Luke 1:80
My foot is held by fetters and my knees slide like water; I can no longer walk. I cannot step forward lightly; my legs and arms are bound by shackle. Hymn 18, XVI, 35	But Herod the tetrarch, who had been reproved by him... and for all the evil things that Herod had done... that he shut up John in prison. Luke 3:19
Despair/ Self Doubt	
My couch utters a lamentation And my pallet the sound of a complaint. My eyes are like the fire in the furnace. And my tears grow dim with waiting. For my salvation is far from me. And my life is apart from me. Hymn 18,XVII, 1-5	And John, calling to him two of his disciples, sent them to the Lord, saying, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Luke 7:18-19

Public-enemy number one at Qumran went by several names, “Liar,” “Man of a Lie,” “Scoffer,” “Spouter of Lies,” and similar pejoratives. These different titles mean essentially the same thing, so belong to the same man, and not to multiple personalities -- as a prosecutor might describe an individual accused of stealing as a “robber,” “thief,” and “burglar.” The Qumran sect did not split into several competing groups, but into a distinct polarity caused by two radically opposed factions.

Prior to his defection, the Wicked Priest was a leading member of the inner circle and a respected confidante of the Teacher of Righteousness. When he dissented, a number of others supported him, and this developed into open rebellion. There is no way to gauge what percentage of the community mutinied, but it must have been a minority because it led to the banishment of both the Wicked Priest and his followers.

Though he broke some of the sect’s rules and encouraged others to do the same, the level of hostility toward the Wicked Priest, consistently maintained throughout the scrolls, could not have derived simply from a difference of opinion regarding the Law. He was accused of plotting to murder the Teacher of Righteousness and destroy the Qumran society. The Wicked Priest’s own demise was seen as divine retribution. For his evil-doing, God condemned him to be arrested by the authorities and sentenced to death:

Because of the blood of men and violence done to the land, to the city, and to all its inhabitants. Interpreted, this concerns the Wicked Priest whom God delivered into the hands of his enemies because of the iniquity committed against the Teacher of Righteousness and the men of his Council, that he might be humbled by means of a destroying scourge, in bitterness of soul, because he had done wickedly to His elect.³⁰

...The Wicked Priest, inasmuch as he shall be paid the reward which he himself tendered to the Poor... As he himself plotted the destruction of the Poor, so will God condemn him to destruction³¹

On what grounds did the Qumran sect believe that the Wicked Priest planned to kill the

Teacher of Righteousness? The scrolls are hazy on this point. Paranoia permeates the list of indictments against him, but the principal motive seems to have been the pursuit of wealth, “he betrayed the precepts for the sake of riches.” He was accused of stealing from the membership: “he robbed the Poor of their possessions.” He was also charged with stealing from his own followers as well as the general population: “he robbed and amassed the riches of men of violence who rebelled against God, and he took the wealth of the peoples, heaping sinful iniquity upon himself.”

Luke mentioned that among Jesus’ followers was a certain “Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s steward,” who was one of a number of women who “provided for them out of their means.”³² In other words, several well-connected women with close ties to Herod Antipas bankrolled Jesus’ campaign. The timing of John’s arrest by Herod added fuel to suspicions of Jesus. John’s disciples had already noticed that John’s support base had weakened following the split with Jesus.

And they came to John, and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, here he is, baptizing, and all are going to him."
John 3:24-26

When Herod seized the moment to move against John, it appeared to Qumranians that Jesus had collaborated with Herod in return for payment. The historicity of the gospel version of John’s death is questionable, but if one accepts it, then John’s decapitation was the result of a conspiracy by women close to Herod. The story probably originated from Baptist sources that disparaged Jesus’ female followers. Herod’s “step-daughter” Salome’s lascivious dancing so mesmerized him that he offered her “half his kingdom.” Salome was the name of one of Jesus’ female followers who brought spices to his tomb.³³ Strangely, the gospel writers did not explain who she was.

In *The Habakkuk Commentary*, the Wicked Priest went to Jerusalem and “committed abominable deeds and defiled the Temple of God,” the same charge leveled by Pharisees after Jesus performed healings on Temple grounds. Jesus’ unorthodox attitude toward the Law is well documented, as was his denunciation by the authorities in Jerusalem. And as the Wicked Priest was “brought to judgment...in the midst of them,” so Jesus was dragged in front of the Sanhedrin. As God condemned the Wicked Priest to “destruction,” so Jesus was found guilty and sent to Pilate with a recommendation for the death sentence.

A gospel slur against Jesus was repeated in *The Habakkuk Commentary*: “He walked in the ways of drunkenness that he might quench his thirst.” Jesus, like the Wicked Priest, was a drunk.

Modern scholars, who think that Jonathan Maccabeus was the Wicked Priest, must admit that we have far more information on Jesus than Jonathan Maccabeus. And if the Wicked Priest of the Dead Sea Scrolls resembles Jesus of the New Testament, then that is reason enough to admit the strong possibility that they are the same person.

FROM JOHN TO JESUS

Six fragments of the same manuscript were found at Qumran, and despite some mutilation, they were successfully reassembled and translated. Collectively known as the MMT (Miqsat Ma’ase Ha-Torah) or ‘Some Observances of the Law,’ they consist of three distinct parts -- a sectarian calendar, a list of special rules regarding separation,

animal sacrifice, and sexual conduct, and a letter or notification addressed to an unnamed individual.

This letter is exceptional. The content and tone of the author fit perfectly with what one would expect from the Teacher of Righteousness. And most scholars now agree that the MMT letter was written by the Teacher of Righteousness, and addressed to the Wicked Priest as plea for him to return to the fold.

And you know that we have separated from the mass of the people and from mingling with them in these matters and from being in contact with them in these matters. And you know that no treachery or lie or evil is found in our hands...And furthermore we have written to you that you should understand the Book of Moses and the Book of the Prophets and David and all the events of every age. And furthermore it is written that you will depart from the way and that evil will befall you.

And we recognize that some of the blessings and curses which are written in the Book of Moses have come. And this is at the end of days when they will come back to Israel forever...remember the kings of Israel and understand their works that each of them who feared Torah was saved from troubles, and to those who were seekers of the Law, their iniquities were pardoned.

Remember David, that he was a man of piety, and that he was also saved from many troubles and pardoned.

We have also written to you concerning some of the observances of the Law, which we think are beneficial to you and your people. For we have noticed that prudence and knowledge of the Law are with you. Understand these matters and ask Him to straighten your counsel and put you far away from thoughts of evil and the counsel of Belial. Consequently you will rejoice at the end of a time when you discover that some of our sayings are true. And it will be reckoned for you as righteousness when you perform what is right and good before Him, for your own good and for that of Israel.

The author appealed to Moses, the Law, and the Prophets because this was his area of acknowledged expertise, and he expected the Wicked Priest to appreciate these credentials. In the gospels, Jesus stated that John “was more than a prophet” because past prophets could only predict the Messiah; John’s privilege was to work with him directly. He insisted that “all the prophets and the law prophesied until John,”³⁴ which implied that the advent of John was the signal that the Mosaic Law had run its course. The cultic ritualism associated with Temple-based religion had overstayed its welcome. It was only a preliminary or temporary phase in Jewish history, “think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them.” The Law had served its purpose, but it was time to move to the next level. Those who accused Jesus of destroying the religion of Moses were correct in the sense that the kingdom of God rendered the Law meaningless.

These opinions were not shared by the Teacher of Righteousness. In the MMT letter, he petitioned the Wicked Priest to “remember the kings of Israel,” and “remember King David.” He understood the Wicked Priest/Jesus as the kingly Messiah. In explaining his status, Jesus often alluded to David, and on eight separate occasions Matthew put the phrase “Son of David” into the mouth of onlookers. As Jesus’ teaching revolved around

the “kingdom of God,” he believed himself to be the king. But the MMT letter was intended to prod the Wicked Priest into accepting that his status as secular Messiah required him to follow the priestly Messiah in spiritual matters. Jesus did not regard his relationship with John in the same light. Besides, his own status was far superior to that of David,

Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, saying, "What do you think of the Christ? Whose son is he?" They said to him, "The son of David." He said to them, "How is it then that David, inspired by the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, 'The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, till I put thy enemies under thy feet'? If David thus calls him Lord, how is he his son?" Matt 22:41-46

Davidic ancestry could not be proven. Any leader who was victorious in battle would be considered Davidic. And if the task of the Davidic Messiah was to lead the fight against the Goliath of Rome, then he needed a battle plan that anticipated a military response.

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.
Matt 10:34, Luke 12:51

I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled!
Luke 12:49

Men think, perhaps, that it is peace which I have come to cast upon the world. They do not know that it is dissension which I have come to cast upon the earth: fire, sword, and war.
Thomas 16

The MMT made plain to the Wicked Priest that by listening to “the counsel of Belial” (the name the sect used for Satan), he had crossed over to the side of darkness. That Jesus was in league with Satan was a familiar charge. But there was still hope for him because previous lapsed kings had been “pardoned” once they “feared Torah.” Should he continue his wayward path, the Wicked Priest would suffer the consequences: “And furthermore it is written that you will depart from the way and that evil will befall you.” In a clear reference to the MMT letter, the *Commentary on Psalms* accused the Wicked Priest that “he watched the Teacher of Righteousness that he might put him to death because of the ordinance and law which he sent to him.”³⁵

Details of the Teacher of Righteousness’ death were not elaborated, but his impending demise was a subject in the *Hymns Scroll* and elsewhere. Blaming his fate on the “seekers of smooth things,” “traitors,” and “interpreters of error,” he directed numerous tirades against the Wicked Priest and his followers. He knew the meaning of Jesus’ words, “he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

Teachers of lies have smoothed Thy people with words and false prophets have led them astray; they perish without understanding for their works are in folly. I am despised by them and they have no esteem for me.³⁶

A common accusation against the Teacher’s enemies was that they justified a comfortable lifestyle by deliberately misinterpreting the Law:

And they, teachers of lies and seers of falsehood, have schemed against me a devilish scheme, to exchange the Law engraved on my heart by Thee for the smooth things which they speak to Thy people. And they withhold from the thirsty the drink of Knowledge, and assuage their thirst with vinegar, that they may gaze on their straying, on their folly concerning their feast-days.³⁷

The charge of loose living was repeated by John the Baptist’s followers:

And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink."
Luke 5:33

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?"
Matt 9:14, Mark 2:18

Obviously, the “seekers of smooth things” were Jesus and his disciples. They had hatched a diabolic scheme to destroy John the Baptist and pervert the Law of God, by appealing to people’s baser nature.

Supporting evidence in the Mandaean texts supports the view that the ‘Wicked Priest’ was a pejorative title given to Jesus by followers of John the Baptist. There are clear parallels between the figures of Yeshua Messiah and the Wicked Priest [see Table 7.3]. Mandeans labeled Jesus the ‘Roman Christ’ because he betrayed secret doctrines to Gentiles that he had learned from John. In the same vein, the Dead Sea Scrolls describe how the Wicked Priest and his followers “violated the Precept” and “transgressed the Covenant” because they chose “the fair neck” -- an obvious reference to pale-skinned Romans. Yeshua and the Wicked Priest were both accused of deceit, blaspheming against the Sabbath, committing atrocities in Jerusalem, and of stealing money to buy popular support.

Table 7. 3 CHARACTERIZATIONS OF JESUS

Wicked Priest	Mandaean Yeshu	New Testament
This was the time when the Scoffer arose who shed over Israel the water of lies. 4Q265, I, 15	And after John the world will continue in lies and messiah...will divide the peoples and the twelve deceivers roam the world. Right Ginza 2:154	The Pharisees then said to him, "You are bearing witness to yourself; your testimony is not true." John 8:13
He appeared before them to confuse them, and to cause them to stumble on the Day of Fasting, their Sabbath of repose. 1QHab 11:5-6	The Sabbath, which Moses made binding, hast thou relaxed in Jerusalem. Book of John 1: 30	And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath; so the Son of man is lord even of the Sabbath." Mark 2:27
He walked in the ways of drunkenness that he might quench his thirst. 1QpHab 9:14		The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a glutton and a drunkard' Matt 11:19

The city is Jerusalem where the wicked priest committed abominable acts and defiled the Temple of God. 1QpHab12:5	He behaves with humility and goes to Jerusalem. He captures some among the Jews with sorcery and deceit, showing them miracles and magical apparitions. Right Ginza 1:149	And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did.... they were indignant. Matt 21:14-15
He robbed and amassed the riches of the men of violence...and he took the wealth of the peoples. 1QpHab 8:11-12	When I showed you bolts and keys to enter heaven, I beguiled you....I gave you gold and silver so that you would keep me company. Left Ginza 1:4	And he sat down opposite the treasury, and watched the multitude putting money into the treasury. Many rich people put in large sums. Mark 12:41

HERODIANS

Because some of his sayings correspond with known Essene teachings, Jesus is often linked with the Essenes. Since the New Testament never used the word “Essene,” it is assumed that many early Christians must have been Essenes. The two other main religious factions of that time -- Sadducees and Pharisees -- were depicted negatively in the gospels because they opposed Jesus. However, Jesus’ attitude to the Law contradicted mainstream Essene philosophy, especially in regard to Sabbath observance, and dietary restrictions. So if Jesus was an Essene, then he was a rebel Essene. In the New Testament, references are made to a certain group of Jews, known collectively as “Herodians:”

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. And they watched him, to see whether he would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, "Come here." And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.
Mark 3:16

And they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, "Teacher, we know that you are true, and teach the way of God truthfully, and care for no man; for you do not regard the position of men. Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, "Why put me to the test, you hypocrites? Show me the money for the tax." And they brought him a coin.
Matt 22:16-19

The identity of the Herodians, who are not mentioned by Josephus or any other Jewish writer of this period, is a mystery. Fourth-century Christian writers, such as Jerome and Epiphanius, described them as Jews who believed that Herod the Great was the Messiah. Church fathers felt it was helpful to their cause to show that not all Jews believed the Messiah would defeat the Romans in battle. Herod the Great was not a popular ruler by any stretch of the imagination. Loathed and feared by the population for his brutality, not

only was he considered a Roman puppet, he was without any Jewish blood. No Jew would ever have believed that Herod was the Jewish Messiah.

Most modern commentators assume Herodians were simply people who supported the Herodian dynasty, and who benefited from Herod's policy of appeasement toward Rome. During Jesus' time, their number would have included advisors and important staff of Herod Antipas. Therefore, if Herodians plotted to "destroy" Jesus, then it was either on the orders of, or to gain the favor of, Herod Antipas. But according to Mark and Matthew, Antipas had not even heard of Jesus at this time. When informed of Jesus' miracles, he was quoted as saying that they were the work of John the Baptist, "raised from the dead."

Luke did not mention Herodians by name, but he did record that the wife of Herod's steward was one of Jesus' financial backers. Logically, if Luke knew Herodians from Mark, then he did not understand them as members of Herod's personal staff.

Palestinian Pharisees loathed the Herodian dynasty, so their close association with the Pharisees suggests that Herodians were primarily a religious group. The name 'Herodian,' though obviously linked to Herod, was in all likelihood an uncomplimentary nickname used by detractors. As the New Testament is the only source for the word "Herodian," it was most probably coined by Jewish Christians.

By tradition, the Essenes were known as the privileged party of Herod the Great. Considering the mixed feelings many had toward Herod the Great and his dynasty, "Herodian" would have made a suitable title to pour scorn on those Jews whom Herod favored -- the Essenes. More specifically, the faction of Menahem that was responsible for the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Mark's statement that Pharisees, who witnessed Jesus' Sabbath transgressions, "held counsel" with Herodians to plot his downfall, makes sense because the *Damascus Document* explains that the Qumran leadership was even stricter than the Law of Moses on Sabbath observances.³⁸ In conversation with his disciples, Jesus provides a further clue as to the identity of the Herodians:

Now they had forgotten to bring bread; and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, "Take heed; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

Mark 8:14-15

The miracles of feeding the crowds with loaves and fishes showed that actual "bread" was nothing to worry about. Disciples must guard themselves against the symbolic bread or "leaven" of the Pharisees and of Herod. Pharisees, who included many priests in their number, had earlier rebuked Jesus for walking through a grain field on the Sabbath. Jesus replied by asking them to recall how David had once eaten the bread of the presence, which only priests were permitted to eat, and had shared it with his companions. David was not tied to the minutiae of the Law, and neither was Jesus. The Pharisees perverted Jewish tradition in order to undermine Jesus' credibility. This was the "bread" of the Pharisees.

Similarly, the fundamentalist Essenes emphasized elaborate rituals with ceremonial bread offerings³⁹ that elevated the priestly faction. The Herodian leadership of the Qumran sect, together with the Pharisees, was bent on Jesus' ruin. Their preoccupation with pious ritual masked their true intent.

THE DAMASCUS DOCUMENT

In the late nineteenth century, a large collection of old manuscripts stored in a room adjoining a synagogue in Old Cairo was found by European scholars. Included were two large medieval fragments of the same work, which came to be known as the *Damascus Document* because of the numerous references to Damascus it contains. When the *Damascus Document* was first published in 1910, scholars were in the dark as to its origins. Light eventually came when several smaller fragments of the same scroll were discovered at Qumran, dated approximately one thousand years earlier.

The “New Covenant” that the text describes was made “in the land of Damascus” -- the location of the Qumran community, and not the Gentile city in Syria. The reference to Damascus was taken from 1 Kings 19:15, where God gave Elijah the order to go to Damascus to anoint the kings of Syria and Israel:

And the Lord said to him, Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus, and when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel.

The significance of this event was that “Israel” was a name used throughout the Dead Sea Scrolls to refer to the sect’s membership. They represented the ‘true’ Israel, from whose ranks messianic salvation would come to the rest of Israel. Scripture prophesied that Elijah would return to anoint the king. Naturally, this would take place at ‘Damascus.’

The *Damascus Document* consists of two parts, an exhortation to the membership giving them an explanation of history, and a section comprised of community laws and statutes. The latter part contains no references to the Teacher of Righteousness or to the dispute that divided the sect; therefore it was most probably composed before the exhortation, in which the Teacher and the mutiny against him are referred to in the past tense.

According to the historical overview, the sect began 390 years after the victory of King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon in 587/6 B.C.E. This would be 196/7 B.C.E., about ninety years before the date of any coins found at Qumran, and 130 years before the Romans came to Palestine. How can this date be explained? Providential time periods were never meant as literal periods of chronological history. In the scriptures, meanings were associated with certain time periods that transcended historical accuracy to reveal the hand of God. Failure to appreciate this led theologians to calculate that the world was created six thousand chronological years ago, the time frame in literal biblical years. The *Damascus Document* specified 390 because that was the number of years decreed for the punishment of Israel by Ezekiel during the captivity in Babylon.⁴⁰ The beginning of the priestly community at Qumran signaled the end of this 390 year punishment, “He visited them, and He caused a plant root to spring from Israel and Aaron to inherit His land and to prosper on the good things of His earth.”

The *Damascus Document* states that the sect struggled for twenty years, “like blind men groping for the way, before He raised for them a Teacher of Righteousness.” There are good reasons to accept that ‘twenty years’ was chronological time, (1) there are no prophetic scriptures signifying providential time periods of twenty years, (2) messianic sects do not maintain their high level of expectation over generations, (3) a period of twenty years was measurable by the sect’s own calendar, but there were no archives nor any technology available to them to calculate accurate dates from the distant past, such as

the year of exile into Babylon, so it was identified symbolically, and (4) if the period of busy occupancy at Qumran started around 6 C.E. it would mean John the Baptist became the leader around 26 C.E, which fits within the timetable of his public ministry.

The exhortation was a diatribe against those who had separated from the sect. In the wake of the Teacher of Righteousness' passing, the speaker gives hope and reassurance to the remnant, and at the same time makes veiled threats to those who might stray in the future. The general theme was consistent with other scrolls, but the Wicked Priest is known by the name "Scoffer" and "Liar." He betrayed the Teacher of Righteousness, broke the sacred rules of the Covenant, and persuaded others to do the same. As for the loyal Qumranians,

They shall take care to act according to the exact interpretation of the Law during the age of wickedness. They shall separate from the sons of the Pit, and shall keep away from the unclean riches of wickedness acquired by vow or anathema or from the Temple treasure; they shall not rob the poor of His people, to make of widows their prey and of the fatherless their victim. They shall distinguish between clean and unclean, and shall proclaim the difference between holy and profane. They shall keep the Sabbath day according to its exact interpretation, and the feasts and the Day of Fasting according to the finding of the members of the New Covenant in the land of Damascus. They shall set aside the holy things according to the exact teaching concerning them.⁴¹

This was a litany of familiar accusations made against Jesus/Wicked Priest. He did not keep the Sabbath, his disciples did not keep the fast days of John the Baptist's disciples, he preached against dietary restrictions, and so on. Also included was the favorite theme that he was motivated by love of money. The tirade continued,

They are all of them rebels, for they have not turned from the ways of traitors but have wallowed in the ways of whoredom and wicked wealth.⁴²

The expression "wallowed in the ways of whoredom" translates into a charge that Jesus' female followers included prostitutes. This accusation might have been made with Mary Magdalene in mind, and if so, may be the source of the later Church claim that she was a reformed prostitute.

The membership was encouraged to endure, keep the Teacher's commandments, and salvation would eventually come. The orator appealed to the standard biblical number of forty, a time period used by scribes to signify purification for a new beginning; forty days flood, forty days fast, forty years in the desert, and so forth. A similar meaning was behind the Roman practice of quarantine, the root of which means 'forty'.

From the day of the gathering in of the Teacher of Righteousness until the end of all men of war who deserted to the Liar there shall pass about forty years.⁴³

Forty years after John's death, Jesus would have no more followers. This time period must pass before the world could be purified of them. Curiously, the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple happened approximately forty years after John's death, and signaled the end of Jewish Christianity. The Middle East has remained in sympathy an overwhelmingly anti-Christian zone ever since.

The existence of a medieval script of the *Damascus Document* proves that the caves near

the Dead Sea were not the sole repositories of Qumran literature. But more importantly, it proves that the sect's traditions were kept alive in the region for more than a thousand years, and did not end after the Roman wars.

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND QUMRAN

Similarities of language, content, and style are noticeable in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament. Several examples follow that highlight Jesus' links with the Qumran sect:

1) Of all the self-appellations of the Qumran sect, the most popular was the "sons of light." This phrase betrays Babylonian influences, and does not occur elsewhere in any other ancient Jewish literature. In fact, the only other place it can be found is the Gospel of Luke, in the closing line of the *Parable of the Unjust Steward*.

The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness; for the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the **sons of light**.

Luke 16:8

The meaning of this parable has always been subject to debate. A corrupt manager was fired by his employer when his malfeasance was discovered. Worried about his future, he called his master's debtors one by one, and reduced their bills to gain their goodwill. Later, when the employer heard of the steward's strategy, he praised him for it. The moral of the story was to "make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous mammon, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal habitations."⁴⁴ Or, use money in this world to buy friends in the next.

Qumranians followed typical Essene economic practices, so individual wealth was given to the group treasury in a religious communist system. Jesus' followers kept the same tradition.

"If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me."

Matt 19:21

Contrary to the claims of most commentators, this instruction was not a call to the monastic life, nor was it an affirmation of the intrinsic holiness of poverty, nor even a demand for the redistribution of wealth. The 'poor' or *Ebion* was another title used in the Dead Sea Scrolls to refer to the membership, but in the context that Jesus used the term a 'poor' was anyone who followed him. And as at Qumran, new recruits were expected to contribute everything to the group's coffers. In the future, the 'poor' would be world leaders; "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus knew the dangers of this kind of life. His followers, the new "sons of light" were often naïve and unsophisticated. As they did not take financial responsibility, they struggled to make an impact on the world outside, where knowledge of the power of money and how to use it were essential to effect change. The corrupt steward made friends because he knew how to manipulate money to his advantage. His employer could appreciate that. Jesus bemoaned his followers' lack of wherewithal, so he sent them into the world with the instruction to be "wise as serpents."

2) John the Baptist's disciples were sent to question Jesus, "are you the one to come, or should we wait for another?"

In that hour he cured many of diseases and plagues and evil spirits, and on many that were blind he bestowed sight. And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."

Luke 7:21-22

The *Resurrection fragment* (4Q521) is a Qumran text that describes the characteristics of the eschatological era. The Messiah "liberates the captives, restores sight to the blind...He will heal the wounded, and revive the dead and bring good news to the poor." Jesus' response to John's question could have been 'Yes, I am the one,' but to convey his disappointment and frustration, he cited these qualifications because they were John's own criteria for recognizing the Messiah.

3) Despite the overwhelming numerical superiority of the enemy, the ultimate showdown between the forces of light and darkness would be victorious for the Qumranians, because myriads of angelic warriors fought with them.

Thou will muster the hosts of Thine elect, in their Thousands and Myriads, with Thy Holy Ones and with all Thine Angels, that they may be mighty in battle and smite the rebels of the earth by Thy great judgments, and that they may triumph together with the elect of heaven.

1QM, XII, 5

Valiant warriors of the angelic host are among our numbered men, and the Hero of war is with our congregation; the host of His spirits is with our foot soldiers and horsemen.

1QM, XII, 9

When soldiers arrested Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, Peter responded by striking the High Priest's slave. Jesus told Peter to put his sword away, and admonished him in a manner directly drawn from Qumranian sources:

Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

Matt 26:53

By this time, the cause was irretrievably lost, and Jesus was resigned to his fate. It had not always been that way. When he first appeared speaking publicly, his message was full of hope for a great future -- the kingdom of God. The notion that Jesus included a military option in his thinking is usually dismissed, but unless he assumed the Romans would simply hand over Judea to him, armed conflict was unavoidable. The public campaigns of both John the Baptist and Jesus were essentially recruitment drives, principally targeted at young males.

The War Scroll described the final conflict as a war fought against Satan and his angels, and when the victory was won, all the nations would be liberated, and the kingly Messiah will rule the world. This theme was echoed in Jesus' Last Judgment speech:

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations... Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.' Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'

Matt 25:31-41

Angelic warriors were "clouds," presumably purified water that cleansed the world of its dirtiness;

Warriors of the angelic host, the host of His spirits... They are as clouds, as clouds of dew covering the earth, as a shower of rain shedding judgment on all that grows on the earth.

1QM, XII, 9

Jesus' enigmatic saying about the "clouds of heaven" has been misinterpreted to mean physical skies, when it was a figure of speech to signify a military campaign.

They will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Matt 24:30-31

Combat strategy was the responsibility of military leaders. Although he was not as prolific as the Teacher of Righteousness, the Davidic Messiah would have contributed to *The War Scroll*. Jesus was a student of military tactics,

Or what king, going to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?

Luke 14:31

He knew the inevitability of armed confrontation,

Let him who has no sword sell his mantle and buy one.

Luke 22:36

To explain the welter of inconsistencies, contradictions, and mysteries in the gospels is no easy task. But the Church simply drew from the text interpretative paradigms that do not derive from it. The same thing has happened to the Dead Sea Scrolls. As a result, the roots of Western civilization have stayed grounded in a confused hotchpotch of nonsensical myths and blinkered scholarship. The intensity of feeling evident in the Dead Sea Scrolls reflected their justifiable conviction that the destiny of the world was in their hands. Events at Qumran represented the crossroads of history. Critical mass was reached there, and the fall-out was phenomenal. It happened two thousand years ago, but the results have reverberated down the ages, and impacted the destiny of untold millions.

8 Legacy of Messianic Conflict

For most Christians, the notion that John the Baptist had disciples who did not believe in Jesus could hardly be less meaningful. And the fact that John's disciples continued to exist as a separate sect long after his death has significance only for a few specialized scholars. Nonetheless, the schism between the two opposing messianic sects was without doubt *the* determinative factor in the establishment of the Christian Church. And compelling evidence exists that the tension between them developed into an ideological rivalry that influenced key events in world history. Today, this friction is manifested in the world's principal religio-political conflict.

The history of the Christian Church is well documented, though there are still gaps in our knowledge of the early centuries. But what about the Church of John? Most people are unaware that such a thing ever existed. Scholars, who know of the 'Johannite' heresy, regard it as a curiosity. The Johannite Church had many faces, and like Christianity, split into competing sects each with a different emphasis. But it has always existed.

DISCIPLES OF JOHN

According to Luke, the early Baptist movement was not restricted to Judea or even Palestine. Baptist missionaries evangelized Diaspora Jews, and had already established a presence in Ephesus (modern Turkey) before Paul and the first Christians arrived there. The Book of Acts told the story of Apollos of Alexandria who was...

an eloquent man, well versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and expounded to him the way of God more accurately.

Acts 18: 24-27

Needless to say, the narrative does not elaborate on the details of Apollos' 'inaccurate' Baptist teaching, and his apparent conversion was described as a formality. Later in Ephesus, Paul came face to face with a group of John's followers who were also converted with remarkable ease.

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." And he said to them, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism." And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is Jesus." On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus....they were about twelve of them in all.

Acts 19:1-7

The Church of John had the same goal as the Christians -- to gain new converts. But both groups shared the same dilemma. Their founders had been executed by the authorities, so had presumably failed in their life's work. For orthodox Jews, who expected a triumphant Messiah, this was all they needed to know in order to reject any Baptist or Christian claims.

After the Resurrection event, the idea of Jesus' second coming took root, though Jewish Christians were unlikely to have understood it in the same way as Gentiles. Jesus' disciples persevered confident they would soon be vindicated. Similarly, the early Baptists expected John's return. It was the cyclical nature of Providence. This explains the speculation that Jesus was John the Baptist revisited,

Some said, "John the baptizer has been raised from the dead; that is why these powers are at work in him."

Mark 6:14

Neither sect could proselytize effectively to Gentiles without a coherent philosophy. Paul devised a theology/Christology specifically intended to appeal to "God fearers" -- Gentiles, attracted to monotheism, who respected the ethical teachings of the Torah, but did not subject themselves to circumcision and had no interest in priestly and Levite rituals. Pauline Christianity was incredibly successful, but modern critics of Paul claim that his strategy of being "all things to all men," forced him to incorporate into his message Gnostic elements from Egyptian, Greek, or Babylonian mystery religions, which he fused together with some of his own esoteric Jewish ideas. Gnosticism is notoriously difficult to pin down; it has many characteristics, and not all of them are found in any given system of Gnosticism. Suffice it to say that Paul's essentially "Gnostic" doctrine was that salvation came from the heavenly Christ and not from Jesus the man. This was achieved through the practice of an ascetic lifestyle, which led to spiritual revelation, and not through the power of intellectual reason or ritual observances.

If Pauline Christians borrowed ideas from others, then no doubt the afore-mentioned, multi-talented Apollos was a prime source of material. The impossibly spontaneous acceptance of Paul's teaching by John's disciples suggests that the opposite scenario was closer to the truth. Baptist ideology was embraced by the Christians. Its most useful or attractive concepts were amalgamated into a religious mix to gain converts from the Church of John. Baptists, and not Christians, were the first to adopt Gnostic principles.

By honoring John and integrating certain Baptist traditions, the Christians hoped to eventually unite the two movements. But in the long term, eulogizing John the Baptist was counterproductive. It fostered a misplaced reverence toward him that enabled the Johannite Church to exist as a parasite and wreak havoc within the body of the Christian Church. A large number of churches, cathedrals, public buildings and even cities dedicated to John the Baptist, were instituted not by the Church of Jesus, but by its sworn enemy.

Despite Jesus' scathing condemnation of John and the indisputable evidence of a conflict between them, a negative portrayal of John the Baptist would still be offensive to most Christians. Psychologists could explain this as denial caused by the subconscious mind, afraid of where the actual truth might lead -- to the gradual deconstruction of everything else it *believes* is true.

The Fourth Gospel, composed in Ephesus, a region with an acknowledged Baptist presence, contains blatant Gnostic references. The text's repeated use of "light" and "life" led scholars to suggest that the writer was himself a convert from a Gnostic Baptist group.¹ The gospel has a singular emphasis on the doctrine of a pre-existent savior, temporarily in the world to suffer as atonement for the sins of mankind, which is an idea most scholars believe is missing from the synoptic gospels. The famous prologue must have been written with Baptists in mind because it insisted that John was "not the light."

Presumably he was a “false light,” as the “true light” was Jesus.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came for testimony, to bear witness to the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness to the light. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.

John 1:5-9

The Baptist cult was a lasting presence in the region. At least 250 years after the gospel of John was written, the Christians still considered them a major threat. Ephraem the Syrian (c. 306-373 C.E.), born in S.E. Turkey, had a reputation as a sacred poet. In one of his hymns, Mary sings to the infant Jesus,

The conception of John took place in October in which darkness dwells. Your conception took place in April when the light rules over darkness and subdues it.²

John the Baptist was more than just “not the light” -- he was the darkness.

SIMON MAGUS

In pursuit of uniformity, the naming and refutation of heresies was the early Church’s foremost obsession. Once Gnosticism was recognized as the number one menace, it was ruthlessly persecuted. Irenaeus (c. 130-202 C.E.), a giant in Christian history, compiled a listing of all known unorthodoxies, which stated that All those who in any way corrupt the truth, and harm the teaching of the church, are the disciples and successors of Simon Magus of Samaria.³

In Church tradition, Simon Magus was considered the founder of Gnosticism, but his story remains one of the great mysteries connected to the origins of Christianity. He is known mostly from a passage in the Book of Acts; the early disciples were being harassed in and around Jerusalem, so Philip went into Samaria to preach the word. His success there eventually drew the attention of Simon Magus,

who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the nation of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, “This man is that power of God which is called Great”. And they gave heed to him, because for a long time he had amazed them all with his magic.

Acts 8:9-11

Simon converted and, “after being baptized,” joined forces with Philip. When the leadership in Jerusalem heard, Peter and John went to Samaria and laid their “hands on the people” to receive the Holy Spirit. This impressed Simon, who offered Peter money in exchange for receiving the same power. Thus the word ‘simony’ evolved to describe the offense of buying and selling ecclesiastical office. Simon Magus was not mentioned again in the New Testament, but his life would become the subject of much myth and speculation. Luke’s source for this episode was almost certainly the Clementine literature. The texts claim that the source of animosity between Jesus’ disciples and the disciples of John the Baptist revolved around the identity of the Christ,

And, behold, one of the disciples of John asserted that John was the Christ, and not Jesus, inasmuch as Jesus Himself declared that John was greater than all men

and all prophets. “If, then,” said he, “he be greater than all, he must be held to be greater than Moses, and than Jesus himself. But if he be the greatest of all, then must he be the Christ.”⁴

Then the astonishing claim is made that Simon Magus was John’s favorite disciple.

Being an adherent of John...through whom he came to deal with religious doctrines...Of all John’s disciples, Simon was the favorite, but on the death of his master, he was absent in Alexandria, and so Dositheus, a codisciple, was chosen head of the school.⁵

Simon had gone to Egypt, “to perfect his studies of magic,” at the time John was in prison. On his return, he usurped control of the Baptist sect from Dositheus, the original leader after John’s death. Peter and Simon had a lengthy and convoluted theological debate which ended with a duel of their magical powers. Simon lost after he attempted to fly from a high building and broke his legs in the fall.

Whether real or imagined, the connection between Simon Magus and John the Baptist was intended to show that John’s disciples were the most committed anti-Christians. Repeatedly identified as the greatest threat, the original Gnostics were Baptists. As John the Baptist was the biggest thorn in Jesus’ side, so his followers were the biggest thorn in the side of the Church.

DOSITHEUS

There is scant information on Dositheus. He is generally understood as the Samaritan founder of the Dositheans, a Gnostic religion that sprang up in the first-century C.E. Epiphanius wrote that the Dositheans were a Baptist sect with a peculiar set of traditions and practices. Origen (c.185-254 C.E.) mentioned that the Dositheans kept written records, and that Dositheus made messianic claims, even a resurrection myth was attached to him:

Dositheus the Samaritan, after the time of Jesus, wished to persuade the Samaritans that he himself was the Messiah prophesied by Moses; from that day until now there are Dositheans, who both produce writings of Dositheus and also relate some tales about him, as that he did not taste of death but is still alive.⁶

A listing of thirty-two heresies, compiled by Hippolytus (c.260-235 C.E.), began with a mention of Dositheus, which demonstrates how seriously he was taken. Rabbinical sources and Arabic writers stated that as late as the tenth-century C.E., Samaritans were divided into two sects, orthodox Samaritans and Dositheans. Books of the Dositheans were found among Christian Gnostic texts at Nag Hammadi, which proves that the early Church was susceptible to influence by Gnostic Baptists. In fact, a significant percentage of the Gnostic treatises found at Nag Hammadi contain no references to Jesus (though some have obvious Christian interpolations), and even though the themes are based around figures from the Old Testament, the texts are clearly not of Christian origin. As no evidence exists for the existence of Jewish Gnostic groups, the texts most probably have Samaritan sources.

Many texts belong to what scholars call ‘Sethian’ Gnosticism. Sethian Gnostics hold Seth, third son of Adam and Eve, in special veneration and claim to be his true descendants. Significantly, this is also a tenet of Mandaean theology. In the late-eighth-

century C.E., a Syriac Christian theologian named Theodore Bar Konai composed a short paper on current heresies. He made no serious attempt to explain their ideas, but included a brief history of the Mandaeans, whom he said were known as the Dositheans.

Among New Testament scholars, the Mandaean religion and its possible connection with the roots of Christianity, was one of the most controversial subjects of the first half of the twentieth century. Outside academe, nobody had heard of Mandaeans. Today, they are an endangered species.

MANDAEANS

Since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, many people belonging to minority religious groups have fled Iraq because his regime had previously given them a certain degree of protection. The Mandaeans, located mostly in and around Baghdad and Basra, are one such group. Their future in Iraq is uncertain, and at the moment they are estimated to number only about thirty thousand worldwide.

Western scholars have assumed that the name ‘Mandaean’ derives from the Aramaic word *manda*, meaning knowledge. But this is unlikely. Based on the principle that religious sects are known by derogatory titles given them by others, ‘Mandaean’ probably comes from *Mandi*, the name of their ritual baptismal house that contains a special pool connected by pipe to a nearby stream, known as a ‘Jordan.’ Wearing long white robes, Mandaeans perform regular ablutions with running water inside the *Mandi*. In addition, *mandi* is a word used in parts of the Moslem world, meaning to bathe or wash.⁷ Mandaeans, therefore, were known by outsiders as ‘bathers’ or ‘baptizers’ rather than ‘knowledgeable ones’.

Similarities between Mandaean and Qumranian baptism rituals have been documented.⁸ In particular, the water must be ‘living,’ moving water connected to natural sources and not static. The literature of both sects includes the concept that angelic warriors fight on the side of “light” against “darkness.” They also reveal an especially high regard for Noah, found nowhere else in ancient literature. This makes sense, as the water of the flood judgment, like John’s baptism, was a purifying agent.

Visiting missionaries who first encountered the Mandaeans described them as a Christian sect who had a special veneration for John the Baptist. Following the publication of Mandaean sacred books in the early twentieth century, that opinion was no longer tenable. The texts describe a complex mix of classic Gnostic precepts. The most important works are the *Ginza*, a collection of prayers, theology, and history; the *Haran Gawaita*, a history of the Mandaeans; and the *Book of John*, a history of John the Baptist traditions and a selection of his prayers. Written in an eastern Aramaic dialect, the manuscripts include a record of the names of the mostly women scribes who had copied them previously. An uninterrupted chain of copyists has been identified going back as early as the late second, to early-third-century C.E.⁹



Mandaean Baptism

Mandaeans claim that they were persecuted in Judea, and left there shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., which they believe was divine retribution for their oppression. Strangely enough, although they consider themselves to be direct descendants of the original followers of John the Baptist, Mandaeans insist that their ancestry is not Jewish. They neither use circumcision nor keep Saturday as their Sabbath Day. Mandaean writings are implacably anti-Jewish, which means that if they emigrated from Palestine shortly before the Roman invasion, they must have been part of the Samaritan or Gentile community that was attacked by the Jews in the uprising of 66 C.E.

Often described with abstract myths and symbols, the Mandaean view of John the Baptist is complex. The *Book of John* explains that shortly after John's birth, the Jews tried to kill him, so he was taken away by Anosh,¹⁰ a celestial savior spirit identical with Enoch, much loved at Qumran. John is depicted as a Gnostic pre-existent savior figure, who descends from the light world to rescue souls trapped below in the world of darkness. After death, he guides the soul of the Mandaean initiate upward through different levels of the light world.

There is no confusion about the Mandaean concept of Jesus. He was the devil incarnate. He betrayed John, stole his secret teachings, and perverted their meaning to deceive the Jews and spread evil throughout the world. The following verses are typical:

While John lives in Jerusalem, gaining sway over Jordan and baptizing, Jesus Christ shall come to him, shall humble himself, shall receive John's baptism and shall become wise with John's wisdom. But then shall he corrupt John's sayings, pervert the Baptism of Jordan, distort the words of truth and preach fraud and malice throughout the world.¹¹

For nine months devil-Christ enters the womb of his mother, the virgin, and conceals himself there...when he grows up he enters the house of prayer of the Jewish people and takes possession of all their wisdom. He perverts the Torah and alters its doctrines and all its works.¹²

O deceived ones, you who have been deceived!... Do you not know, O you deceived, that you have been deceived? I (Jesus) am a good for nothing messiah, flayed for my torment, wise for evil...leads men astray and throws them down into the powerful clouds of darkness.¹³

The hereditary Mandaean priesthood is known as the “Nasoreans.” Mandaeans insist that Jesus was originally a Nasorean of high standing, forced out of the group because he violated a sacred trust. The gospel notion that Jesus was a “Nazarene” -- after an obscure village named Nazareth -- is best understood as a Christian attempt to explain away the title by which he was known -- ‘Nasorean.’ The phonetic root of ‘Nazarene’ and ‘Nasorean’ is the Hebrew word *nazar*, meaning to separate from others for self purification. The word ‘Nazarite’ is used in the Old Testament to describe those who make religious vows of abstinence. Samson was the most famous Nazarite in the Old Testament. Paul also took religious vows, as did Jesus.

“Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

Mk 14:25, Mt 26:29, Lk 22:18

Jews who made these oaths did not shave or cut their hair during the time period of the vow, which explains why Jesus was always depicted with long hair and a beard. It would be impossible for the title ‘Nazarene’ to originate from a village named Nazareth for two reasons. First, there is no evidence from census records, historical maps, or archeological excavations that Nazareth existed at the time of Jesus. Second, a small Galilean town was a meaningless point of reference for people who lived in Jerusalem or Judea, and would only be recognized by those who lived in its immediate vicinity. Opponents of Jesus who wished to disparage his native land called him a ‘Galilean;’ those who wished to belittle his message called him a ‘Nazarene.’ ‘Nazareth’ was a suitable word to denote a community of committed religious Jews, separated from mainstream society; it was not necessarily a specific point on the map. The village of Nazareth was established by Christians long after Jesus’ death.



Plate 27. Domenico Ghirlandaio, *John the Baptist Preaching*, 1486, Florence, Italy

Jesus, top left, watches and listens to John the Baptist. The crowd is oblivious to Jesus, and only John has a halo. A dove, symbol of spiritual authority, descends toward John, and not Jesus, as in the gospel accounts.

Long and involved poetic tractates dedicated to John the Baptist as the 'Good Shepherd' or the 'Good Fisher' are a feature of Mandaean literature. These themes are much more developed than in the New Testament, where they refer to Jesus. As John was the first to have a dedicated following, these titles would have originally belonged to him.

In the Good Shepherd poetry, John is called by God to "be a loving shepherd for me and watch me a thousand out of ten thousand." John accepted, but asked how he would retrieve those who were lost and left behind. God replied,

If one falls into the mud and stays there stuck, then let him go his way and fall a prey to the mud. Let him go his way and fall a prey to the mud, in that he bows himself down to Messiah.¹⁴

John should leave them alone. As victims of 'Messiah' (Jesus), they were a lost cause. However, John takes care of his own followers,

A Shepherd am I who loves his sheep; sheep and lambs I watch over. Round my neck I carry the sheep; and the sheep from the hamlet stray not...I bring them unto the good fold; and they feed by my side.¹⁵

Although Renaissance artists commonly depicted John holding a shepherd's staff, only Jesus was described as a 'shepherd' in the New Testament.

I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me... And I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.
John 10:4-16

In the Good Fisher discourses, John rejects the approaches of the evil fishers and finally overwhelms them. The 'evil fishers' are the Christians, and John wants nothing to do with them. They belong to Jesus, "the head of all of you."

The Fisher clad him with vestures of glory, and an axe hung from his shoulder....when the fishers caught sight of the Fisher, they came and gathered around him... "be our great partner and take a share as we do... Grant us a share and we will give thee a share in what we possess."...When the Fisher heard this, he stamped on the bows of the ship..."Off from me, ye foul smelling fishers, ye fishers who mix poison. Begone, begone, catch fish who eat your own filth. The perfect ones' partner cannot be your partner. The good cannot belong to the wicked, nor the bad to the good. Your ship cannot be tied up with mine, nor your ring be laid on my ring. There, is the head of all of you; count yourselves unto *his* realm."¹⁶

John issues a warning to be wary of false baptizers on the river Jordan,

'Tis the voice of the Pure Fisher who calls and instructs the fish of the sea in the shallows. He speaks to them, "Raise yourselves up, on the surface of the water

stand straight; then your force be double as great. Guard yourselves from the fishers who catch the fish and beat on the Jordan.”¹⁷

By contrast, when John is asked about rival Christian baptizers in the fourth Gospel, he replied with a suspiciously longwinded theological harangue in praise of Jesus that ends with the dubious famous phrase “he must increase and I must decrease.” The Mandaean writings make curious references to ‘sandals.’

I will bring thee then sandals of glory with them canst thou tread down the thorns and the thistles. Earth and heaven decay, but the sandals of glory do not. Sun and moon decay, but the sandals of glory decay not. The stars and heaven’s zodiacal circle decay, but the sandals of glory decay not. The four winds of the world decay, but the sandals of glory decay not. Fruit and grapes and trees decay, but the sandals of glory do not. All that is made and engendered decays, but the sandals of glory do not.¹⁸

The “sandals of glory” belong to John as the true savior. Christian writers stole the sandal metaphor, and all the gospels emphasize John’s unworthiness to even “tie the thong of Jesus’ sandals.”¹⁹ The original context was switched so that Jesus, and not John, was the rightful wearer of the ‘sandals of glory.’

Mandaean literature contains a description of the afterworld. Once there, Christian souls find themselves in a low realm and realize they were deceived by Jesus. When they notice Jesus bowing four times to ‘Manda d-Hiia,’ (Aramaic for ‘Gnosis of Life’), a title for John the Baptist, they ask him,

Did you not say ‘I am the God of Gods, the Lord of Lords, I am king of all the worlds, I am the chief of all works’. And now who is this man, who passed before you, and you have bowed down to him four times with the deepest respect. Who is this man?²⁰

Dissatisfied with Jesus’ answer, the Christians wish to receive John’s baptism.

We wish to sell all our goods, go up to the Jordan, and have ourselves baptized in the name of the man who passed beyond you.²¹

GNOSTIC RELIGIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

What separates the Mandaeans from other minority religions in the region is that its ruling priesthood has allowed outsiders access to the sacred texts, parts of which have been published in the West. Other Gnostic-minded groups in the Middle East, more powerful and influential than the Mandaeans, refuse to divulge their innermost teachings. In certain cases, this prohibition has been enforced with the death penalty.

The Druze faith is one such mysterious religion. Non Druze are forbidden to read Druze texts, and the teachings remain unpublished. Only a basic outline of Druze theology is in the public domain. Today there exist an estimated 800,000 Druze, located principally in Lebanon, Syria, and Israel. Historians date the origin of their religion to approximately 1,000 years ago, but the Druze, like the Mandaeans, claim they existed before Moses.

The Druze community is split between the ‘initiated,’ cognizant of the esoteric teachings, and the ‘uninitiated,’ who are ignorant of them, a common feature of all Gnostic sects.

From the little that is known of their philosophy, Druze share the same concept of the spirit world as the Mandeans. They are also known to venerate El Khidr, known mostly as a figure worshipped by Sufis (quasi-Gnostic Moslems), but who is widely honored in Turkey, North Africa, and throughout the Middle East. In many Islamic and Arabic traditions, El Khidr is another name for the prophet Elijah. As in Jewish tradition, Elijah/El Khidr is an eternal being who watches over mankind, bringing help and comfort to the righteous in times of need. Belief in reincarnation and the transmigration of the soul is a Druze tenet, and Druze believe that El Khidr and John the Baptist are one and the same.

Tourists in Israel can take guided tours around traditional Druze villages, but although there are no temples or churches, visitors will be able to see Druze holy sites as well as historical artifacts dating from the time of the Crusades. Near a large Druze town, mentioned in Crusader documents as the fortress of “Busnen,” is the tomb of Nabi Zakarya. Christian and Jewish tour guides, knowing almost nothing about the Druze religion, mistakenly explain that this tomb was built for the minor Jewish prophet Zechariah, and no tourist is in a position to correct them. Druze themselves do not make this claim. In all likelihood, the hallowed tomb belongs to Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist/El Khidr. But if the Druze understand that Zacharias was the father of Jesus, they are not saying. Their view of Jesus is murky. Historically, their existence was always threatened by Moslems and Christians, and they could not risk offending them. Past experience has taught them that the art of survival means keeping their secrets.

Druze are not the only Gnostic faith in the Middle East with Baptist connections. The powerful Alawi sect of Syria, the controlling faction in both the government and military, and the Alevi minority of Turkey are both secretive societies with hereditary priesthoods dedicated to preserving their undisclosed teachings. The Alawi originate from the mountainous region of Syria, recognized by Pliny the Elder as home of the ‘Nazarenes.’ Even today, they are known to outsiders as “Nosaryii,” after the name of their priesthood. El Khidr is highly regarded in the customs of Alawi and Alevi, and many public festivals and ceremonies are held in his honor.

The Kurdish Yazidi religion is centered on angels, spirits, and the different levels of heaven. Throughout Kurdistan, special shrines dedicated to El Khidr, are built near water springs. ‘El Khidr’ translates from the Arabic as ‘the Green man,’ which symbolizes his life-giving properties, and hence the association with water. Baptism by El Khidr/John the Baptist has the power to give initiates eternal life in the high realms of the spirit world.

The ‘Green Man’ is found in many different cultures. In medieval European art, he was usually depicted as a stone or wood-carved head made from leaves and vines. A mysterious figure, no scholarly consensus exists on its meaning. Although seemingly pagan, the Green Man frequently appears in churches, chapels, abbeys, and cathedrals. The author of *A Little Book of The Green Man* even found carvings of the Green Man in Knights Templar churches in Jerusalem built in the twelfth century.²²

Perhaps Europe’s most fascinating medieval chapel is at Rosslyn, Scotland. Built in the middle of the fifteenth century, half way between the dissolution of the Knights Templar and the official institution of the Freemasons, Rosslyn chapel’s architecture and enigmatic carvings are cited by numerous conspiracy theorists as evidence for an alternative explanation of history. In many different guises and changing facial expressions, there are over one hundred carvings of the Green Man at Rosslyn chapel.

ISLAM

Islam has towered over the Middle East for almost fourteen hundred years and is the biggest single influence in the region. For various reasons, Islamic scholars have not yet developed a critical approach to the Koran, and there is no serious investigative quest to discover the 'historical Mohammed.' It is simply accepted that the Koran was dictated to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel and it is therefore the word of God. Yet Islam is far from monolithic. Its two main Sunni and Shiite branches are themselves divided by various splinter groups. So defining Islam is not a simple matter.

A common observation in the West is that since Judaism, Christianity, and Islam originate from the same Hebrew source, they should not be inimical to each other. However, the roots of division are buried so deep within the fraternal archetypes that attitudes and behavioral patterns are almost genetically pre-conditioned.

In contrast to the favored second-son principle within Judeo-Christianity, Islam champions the cause of the first-born. Ishmael, Abraham's first son, is revered as the common ancestor of the Arabs and, in direct contradiction to the Genesis story, Moslems believe that Ishmael, not Isaac, was taken up the mountain by Abraham and offered as a sacrifice.

By claiming that Mohammed received his angelic vision in "a cave," the Koran repeated the story of Elijah, the prototype of John the Baptist. While Elijah fasted inside a cave, he received instructions from an "angel of the Lord." Compilers of the Koran used the angel Gabriel because he had famously announced the birth of John the Baptist, and Islam was to restore the lost birthright of the older brother. Islam's early history was an attempt to reclaim this legacy by force of arms. The strong faith of Moslems came from the absolute conviction that they were taking back -- on behalf of God and their ancestors -- what was rightfully theirs.

Islam began in the seventh century but its roots can be traced back to the Qumran sect. Much of Islamic law and ritual is centered on practices advocated by John the Baptist, and rejected by Jesus. Qumranian traditions were adopted by various baptizing groups that continued to exist in and around the Dead Sea area during the early centuries of the Christian era. In general, these groups maintained strict obedience to laws on fasting, animal sacrifice, circumcision, dietary restriction, daily ablutions, and the wearing of white robes. Epiphanius, Eusebius (c. 320 C.E.), Hegesippus (c. 150 C.E.), and Hippolytus gave them a series of different names: Elchaisites, Sampsaeans, Naasenes, and so on. They were not regarded as Christian sects, Jews, or even pagans, but as something altogether separate.

In the view of modern non-Islamic scholarship much of the Middle East was occupied by unorthodox Christian groups who practiced a primitive form of Christianity centered on non-canonical texts. In a transparent attempt to claim Islam as a corruption of Christianity, the Encyclopedia Britannica states that "it can hardly be wrong to conclude that these nameless witnesses of the Gospel, unmentioned in church history, scattered the seed from which sprung the germ of Islam."²³ This opinion wildly exaggerates the influence of Christian heretics, and woefully neglects the Baptists, who *are* mentioned in church history.

Initially, when Arab armies invaded Palestine and the surrounding areas, they did not

destroy Christian churches. Churches built to honor John the Baptist were co-opted. In Damascus, a large Byzantine church dedicated to John the Baptist was initially shared with the Christians. But under the Umayyad caliph Al-Walid I, the church was demolished in 720 C.E., and a mosque built in its place. The location was considered appropriate for Moslems only, and by way of compensation, Christians were given land in the city to build four churches. The Grand Mosque of Damascus, built on the site of the old church, was constructed based on the House of the Prophet Mohammed in Medina, and was the largest and most impressive mosque in the world at the time. During excavations, a rumor started that the head of John the Baptist had been found so a special shrine was constructed to hold it. The shrine still exists and attracts pilgrims from all over the world. In 2001, Pope John Paul visited to pay his respects.

The Baptists were mentioned in the Koran as “Sabians,” an Arabized word meaning “Baptist” that also has a connotation to light. According to Islamic historians, Mohammed himself was originally a Sabian, not a Christian, and many of Islam’s externals were derived from Sabian practices. The key to understanding Islam lies with these mysterious “Sabians.”

SABIANS

Moslems often assume that the Sabians of the Koran were inhabitants of ‘Saba,’ an ancient kingdom of southern Arabia mentioned in the Old Testament, from whence came the Queen of Sheba. However, the kingdom of Saba had ceased to exist several centuries before the time of Mohammed. The Koran identifies Sabians as “people of the book,” which means they had religious scriptures centered on the holy prophets of Israel. They are mentioned three times:

Those who believe, and the Jews, and the Christians, and the **Sabians**, whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does good, they shall have their reward from their Lord, and there is no fear for them, nor shall they grieve

Those who believe and the Jews and the **Sabians** and the Christians -- whoever believes in God and the last day and does good they shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve.

Those who believe and those who are the Jews and the **Sabians** and the Christians and the Magians and those who set up gods (with God) -- God will decide between them on the day of resurrection for God is a Witness over all things.

Modern Islamic scholars explain that “sabi” was a word meaning “one who has changed his religion.” Therefore, once Mohammed renounced his former faith, he was known as a ‘sabi.’ But Muslim writers who lived during the early Islamic period used ‘Sabian’ and ‘sabi’ to specifically link Mohammed and his teaching with the beliefs and practices of the Sabian religion:

The polytheists used to say of the prophet and his companions ‘these are the Sabians’ comparing them to them, because the Sabians who live Jaziart al Mawsil (Iraq) would say ‘there is no God but God’.
Abd al-Rahman ‘ibn ‘Zayd (d. 798 C.E.)

I saw the prophet when I was a pagan. He was saying to the people, ‘if you want to save yourselves, accept that there is no God but Allah.’ At this moment I

noticed a man behind him saying 'he is a sabi.'
Rabi'ah 'ibn 'Ubbad (who lived at the same time as Mohammed)

He (Mohammed) is a Sabian.
Ibn Juray (who lived in the 8th century)

Islamic writers provided only meager descriptions of Sabian teaching:

The Sabians believed in prophets and prayed five times daily.
Ziyad 'ibn 'Abihi (d. 672 C.E.)

The Sabian religion is between Judaism and Magianism.
Ibn Abi Nujayh (d. 749 C.E.)

The Sabian religion resembled the Magians and worshipped angels.
Hasan al-Basri (d. 728 C.E.)

The Sabians believe they belong to the prophet Noah, they read zabur, and their religion looks like Christianity.
Khalil 'ibn Ahmad (d. 786-787 C.E.)

In some cases the Sabians were said to inhabit the area of modern Iraq, and the general description fits with that of the Mandaeans, who are known today as 'Subi' by their Moslem neighbors. Modern Mandaeans claim that they are the Sabians mentioned in the Koran to avoid persecution. But many Moslems remain unconvinced, largely because Mandaeans reject Abraham, Moses, and the prophets after him, and their writings include attacks on Mohammed. They also disallow circumcision which is absolute to Islam. Islamic scholars noted that there were two distinct groups of 'Sabians,' who were at odds with each other:

The Sabians of Harran and the Kimariyyun. They are different Sabians and the latter opposes the religion of the Harrians.
Abu Bakr Mohammed 'ibn Zakariyya al-Radi (d. 923 C.E.)

The 'Kimariyyun' was another name for Iraqi-based Sabians, or Mandaeans, who were a breakaway faction of the Harranians, named after the ancient city of Haran, located in the area of southern Turkey near the border with Syria. During the time of Mohammed, Haran was a strategic center on the ancient caravan routes whose population had resisted Christianization, but was no longer a great civilization. Skeptical historians believe that the Sabians of Harran only adopted the name "Sabian" to claim the same rights that Moslems had given Jews and Christians.

A written tradition, considered factual by modern Mandaeans, states that they came via Haran to their present location in Iraq. The abrupt opening lines of the Haran Gauaita, a Mandaean sacred text, refer to their exile:

And Haran Gauaita welcomed him and that city in which there were Nasurii, since there was no road for the king of the Jews...And 60,000 Nasurii abandoned the sign of the Seven and entered into Tura-d-Midai, the place where no tribe had power over us.

Haran was a Christian-free zone, "since there was no road for the king of the Jews." The

ancient city of Haran was a center of the old Mesopotamian religion of the seven planetary deities. Haran had seven famous temples built on seven different levels, which explains the reference “they abandoned the sign of the Seven.” The Mandaeans left Haran before the Islamic conquest. Harranians, who remained behind, made peace with the Moslem invaders, and were considered as traitors by the Mandaeans.

According to Islamic tradition, Mohammed was illiterate, so he was probably unschooled in the complexities of Mandaean or Harranian theology and familiar only with their rituals, which included praying five times daily and a thirty-day fast reminiscent of the Moslem Ramadan fast. He may also have been influenced by the negative portrayal of Jesus.

The Koran does not give an account of Jesus’ life, but suggests, and many Moslems believe, that the crucifixion was a staged event. Jesus was replaced on the cross with an imposter, and viewed events from a secret hiding place, “they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown to them.” This same opinion was espoused earlier by Mandaeans²⁴, and can also be found in *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*, one of the Dosithean scrolls found at Nag Hammadi:

I did not succumb to them as they had planned. But I was not afflicted at all....I did not die in reality, but in appearance, lest I be put to shame by them...It was another, their father, who drank the gall and vinegar; it was not I. They struck me with the reed it was another, Simon, who bore the cross on his shoulder...It was another upon whom they placed the crown of thorns...And I was laughing at their ignorance.²⁵

Arab historians described the Sabians of Harran as monotheists who practiced baptism as inspired by John the Baptist and followed a strict moral code. They held daily prayers and ablutions, and had the ‘call to prayer’ tradition that Islam adopted. Unlike the Mandaeans, circumcision was compulsory. Harranians believed they were descendants of Abraham, himself a Sabian, and had a systemized belief in angels and heavenly bodies that followed Gnostic traditions.

Many non-Islamic historians think that the Moslem fasting ritual of Ramadan came originally from the Harranian/Sabian tradition. The ancient religion of Haran, which spread around the region and into Arabia, centered on the worship of Sin, the moon god. Adherents held a special thirty-day fast in honor of Sin. They concluded this fasting period by offering animal sacrifices and by giving alms to the poor, as is the custom in Islam.

The Islamic Calendar is based on lunar reckoning. The months begin with the appearance of the new moon, and the position of the moon determines the dating of festivals. During Ramadan, Muslims observe the daily fast from the first appearance of light on the eastern horizon to sunset. The original reason for the fast was to mourn the disappearance of the moon. Eating and celebration began again with the moon’s daily re-appearance. Ramadan ends at sunset when the moon’s crescent becomes visible. The crescent moon was the symbol of Sin, the moon god, and the crescent moon features on ancient coins and in archeological sites throughout the region. Islam assumed the same symbolism as its own motif.

A strong connection between the Sabians of Harran and the sect at Qumran has been noted recently.²⁶ Twelve hundred or so graves discovered at the Qumran site, are all

aligned on a North-South axis. Jewish graves, however, always faced Jerusalem. Similar graves have also been found at other locations around the Dead Sea and in Jordan, and these cannot be Moslem graves as they would be facing Mecca. The Arab historian al-Buruni, writing around the mid-ninth-century, wrote that the Sabian/Harranians prayed toward the North, which they considered was the location of "the middle of the dome of Heaven and its highest place." This not only explains the arrangement of the graves, but suggests that a northern migration of John the Baptist's followers was an historical fact.

Mohammed's new religion was borne out of his Sabian convictions. The goal of Islam was to unite the different monotheistic creeds, so he rejected complex Gnostic elements attached to Sabian theology, and the Koran did not condemn other Abrahamic faiths. Nevertheless, Islam represents a monumental effort to impose onto the world the philosophy and religion of John the Baptist. In the Arabic language, John the Baptist is known as 'as-Sabi,' which means the 'Baptizer' or 'Immerser.' John the Baptist was indirectly the founder of the Sabians, and the spiritual father of Mohammed.

Fallout from the division between Jesus and John the Baptist developed into the history of conflict between Christians and Moslems. The initial victories of Islam, which included the capture of territories in Italy, France, and Spain, elicited a military response from European powers. The medieval crusades were supposedly instigated to take back possession of the Holy Land and liberate the Christians from Islamic repression. One group of crusaders, officially known as The Poor Knights of Christ of the Temple of Solomon -- the Knights Templar -- was at the center of events during this period. But it is not certain why they were there, what they were doing, or whose side they were on.

THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

Genuine facts on the origins of the Knights Templar are scarce. They rose almost without trace. Officially, the order was founded by French noblemen sometime after the first crusade early in the twelfth century, ostensibly with the honorable purpose of safeguarding passage to travelers en route to the Holy Land. This was clearly a ruse, because within a generation the Knights were established as *the* elite crusader fighting force, and had earned a reputation in battle as almost unbeatable opponents. The Templars were granted special privileges by the Pope, and were allowed such an unprecedented degree of independence that within a relatively short space of time they controlled the destiny of nations. Yet their fall from grace was even more sudden and mysterious than their rise had been.

In 1291, the last European stronghold in the Holy Land collapsed, and the demoralized Templar fleet escaped to Cyprus. The major power brokers had already lost their enthusiasm for the Holy Land, and many held the Templars responsible for the failure of past crusades. It was only a matter of time before their enemies struck. Philip IV, the bankrupt king of France, conspired together with the Pope, by then a virtual vassal of the French king, to destroy the Knights Templar and confiscate their wealth and property. Denounced as heretics and blasphemers, they were thrown in jail, tortured by the Inquisition, and their leadership burnt at the stake.

Abolition of the Templars applied throughout Christendom, but some researchers claim that a substantial number escaped persecution and continued to thrive in Scotland and elsewhere as an underground political and religious movement. Later, Templar ideals and aspirations resurfaced in Freemasonry and in mystical sects such as the alchemists and Rosicrucians. Many suspect that influential and powerful secret societies with Templar

origins have manipulated global geo-politics from behind the scenes for centuries. These ideas irk traditional historians who regard the Knights Templar as nothing more than a group of sophisticated warrior-monks.

During the heresy trials, bizarre and conflicting information was presented by prosecution witnesses and defendants. But increasingly, as new research comes to light, it appears that a strange and heretical ideology underpinned both the Templar's involvement in the crusades and their immensely wealthy and influential international power base. The Knights Templar organization was structured not to bolster the establishment, but to undermine it. They sought not to promote Roman Catholicism, but to overthrow it. Lynchpin of the Templar revolution was messianic faith, not in Jesus Christ, but John Christ.

At the height of their power, the Templar network consisted of some 870 castles, churches, and convents, and vast tracts of land spread throughout Europe, Syria, and Palestine. They were outside the jurisdiction of all kings, and were answerable only to the Pope. They were not subject to any local ecclesiastical authority, and were given the right to construct their own churches and maintain their own priesthood. Exempted from all tithes, they could still collect tithes for themselves, and keep any booty or spoils of war. In 1144, even indulgences were granted to benefactors of the Templars. Not only were they an autonomous church within a church, the Knights Templar were the most powerful multi-national corporation the world had ever seen.

Historians grossly underestimate the extent of Templar influence on the affairs of medieval Europe. The Plantagenet Kings of England (1154-1399), adopted John the Baptist as their patron saint [Plate 29], and maintained close links with the Knights Templar. The ensign of St. George, a red cross on a white background that was selected by Plantagenets as the national flag and symbol of England, was a Knights Templar standard. The Plantagenet dynasty was descended from French nobility who ruled the county of Anjou. The first Plantagenet or Angevin king, Henry II, ruled as King of England (1154-1189), Count of Anjou, Duke of Normandy, Duke of Aquitaine, Duke of Gascony, Count of Nantes, Lord of Ireland and, at various times, controlled parts of Wales, Scotland and western France. Significantly, Plantagenets also ruled as Kings of a Templar-controlled Jerusalem from 1131-1205.

As part of Henry II's attempt to increase independence from Rome, he tried to force the Church to accept the jurisdiction of the crown courts. Inevitably, this led to conflict with the Vatican and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas a Becket. The Church refused to concede, and as an uneasy standoff prevailed, the king took counsel from the Knights Templar. The subsequent murder of Becket in 1170 -- an event apparently Henry later regretted -- shocked the medieval world. It was inconceivable that Christian knights would murder the Archbishop of Canterbury (second in rank only to the Pope), inside a Cathedral and in front of witnesses. But the architects were unlikely to have been Christians, in the normally accepted sense of the word. Most probably they were Templar Knights, and they had no reason to fear the consequences of their actions in civil society. They were the untouchables.

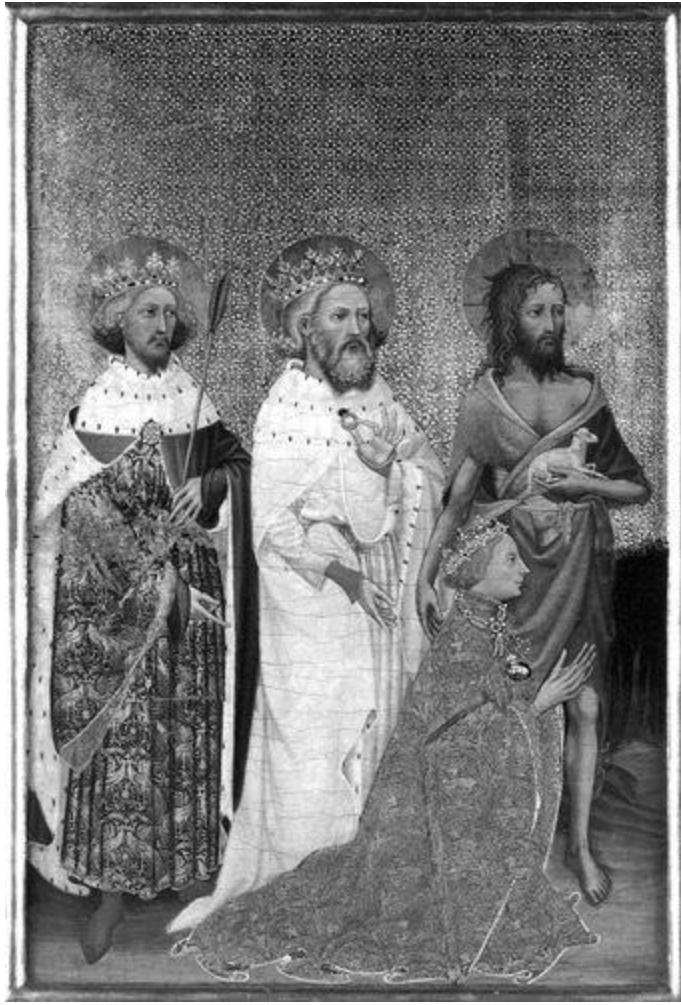


Plate 29. The Wilton Diptych, Anonymous, c 1395, National Gallery, London.

John the Baptist puts his arm on the shoulder of the Plantagenet King Richard II of England. Ancestral kings stand behind. The origin and of “Plantagenet” has long baffled historians. But the root is undeniably an amalgam of “plant” and “gene.”

This association derives from the ancient tradition of using agricultural references to denote human bloodline and genealogy.

To whose ancestral lineage, then, did the “Plantagenets” claim to belong? John the Baptist?

The Templars were the most powerful faction behind the forcing of King John to sign the Magna Carta in 1215. John was staying at Templar headquarters when the Barons first made their demands, and Templars actually positioned themselves as supporters of the king, although many Barons were also Templars. The first section of the Charter was designed to advance the Templar agenda to free the English Church from Papal control. Naturally, the Pope denounced the Magna Carta shortly after it had been signed, feigning concern that it took away the authority of the king.

The twelfth and thirteenth century heyday of the Knights Templar coincided with the construction of numerous churches, abbeys and hospitals dedicated to John the Baptist, many of which still stand today. Popular mystical cults emerged that emphasized salvation through baptism and venerated saints of dubious historicity such as St Catherine and St Margaret. Midway through the thirteenth century, the Archbishop of Canterbury

declared that all baptismal fonts were to be kept under lock and key when not in use by the priesthood. This was to protect them from “interference by sorcery.”

As an officially established Order of the Church, receiving an annual papal tribute, the Knights Templar had a special obligation to convert non-believers wherever and whenever possible. Yet from what is known of their time in the Holy Land, the Templars had no interest whatsoever in evangelizing or recruiting on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church. The Knights Templar was a Trojan-horse movement.

Several incidents raised suspicion of their motives, and with the passing of time, contemporaries began to wonder exactly where Templar sympathies lay. In 1154, there was a failed coup in Cairo which resulted in the murder of the caliph, the implacable enemy of the Europeans. The perpetrator, who was the vizier to the caliph, and his son escaped with a large quantity of treasure. Soon afterward they were captured by Templars, who confiscated the wealth and killed the father. The son confessed his desire to convert to Christianity, but the Templars sent him back to Egypt, where he was put to death.

Another notorious episode was even more damning. When the legendary Muslim leader Saladin emerged with his dream of a unified Islamic world, the heretical Islamic sect known as the Assassins was seriously threatened. By 1173, the Assassins had been paying a tribute of two thousand gold pieces to the Templars for two decades by way of protection money, and they sent an ambassador to Jerusalem to seek an alliance against Saladin. Almaric I, the crusader King of Jerusalem, agreed and promised the Templars that he would recompense them financially for the loss of revenues. But during his return home, the Assassin ambassador was killed by Templars.

William of Tyre, a contemporary historian, wrote that the Assassins had expressed their readiness to convert to Christianity in order to seal the alliance with the crusaders. Evidently, this was not an attractive proposition for the Templars, and the ambassador’s murder prevented it from happening.

The Inquisitors accused the Templars of having Moslem sympathies. There may be some validity to this charge, in so far as certain Templars used Islamic symbols on their seals, which is difficult to imagine in a Christian Order, particularly during the time of the crusades. Seals were an extremely important aspect of medieval life, because only a tiny minority of the population was literate. Seals were precursors of the signature, and as such were indispensable in establishing authenticity and credibility in medieval society. Official stamps today used on government documents follow this tradition. Educated outsiders, who expected to see overtly Christian symbolism on a Templar seal, were no doubt surprised to see the crescent moon. Perhaps some seals were intended only for ‘in house’ communication, but Templar symbols revealed a kinship with an esoteric heritage that predated Islam.



Templar Seals

Popular opinion that the Knights Templar were the sworn enemies of Islam is incorrect. They chose their battles carefully and only fought against certain branches of Islam. Throughout most of the period when the Templars were an active fighting force, the Middle East was in a state of virtual civil war between the rulers of Cairo and Damascus, and the smaller sultanates or tribes variously allied with either side. Moslem powers often proposed military alliances with the Europeans, which time and again caused friction because the Templars invariably supported the Damascenes whatever the circumstances merited.

In 1148, the crusaders decided to attack Damascus and a force of 50,000 men laid siege to the city. Yet within five days, the army had disintegrated and the siege collapsed. In the inquest that followed, the Templars were accused of accepting bribes from the Damascenes to arrange the mission's failure.

In 1239, after Frederick II, the Holy Roman Emperor, had returned to Europe following the sixth crusade, he publicly blamed the Templars for many crusader defeats because they would not enter into alliances with Egyptians. He further accused them of having a treasonable relationship with Damascus Moslems, and of allowing Moslems to perform religious rites in Templar churches.

A similar conflict developed between the Templars and King Louis IX of France. In 1252, the two warring Moslem factions had sent delegations to the king to canvas his support. The Templars showed Louis a signed treaty that they had already negotiated

with the Damascenes, which required his signature. But the king had intended to ally with Cairo and he reacted furiously to this news. The Templars were forced to assemble barefoot and the Grand Master made to publicly confess his error and beg for forgiveness.

Evidently, the Templars shared an ideological affinity with the Damascenes. And if Damascus Moslems were allowed to perform rituals in Templar churches, then *quid pro quo*, Templars were permitted similar access to Moslem holy sites. At this time, Damascus was a melting pot of cultures, and the Sunni branch of Islam was only one of many competing faiths. The Alawi or Nosyrai, and the Druze were also strong there, and as mentioned previously, the focal point for the worldwide veneration of John the Baptist was located in Damascus.

The Assassins, with whom the Templars initially had an adversarial relationship, are suspected of having had a strong influence on Templar mysticism during the later years of their involvement in the Holy Land. Inhabiting the mountainous region of Syria known for its 'Nazarene' origins, they rejected orthodox Islam. Derivation of the "Assassin" name is more likely from the Arabic "assas," meaning 'guardian,' and not from 'hashish' as has often been suggested. The Assassins were keepers of secrets.

During the heresy trials, some Knights made reference to a sacred red cord worn around the neck that was received after a certain initiation ceremony. A similar tradition belonged to the Order of the Peacock Angel, a Kurdish Yazidi secret society, whose members wore a red and black intertwined thread. This practice was probably linked to ancient beliefs regarding the messianic bloodline.²⁷ It was understood that a spiritual umbilical cord connected to the head was severed at the moment of death. The red cord was symbolic of this umbilical cord and linked initiates to the holy blood.

During torture and interrogation, many Knights revealed that they worshipped a figure known as 'Baphomet,' which individual Templars described as a bearded human head, two heads, or a horned head of some kind. Much speculation has centered on the identity of Baphomet, but rather than list all the possibilities, the most obvious explanation is likely to be nearest to the truth. *Baphe* is Greek for to baptize in water, and *metis* is the Greek for wisdom. Accordingly, Baphomet was either the literal head of John the Baptist or something representative thereof. Among the iconography inside Templar churches, there were usually depictions of John the Baptist's severed head on a platter. And in an era obsessed with the power of relics, the Templars were reputed to have had a saying that "he who controls the head of John the Baptist rules the world."

Once in the Holy Land, crusaders set about repairing old churches and rebuilding holy sites, as well as looking for treasure and valuables. In the town of Sebaste, ancient capital of Samaria, two ruined churches would have had particular significance to the Knights Templar: The Church of the Tomb of John the Baptist, and the Church of the Discovery of the Baptist's Head.

The tomb of John the Baptist in Samaria was first mentioned by Rufinus of Aquileia, who described a pagan assault on Christians that took place in 361-362 CE under Julian the Apostate. Rufinus claimed that pagans broke open the tomb, burnt the bones, and scattered the ashes. Later, a group of monks from Jerusalem succeeded in rescuing some relics.²⁸

Matthew recorded that Herod allowed John's disciples to take his body, so conceivably it

was taken to Samaria at some stage. Samaria was a stronghold of the Baptists during the first century, and few Jewish tombs were located there. Later, a church was built over the location of the tomb. The Monophysite John of Beth Rufina, described the tomb's position within the church: "The place was a particular chapel of the temple, protected by a grating because it had two reliquaries covered with gold and silver, before which two lamps burn constantly, one of St. John and the other of St. Elisha; there is also a rug-covered throne on which no one sits." Elisha was the apprentice of Elijah the prophet, thus he was similarly apprenticed to John the Baptist. The throne at the tomb of John was not a Christian creation, but represented John's role and status amongst his followers.

Of the many rumors that circulated about the location of the severed head, one emerged in Sebaste that claimed John the Baptist was imprisoned there and his head was found at the prison site. A church was built over the site of the discovery. Both these churches in Sebaste were shells by the time of the crusades, and were rebuilt by visiting crusaders. After the Europeans left the Holy Land, Moslems took over the Church of the Tomb and transformed the area into a mosque, which was standard Islamic practice with religious sites attached to John the Baptist.

In 1145, the Patriarch of Jerusalem, William I, announced that the relics of John the Baptist had been recovered, and he granted an indulgence of forty days to whoever would contribute to the rebuilding of the church of the Discovery of the Head of the Baptist.²⁹ A strong possibility exists that Templars restored these two churches, after first removing certain valued items, including perhaps what was believed to be the head of John the Baptist. A Russian abbot, who visited Sebaste in the middle of the twelfth century, remarked that he saw "a beautiful church erected on the site (of the tomb of the Baptist), dedicated to the Precursor, with a most wealthy Frankish friary." The founders of the Templar Order were all French or Frankish noblemen. Who else could have been this "wealthy Frankish friary"? The Moslem writer Usamah, who died in 1188, also visited Sebaste and witnessed a certain ceremony.

I visited the tomb of John, son of Zacharias -- peace be onto them both! -- in the village of Sebastia in the district of Nablus. The prayer over, I walked out into an enclosed courtyard in front of the place of the tomb. There was a door ajar; I opened it and entered a church where I saw about ten elderly men with uncovered heads and hair as white as carded cotton. They stood looking to the east, and had on their chests sticks ending with transverse bars, twisted like the front part of a saddle. On these sticks they swear... Such a view as I saw would soften any heart, but at the same time it displeased and saddened me, not having ever seen among Moslems anyone with such devout zeal.³⁰

The description reads as though the writer had witnessed a Templar ritual on what would have been hallowed ground for them. It may even have been the Knights of St. John, or Hospitallers. This was an order with close connections to the Templars, and there are grounds to believe they shared some of the same heretical views.³¹ The Hospitallers' cross was white on a black mantle, and that of the Templars was the same shape but red on a white background. The design is known as a cross pattée; meaning the arms of the cross broaden outward toward the ends. Initially, both Orders joined forces together on military campaigns, but later developed a rivalry and tended to keep to themselves.

The Templars were given the emblem of the red cross pattée by the Pope, but their original insignia, given by the Patriarch of Jerusalem, consisted of a cross made from one vertical and two evenly spaced horizontal bars, commonly known as the Cross of

Lorraine, because it was incorporated into the heraldic arms of the House of Lorraine during the fifteenth century by Rene d'Anjou. Celebrated as a royal patron of the Renaissance, Rene d'Anjou, among whose many titles was the King of Jerusalem, was a close friend of Leonardo Da Vinci.

In ancient Mesopotamia, this type of cross symbolized the staff of Dumuzi, the Assyrian shepherd king/god, and became an emblem of leadership throughout the region. As John the Baptist was known as the original Good Shepherd, the cross of Lorraine was used to show allegiance to him. During incarceration while awaiting trial, Templar Knights drew the cross of Lorraine on their cell walls.

Although no conclusive proof exists that she ever used it, Joan of Arc has always been associated with the cross of Lorraine. The transcript of her court trial does not specify details of the heresy she was charged with. The Church continues to keep that a closely guarded secret. Nevertheless, considering Rene d'Anjou was Joan's backer, and that his mother, Yolande de Bar, was the mother-in-law of the Dauphin and a strong advocate of Joan's cause, one might speculate with good reason that Joan of Arc had Johannite affiliations, unwittingly or otherwise. This would account for the fact that it took five hundred years for the Catholic Church to grant her sainthood.



Cross of Lorraine

Was the Vatican aware that important Orders participating in the crusades, not only had hidden agendas, but adopted teachings that opposed those of the Church? In certain Church circles, the Templars' true loyalties were probably well known. They simply could not be exposed until the time was right. Hence, the dénouement was postponed until the early fourteenth century, when the advantages of doing so outweighed the disadvantages. In the nineteenth century, the Vatican issued a statement claiming that it knew all along about the Templar's involvement with the Johannite heresy.

The Johannites ascribed to Saint John [the Baptist] the foundation of their Secret Church, and the Grand Pontiffs of the Sect assumed the title of *Christos*, *Anointed*, or *Consecrated*, and claimed to have succeeded one another from Saint John by an uninterrupted succession of pontifical powers. He who, at the period of the foundation of the Order of the Temple, claimed these imaginary prerogatives, was named Theoclet; he knew Hughes De Payens, he installed him into the Mysteries and hopes of his pretended church, he seduced him by the notions of Sovereign Priesthood and Supreme royalty, and finally designated him as his successor.³²

The Templars are now recognized for their advances in architecture, which enabled the construction of the amazing Gothic cathedrals such as Chartres in France, which they sponsored. They possessed a deep appreciation of geometrical principles far in advance of their time. Some writers have convincingly argued that the Templars had a sophisticated and accurate knowledge of the earth's measurements centuries before

conventional science.³³ Templar economic practices involved banks, checks, credit and interest-bearing accounts, and are widely acknowledged as precursors of the modern capitalist banking system. But, in their own time, the Knights Templar were not loved.

The wealth, and the political clout that came with it, made the Templars unpopular with ruling elites, but they were similarly disliked by the masses. When the purge against them began, there were no riots in the streets of Paris; there was no public outrage. The general population considered them to be arrogant, secretive, ostentatious, and aloof. Medieval artists represented them as paying homage to Reynaud the fox, a character that stood for pious fraud and hypocrisy. But above all, the Templars were suspected of having a mysteriously sinister purpose. This was the case, even from the earliest days, as the following quotes from twelfth century documents testify,

“We have heard that certain of you have been troubled by persons of limited wisdom, as if your profession, to which you have dedicated your life, to carry arms for the defense of Christians against the enemies of the faith and of peace, as if, that profession is either illicit or pernicious, that is either a sin or an impediment to a greater achievement.”³⁴

For the Knights of the Temple with the pope’s approval claim for themselves the administration of churches, they occupy them through surrogates, and they whose normal occupation it is to shed human blood in a certain way presume to administer the blood of Christ...Above all it would be a sign of true religion if they refrained from the administration of those things which by God’s prohibition it is not permitted for them to touch. Still it is entirely wicked that, enticed by the love of money, they open churches which were closed by bishops. Those suspended from office celebrate the sacraments, they bury the dead whom the Church refuses, and they act once a year so that during the rest of the year the erring people are deaf to the voice of the Church; and he who cannot be coerced seems to be corrected. Therefore, they travel around to churches, they praise the merits of their own Orders, they bring absolution for crimes and sometimes they preach a new gospel, falsifying the word of God because they preach living not by grace but by a price, by pleasure and not by truth. And in the end, when they convene in their lairs late at night, ‘after speaking of virtue by day they shake their hips in nocturnal folly and exertion’. If one moves in this fashion towards Christ, then the doctrine of the Fathers which teaches that the narrow and steep path heads towards the true life of man is false and vain.³⁵

The Templar leadership held the same contempt for Jesus and the Christians as the original followers of John the Baptist. Under oath, most Templars confessed to denying Jesus and the Virgin Mary, and to desecrating the cross by various means. Some revealed that at the time of initiation into the Order they were told “Jesus is nothing. He is a false prophet.” The Knights Templar became a place of solace for antichurch heretics, and eventually the word spread. Church leaders in Europe demanded the withdrawal of Templar privileges, and as early as 1175, Pope Alexander III publicly condemned the Order for allowing the burial of people in Templar cemeteries who had been excommunicated by the Church.

Long before the collapse of the European presence in Palestine, many Europeans had begun to look at the Templars with serious misgivings. But perhaps the truth was that the Knights Templars had become too powerful, too independent within the Johannite Church. They no longer served the interests of those on whose behalf the order was

created, and the secular Johannite leadership was resentful of them. Several years before he moved to destroy the order, the young Philip IV had applied to join the Templars. His membership request was summarily rejected for reasons unknown.

THE HOLY GRAIL

The appearance of Grail literature during the halcyon days of the Knights Templar was not accidental. In its original format, the legend of the Holy Grail was an epic of Templar mythology and rites of passage. Although the Grail is commonly assumed to be a sacred object or spiritual ideal connected to the blood of Jesus, this is only because Christian writers hijacked and expanded on the original Baptist version of the Grail story.

The concept behind the Holy Grail was around a long time before the end of the twelfth century, when Chrétien de Troyes produced the first known Grail romance, *Perceval, the Story of the Grail*. The Grail legend was patterned along similar lines to the “cauldron of rebirth” of Celtic folklore, the “horn of plenty” from Greek mythology, and the “tree of life” of Jewish mysticism. In other words, it represented the ideal.

Nowhere in Chrétien’s poem is Jesus either mentioned or alluded to. Neither is the reader told what the Grail is, apart from that it is golden and carried by a maiden. It is considered to be a type of dish, as Chretien at one point mentioned “a hundred boar’s heads on grails” -- which must realistically have been carried on platters or dishes of some kind. The central scene occurred when Perceval, on his quest to win his knighthood, encountered the “Fisher King” at the Grail castle but neglected to ask him the enigmatic question, “whom does the Grail serve?” Later, Perceval learns, much to his distress, that his oversight had caused a terrible affliction on the land, and that the Fisher King was his uncle, making Perceval a member of the Grail family.

Chrétien died around 1188, before he was able to finish the work, so he did not live to witness the explosion of interest in the Holy Grail throughout Western Europe in the decades that followed. Several Grail stories have survived from this period, each claiming to tell the ‘real story.’ The most celebrated and successful was undoubtedly *Parzival*, composed between 1195 and 1216, by Wolfram von Eschenbach of Bavaria. Wolfram began his version by claiming that Chrétien’s account was flawed, and that his was more accurate as he had been taught the true story of the Grail by a gentleman who had read the original text, written in a “heathen” language by a “scholar of nature descended from Solomon and born of a family which had long been Israelite until baptism became our shield against the fires of hell.” The source of Wolfram’s Grail legend was not a Christian, but a Baptist of high ranking Jewish ancestry.

Wolfram adhered to the hermetic principle that all of man’s affairs, past, present, and future are written in the constellations, and that at one time angels had left the Grail on the earth. “Since then, baptized men have had the task of guarding it, and with such chaste discipline that those who are called to the service of the Grail are always noblemen.” Described as a special stone of immense significance, the Grail is mysteriously connected to God, royalty, and to a specific bloodline. Considering that there is also a “Grail family,” this ‘stone’ is not to be confused with a pebble or boulder, but rather it is the seed inside the fruit -- an ancient idea found in most religions that symbolized the regeneration of life and lineage.

A constant theme of *Parzival* is that those responsible for the Grail are “baptized men,” and they alone are worthy to be associated with it. As they were subordinate to no

ecclesiastical hierarchy, and not subject to the Pope or the Church of Rome, this “baptism” is unlikely to have been the traditional Christian sacrament. Wolfram stated on several occasions that Grail knights are Templars:

Always when they ride out, as they often do, it is to seek adventure. They do so for their sins, these Templars, whether their reward be defeat or victory.³⁶

These independent Baptist knights are tasked by God to protect and preserve the “Grail Family.” But absolute secrecy is required of them.

Upon the Grail it was now found written that any Templar whom God’s hand appointed master over foreign people should forbid the asking of his name or race, and that he should help them to their rights. If the question is asked of them they shall have his help no longer.³⁷

This type of saintliness is very different from the Christian ideal. The Grail knights resemble more of a secret society than a charitable order. They wished to protect their identity because even though the Templars preached a heresy, they did not wish to be publicly identified as heretics.

Chrétien’s original work was written in response to the loss of Jerusalem in 1188, when the faith of the Templars needed renewal. He came from Champagne, the area where most of the founders of the Knights Templar were born. Chrétien’s Holy Grail could easily be understood as the platter which carried the head of John the Baptist, or as an allusion to Baphomet. The first Christianized version of the Grail story was written as a riposte by Robert de Boron, a decade or so after Chrétien. Robert claimed he was drawing on an earlier source than Chrétien, and one of his main goals was to eliminate confusion about what the Holy Grail was. According to Robert, it was the chalice used by Jesus at the Last Supper. It came into the possession of Joseph of Arimathea, who used it to collect Jesus’ blood during the crucifixion. Members of the “Grail family” were relatives and descendants of Joseph of Arimathea. The Fisher king was Joseph’s brother-in-law, and Perceval was a grandson of the Fisher King. Robert was trapped, however, by official church doctrine that stipulated Jesus had no other family save Mary, his mother -- so the Grail family was linked instead to Joseph of Arimathea. The Grail family in Templar-inspired versions was connected to the lineage of John the Baptist.



The head of John the Baptist on a golden charger or platter was a popular subject for certain medieval artists. Did it represent the Holy Grail of the Johannite Church?

Anfortas, the Fisher King in Wolfram's *Parzival*, is initially described as "wearing clothes of such quality that had he been lord of the whole earth they could not have been finer. His hat was of peacock's feathers and lined inside."³⁸ Peacock feathers signaled that Anfortas belonged to the messianic royal lineage. The hero Parzival became Grail King, and thus achieved messianic status, once he returned with the Holy Grail, found with help from his family and various Templar Knights.

Modern authors, who suggest that the Knights Templar were guardians of the secret lineage of Jesus, need to reconsider. Linking Jesus with the esoteric meaning behind the Holy Grail is perfectly legitimate, but the original medieval presentation of the Grail story was from the Baptist perspective. If Jesus and John were brothers, the bloodline issue is further complicated, but it is hard to imagine that the Knights Templars, or any successors to the Templar legacy, had interest in protecting descendants of Jesus.

The Knights Templar's demise coincided with the end of the Grail literature. Revived two hundred years later in Sir Thomas Mallory's *La Morte D'Arthur*, the Holy Grail was

established as Robert de Boron's cup of the Last Supper. Mallory moved King Arthur to center stage, so he was no longer the peripheral figure of early Grail romances. Later, Victorian artists introduced King Arthur and the Holy Grail to the modern era and ever since it has been one of the most popular myths in Western culture. But meaning of the Grail remains inscrutable.

AGNUS DEI

Agnus Dei -- Latin Vulgate for the 'Lamb of God' -- was an essential Templar emblem. Templar seals featured the *Agnus Dei*, usually with its right leg folded over a shepherd's staff, and with a cross pattée in the background. Some seals even have the legend, "TESTIS SUM AGNI," meaning "I am a witness to the Lamb." This particular lamb motif predated the Templars, and was a common feature in early medieval illustrations of Beatus' *Commentary on the Apocalypse*. Beatus was an eighth century monk living in Spain during the Islamic occupation, who mostly wrote compilations of texts from early Church Fathers. For reasons unknown, his *Commentary on the Apocalypse* was popular in certain monastic circles. Twenty six lavishly decorated copies, infused with esoteric symbolism, have survived dated between the tenth and sixteenth centuries. [Plate 30].

Although the significance of the leg position is unknown, it held a strange importance for the Templars. Every knight was buried with his legs arranged in the same manner. Tombstones of wealthier knights were often intricately carved with an image of the deceased laid to rest in the same configuration.³⁹

Stone carvings of the *Agnus Dei* are a common feature above the entry door to Templar churches, particularly in England. And to most observers, this insignia would belong to a Christian order. *Agnus Dei* derives from a well known verse in the fourth Gospel by which John the Baptist identified Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"⁴⁰ As John had no reason to subscribe to the Christian theological view of Jesus that emerged decades later, this saying was clearly inauthentic and, like other verses in the fourth Gospel, was put in John's mouth to hide the truth from new recruits to the Church.



Plate 30. Illustration from Beatus Manuscript, c 10th century The Lamb is victorious over the serpent and the dragons.

The 'lamb' reference was derived from the paschal lamb of the original Passover event. In Moses' time, God sent a plague over Egypt to kill all first-born sons. The Jews were instructed to protect themselves from the angel of death by marking their doorways with lamb's blood as a substitute for the first-born Israelites. The sacrifice of the paschal lamb came to represent the messianic covenant between God and the chosen people. In Templar theology, the true Lamb of God was John the Baptist, the first-born son. The Christians stole John's title and applied it to Jesus.

The end of the early period of Grail literature was a signal for the Baptist heterodoxy to be expressed in works of art. Numerous masterpieces promulgated Johannite themes using the 'Lamb of God' motif. John was depicted with a shepherd's staff, sometimes holding a lamb, or with a lamb at his feet.

The Flemish painter Jan Van Eyck, acknowledged as one of the greatest artists of all time, is credited with introducing oil painting techniques to Florentine artists such as Botticelli and Leonardo Da Vinci. His influence was extraordinary, and in several ways Van Eyck was a facilitator of the Renaissance. His most famous work, *The Adoration of the Lamb*, a twenty-four-paneled polytryph completed in 1432, was at least a decade in the making. Known as the “Ghent Altarpiece,” it is located in the city’s San Bavo cathedral [Plate 31]. The concept behind the painting is the apocalyptic vision of the end of history as described in the Book of Revelation, in which the “Lamb” is the principal character.

In the center panel, the Lamb stands on Mount Zion in the New Jerusalem. Blood flows from a wound on the Lamb’s side into a grail or chalice. Behind, in the left background, is a crucifix. Directly in front of the Lamb, an octagonal fountain aligned to its center, almost touches the Lamb’s pedestal. A Latin inscription on the fountain, “this is the source of the water of life, originating from the seat of God and the Lamb,” alludes to the eternal life-giving properties of baptism.

Octagonal fonts and pillars were common architectural constructs in Templar churches. One of the most famous octagonal structures in the world is the ‘Dome of the Rock’ built on the site of Solomon’s Temple [Plate 32], where the Templars established their headquarters. According to Islam, the rock placed in the center of the dome is the spot from where Mohammed was taken into the heavens by Gabriel. In Florence, the spiritual home of Renaissance Johannism, the city’s celebrated Baptistery is also an octagonal building.

Van Eyck insinuated Templar crosses throughout the panels. On the reverse side of one panel, John the Baptist touches a Templar cross with his famous right-hand forefinger. Two panels are filled with Templar Knights on horseback, come to worship the Lamb. In the lower center panel, a group of cardinals turn to face away from the Lamb. And in the left foreground, a group of bearded figures, presumably rabbis, also look away.

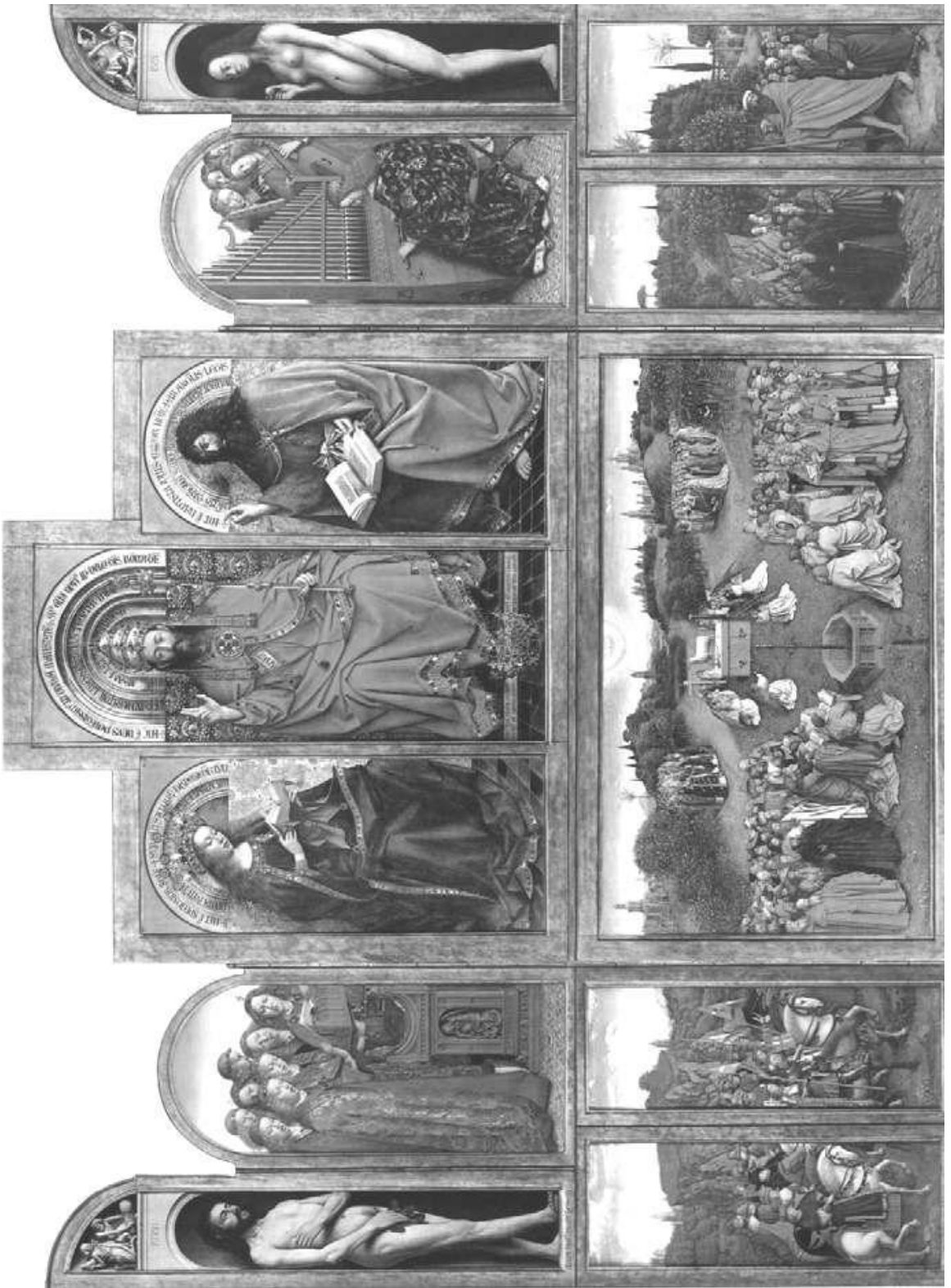


Plate 31. Jan Van Eyck, *Ghent Altarpiece*, c 1432, Cathedral at St Bavo, Ghent

In Revelation, the crowd around the Lamb are described as “these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes.”⁴¹ Van Eyck’s message is that the Catholic hierarchy, along with the Jewish rabbis, did not recognize the Lamb, so would not be saved on the last day.

Most art historians take for granted that Van Eyck painted the Lamb as a representation of Jesus. They also assume that the prominent regal figure who sits in the top center

panel, directly above the Lamb is Jesus. The words, “King of Kings” are painted on his gown, and together with the crowns upon his head, indicate that this is the character from Revelation 19, “and on his head are many crowns... On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, “King of Kings and Lord of Hosts.” He will “rule the nations with a rod of iron.” Traditionally, Christians have interpreted these verses as a reference to Jesus. However, Revelation 19 continues with the crucial, and usually neglected line; ‘he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself.’ If this royal personage was the returning Jesus, then the prophecy was meaningless because *everyone* knows his name. The prophecy only makes sense if it refers to someone unknown, or as yet unborn. .



Plate 32. The Octagonal *Dome of the Rock*, Jerusalem

Revelation stated that “the armies of heaven, wearing white linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses.”⁴² In the Johannite movement, from Qumran Essenes to the Knights Templar, all white was standardized wear. Messianic prophecy belonged to them. With Templar crosses embroidered into his garments, the coming savior of Van Eyck’s masterpiece was part of the Baptist Grail family.

Despite widespread speculation on Templar involvement in the occult, their scientific and practical leanings are well known. It is unlikely, therefore, that they believed in the literal return from the dead of any historical figure. Such ideas were probably mocked as fantasies concocted by the Roman Church. And there is no evidence to suggest the Templars believed in reincarnation.

The painting was known to be a particular favorite of Adolf Hitler, and was confiscated by the Nazis during the Second World War. Doubtless, part of its appeal was the theme that Jews and Catholics were persona non grata in the millennial kingdom -- the Third Reich. Hitler was reputed to have been an avid reader of Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Parzival*, and his favorite piece of music was known to have been Wagner’s *Parzival*.

The well-documented obsession of the Nazi leadership with Grail-related artifacts strongly suggests a belief that their mission was to consummate the quest of the original Grail Knights .

Presumably, the Nazis had in mind the “Teutonic Knights of St. Mary’s Hospital of Jerusalem,” a Germanic version of the Knights Templar, rather than the Frankish original. Formed in Jerusalem in 1190, the Teutonic Knights were an order exclusively for German born nobility. Based on the same model as the Knights Templars, they were answerable only to Popes, had a separate and distinct priesthood, and were exempt from the jurisdiction of any secular or ecclesiastical powers. Their heartland was the Baltic region, but they were intermittently involved, politically and militarily, throughout central and eastern Europe. Influenced by the Teutonic Knights, many German intellectuals and aristocrats developed anti-Catholic sentiments, which was later of great help to Martin Luther in his fight with Rome.

Following the annexation of Austria in 1938, Hitler confiscated the “Spear of Longinus,” alleged to be the Roman spear that wounded Jesus on the cross, from a Vienna Museum. He did not collect memorabilia for its monetary value; it was the spear’s ‘anti-Christ’ properties that appealed. One myth connected to it was that its owner had the power to rule the world. It had once belonged to Charlemagne, and was seized by Napoleon from the Holy Roman Emperor a thousand years later. The Spear of Longinus was adopted as a totem of the Teutonic Knights, and was purportedly an inspiration behind the Order’s creation.⁴³

The Grail family, given a strictly genetic interpretation by the Nazis, became the Aryan master race. The destiny of the German people, therefore, was to bring “salvation” to rest of the world. Hitler was regarded as the end time redeemer figure in Revelation who will “smite the nations.” As a prayer composed for children in Nazi orphanages testifies,

Leader, my Leader, given to me by God, protect me And sustain my life for a long time

You have rescued Germany out of deepest misery, To you I owe my daily bread

Leader, my Leader, my belief, my light

Leader my Leader, do not abandon me

The occult side of Nazi ideology is still shadowy. The victorious allied powers were determined not to publicize it, and defendants at Nuremberg were forbidden from making any references to Nazi esoteric beliefs. It was essential that the public believed Nazi atrocities were motivated only by brute primitive instincts.

Matthias Grunewald was one of most highly regarded painters of the German Renaissance. Born in the 1470s, he served as court painter and hydraulic engineer to two successive archbishops of Mainz, from about 1510 to 1525. It is thought that he left this post because of his Lutheran sympathies, but Grunewald was far more extreme than Luther. His greatest work, the *Issenheim Altarpiece*, was completed in 1515, two years before the world ever heard of Martin Luther [Plate 33].

The center panel is a crucifixion scene that has a reputation for inspiring awe and wonder among those who see it, though not only because of the artist’s technique. Grunewald

placed a character in the crucifixion scene not mentioned in any gospel as being present. It was a bold move, not because the person he depicted was dead by the time of Jesus' crucifixion, but because Grunewald had resurrected John the Baptist to return as a prosecutor to accuse Jesus.

John stands to the right, holding a book with his left hand, while pointing sharply at Jesus with his right-hand forefinger [Plate 80c]. The gesture is not made to identify Jesus, but to indict him. This is overlooked simply because it is so far outside the accepted myth.

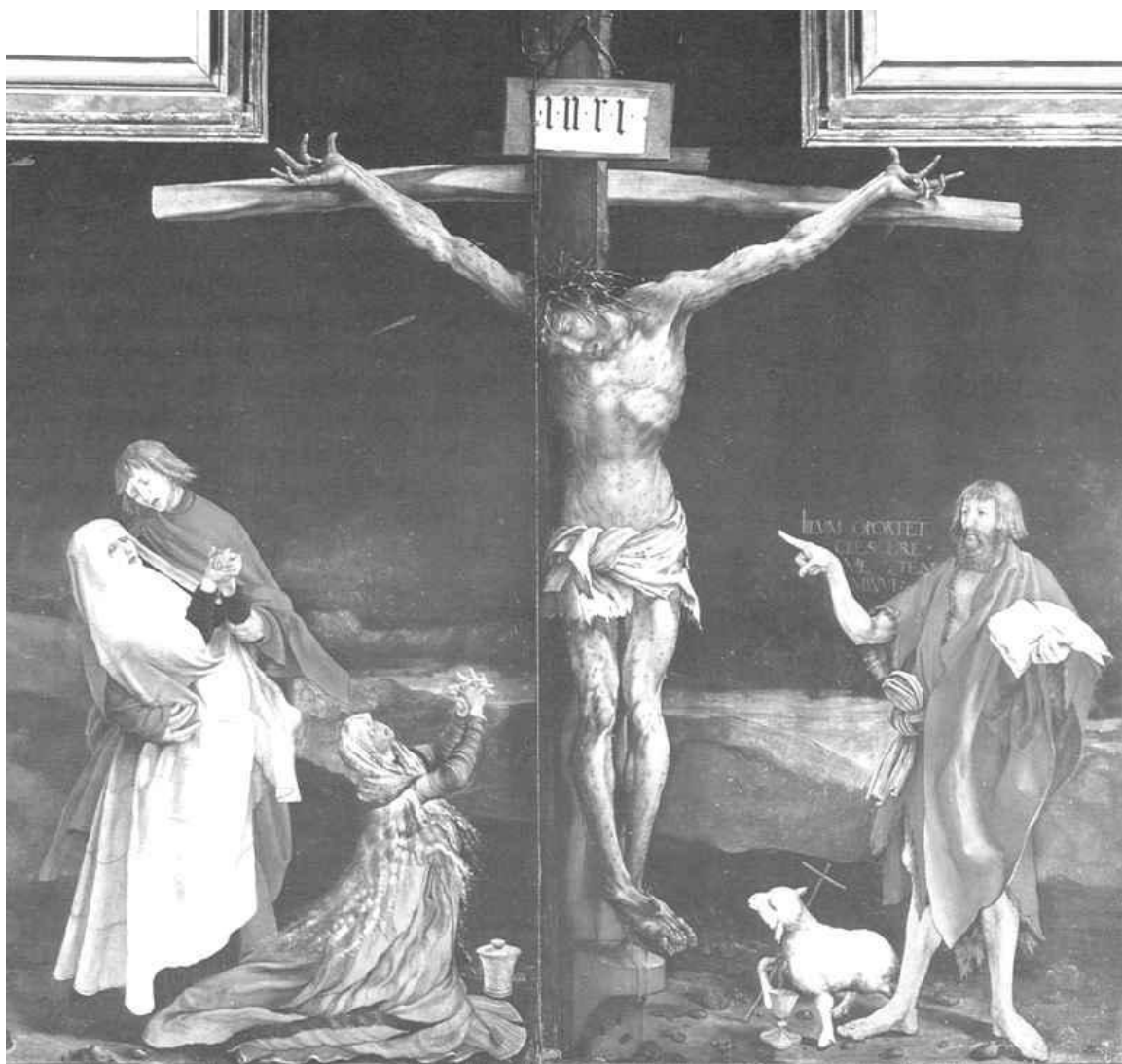


Plate 33. Matthias Grunewald, *Isenheim Altarpiece*, 1515, Musee d'Unterlinden, France

The Lamb of God stands loyally at John the Baptist's feet, depicted exactly as it appears in Templar seals and insignia -- right leg folded, holding a shepherd's staff. As in the Ghent Altarpiece, blood runs from the Lamb's side into a golden chalice, or grail. The Latin Vulgate, "He must increase, and I must decrease," is painted as though spoken by John. But if Grunewald wanted to emphasize that John was lesser than Jesus, it would have been simpler to have omitted him from the painting. John's posture indicates that this Bible verse was a slander, falsely attributed to him. Grunewald brought John back from the dead to condemn Jesus, not to laud him. Crucifixion was justice served.

One of the best encapsulations of the medieval Grail/Baptist heresy is the Coat of Arms of the Tallow Chandlers of London [Plate 34]. The Tallow Chandlers were originally a

guild of candle makers, formed to promote educational and charitable purposes in London around the year 1300. John the Baptist is their patron saint.

Both crests at the top of the Coat of Arms feature the head of John the Baptist. On the left side, a female angel holds a golden charger or serving plate on which John's severed head rests. On the right, John's head lays on a platter centered on an alchemical sun. The motto at the base of the Arms is the Latin Vulgate, "Ecce Agnus Dei qui tollit peccata mundi -- "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." There is no representation of Jesus anywhere. John the Baptist is the Lamb of God. It is he who takes away the sins of the world.

The angels wear golden crowns of five five-pointed stars, not to signify that 'light' is the business of candle makers, but because the pentangle star was a well known symbol of esoteric spirituality, and a central component of Templar/Baptist iconography. Similarly, the scallop shell, resting on top of the three dove shield, was a familiar motif in the mystical imagery of the period, best known from Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*, but also associated with Mary, the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. The scallop shell was also linked with John the Baptist [Plate 35]. Turtle doves were also commonly used Templar symbols. For diplomatic reasons, the "Agnus Dei" verse replaced the earlier motto of the Tallow Chandlers, "Quae arguuntur a lumine manifestantur" -- "Things not in dispute are made clear by the light."⁴⁴ In the era of the Inquisition that followed the persecution of the Templars, the potential identification of John the Baptist as 'the light' of the Tallow Chandlers would have been much too dangerous.

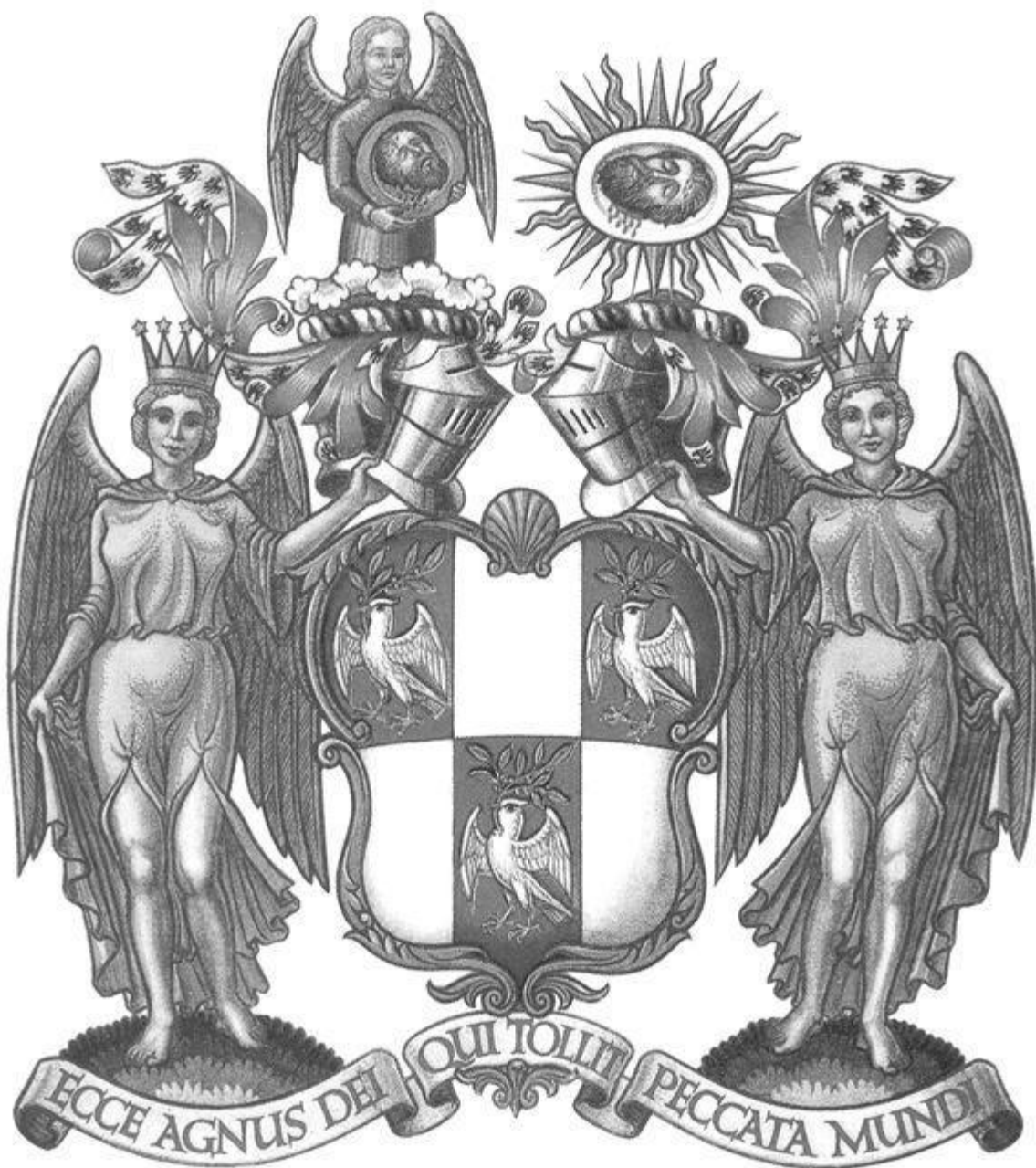


Plate 34. Coat of Arms, Tallow Chandlers, London, UK

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

The remarkable achievements of Bernard of Clairvaux make him *the* outstanding figure in twelfth century Church history. More than any king or Pope, Bernard shaped the course of important events. A deeply religious man, politics was also his field of expertise. He preached to kings, instructed Popes and cardinals, hired and fired bishops, built abbeys and cathedrals, instituted a military order, and mobilized a crusade to the Holy Land. He was born in 1090, during the height of the monastic reform movement. Forty years later, Bernard had almost the whole of Christendom dancing to his tune.



A statue of John the Baptist at Orleans Cathedral, France, shows him reflecting on a scallop shell he holds in his right hand. Plate 35.

In the face of widespread corruption in the Church and the moral decline of the priesthood, the monastic lifestyle had come to be regarded as the ideal Christian vocation. Several Popes were former monks, and by the beginning of the twelfth century the papacy had established a degree of independence from the Holy Roman Emperors. The new power of the Papacy was proven by the overwhelming response to Urban V's call for the first crusade that led to the 'liberation' of Jerusalem in 1099. Popes and Holy wars, however, needed sponsors. And whoever paid the piper called the tune. So with this in mind, and with Jerusalem safely under its control, the Johannite Church infiltrated the monastic movement.

Not for Bernard the customary agony of the saint who struggles to overcome his demons; he had no great crisis in coming to terms with God or salvation. He was only twenty two

years old, but his focus was already set when he joined the recently formed and ailing Cistercian order of Benedictine monks in 1112. His impact was immediate; his rise meteoric.

According to legend, Bernard's family was horrified when he announced his intention to join a monastery. But the legend does not explain why thirty two of his noble friends and family members joined the Cistercians at the same time. Clearly, a great deal of forethought was involved. The grand strategy was not to escape from the world, but to change it. Effective control of the abbey at Citeaux was usurped by the newcomers, and on account of his charisma, intellect, and energy, Bernard emerged as the leader and spokesman.

In 1115, the Count of Champagne, a cousin of Bernard's and one of the wealthiest men in Europe, donated land to build Clairvaux (Valley of Holy Light) abbey, in Champagne, a few miles from Troyes. This signaled the start of a period of explosive growth for the Cistercian order. During Bernard's lifetime over three hundred abbeys were founded. Never before or since has Europe witnessed such phenomenal development in a monastic order.

Similar to the Essenes at Qumran, Cistercians wore white robes, practiced daily ablutions, followed a strict dietary regimen, and all personal wealth belonged to the community. But more significant was the shared conviction that they were establishing the kingdom of God on earth. Bernard of Clairvaux was a new Teacher of Righteousness, leading the new "sons of light." A special military corps, the Knights Templar, was being prepared for heavenly war against the "Kittim," not Imperial Rome, but the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1118, three years after the founding of Clairvaux, Hughes de Payen, another relative of the Count of Champagne, arrived in Jerusalem as leader of the original Templar faction in the Holy Land. His second-in-command, Andre de Montbard, a co-founder and a future Grand Master of the Knights Templar, was Bernard's uncle. The Count of Champagne made at least two trips to the Holy Land and officially joined the Templars in 1124. The patriarch of Jerusalem, who formally recognized the Knights Templar in 1120, was also a family member.

Bernard quickly built a vast network of agents, recruiters, and spies. Financed, not with monastic farming revenues, but by the Knights Templar and their wealthy supporters among the nobility. He interceded with Pope Honorius II to obtain papal recognition for the order, and subsequently a Church council was convened at Troyes in January 1128 to officially legalize the Knights Templar. During the council, the Templars received their new rule written by Bernard, based on the rule that Cistercians lived by, and not dissimilar to the rule at Qumran.

Bernard composed a special tract, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, in which he described the new order as, "unknown by the ages. They fight two wars, one against the adversaries of flesh and blood, and another against a spiritual army of wickedness in the heavens." It extolled the virtues of the Templars, promising heavenly rewards for those who contributed to their cause. It was, in effect, a Baptist indulgence, a substitute for the traditional Vatican practice of selling places in heaven along with the forgiveness of sins. Land and money poured in. The wealth and prestige of the Cistercian order grew hand in hand with the Knights Templar. In a relatively short space of time, Bernard had earned the reputation and the resources to be a popemaker. And, in order to move to the next

level, that was precisely what he needed to be.

The abbey of Clairvaux alone produced eight Cardinals during the twelfth century. But Bernard especially groomed one of his former pupils, Gregorio Paparesci, for the papacy. When Honorius II died in 1130, Gregorio was already the papal legate to France. On the night of the Pope's death, a minority of Cardinals hastily elected Gregorio as Pope Innocent II. He was forced to flee Rome, however, when Anacletus II was elected shortly afterward by the majority. Bernard called a special synod in France which declared Anacletus' election invalid, and he traveled extensively to rally support for Innocent. Following audiences with several crowned heads of Europe, King Lothair of Germany was persuaded to send an army to invade Rome and oust Anacletus from the Vatican.

Inconclusive fighting dragged on for many years. Innocent only took his seat in Rome in 1138, following Anacletus' death in January that year, and after his duly elected successor, Victor IV, conveniently resigned two months later. Once Bernard's surrogate was the undisputed head of the Church, a Papal Bull was issued, *Omne datum optimum*, which made the Knights Templar invulnerable. Technically, from this moment onward they were responsible only to the Pope. No bishop or ecclesiastical authority, no king or prince of Christendom, had authority to interfere in Templar affairs.

Innocent II did not enamor the papacy to the population of Rome. On his death in 1143, the citizenry, weary of incessant papal corruption, established a Commune and declared Rome an independent state. His successor, Lucius II died in battle against the forces of the Commune, and the next three popes were each forced out of the city at one point. Eugenius III (1145-1154), a former star pupil of Bernard's, and Eugenius' protégé, Hadrian VI (1154-59), were not conventional died-in-the-wool Catholics. To the consternation of believers, and surely to the delight of anti-Catholic heretics everywhere, Hadrian used the pretext of his dispute with the Commune in Rome to ban all Church sacraments in the city.

After the loss of the county of Edessa, retaken by Moslem forces in 1144, Eugenius called for a second crusade in 1145. The reaction to his appeal was lukewarm, so Bernard intervened and took personal responsibility for the success of the campaign. In 1148, the kings of France and Germany agreed to send armies to the Holy Land. For various reasons, however, the second crusade ended as a humiliating fiasco. To deflect responsibility for the debacle, Bernard declared that it was God's punishment for the "immorality" of the Christian soldiers.

Official Church history regards Bernard of Clairvaux as a devout and unfailingly orthodox Roman Catholic. Surviving texts of sermons attributed to Bernard are cited to prove his piety. Yet scores of them are dedicated to the Song of Songs -- a paean to sexual love and the physical attraction between the king and queen. This theme holds no relevance for a celibate priesthood and does not validate any Church doctrine. Bernard seldom mentioned incidents in the New Testament, nor did he quote extensively from it, save to wax lyrical on the "bride and the bridegroom." Though he is widely credited with encouraging veneration of Mary, there is no evidence that he understood her as the mother of Jesus. For example, the oath of allegiance that Bernard wrote for the Knights Templar required them to have the "Obedience of Bethany -- the castle of Mary and Martha." In other words, their loyalty was to Mary of Bethany, synonymous with Mary Magdalene.

Place names in the New Testament held a much greater significance than mere

geographical locations. Bethany's relevance was as the place "beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing."⁴⁵ The heart of Bethany in modern day Jordan is a small natural hill called Elijah's Hill, or *Tell Mar Elias* in Arabic. Local tradition, for thousands of years, has identified it as the place from where Elijah ascended to heaven. As Jesus identified John the Baptist with Elijah, so Bethany was similarly linked with John. The title "Mary of Bethany" signified that Mary was part of John's inner circle. For Bernard of Clairvaux and the Knights Templar, "Obedience to Bethany" meant submission to the Baptist cause, or in practical terms, the House of Champagne. When Bernard appealed for the second crusade to the king and queen of France in front of an assembled multitude of thousands, he did so at the Basilica of Mary Magdalene at Vezelay, where local legend claimed she was buried and her relics were kept. In the treasured myths and iconography of the Knights Templar, there was no place for Mary, the mother of Jesus.

In Catholic mythology, Bernard was praying to a statue of the Madonna and Child when he asked, "show me that you are a mother." Looking up, he saw drops of milk fall miraculously from Mary's breast. Myths, however, are subject to interpretation. Popular folklore in parts of France claimed that Mary Magdalene had sailed to France to avoid persecution in the Holy Land. She gave birth to a "holy child" on French soil. A cult of Magdalene was fervently maintained by those who held an unorthodox view of the sacred feminine. Statues of the Madonna and child were everywhere, and churches dedicated to Our Lady -- "Notre Dame" -- dotted the landscape. But to which "Lady" did they belong? As the Cathars discovered, dedication to the wrong Mary could prove fatal. In the Church of John, public devotion to Mary was kept deliberately ambiguous.

Fasting himself to emaciation and ill health, Bernard might be described today as a religious fanatic. Yet he had a brilliant mind. In the medieval world, Bernard of Clairvaux was a Gulliver among Lilliputians. He ran rings around contemporary Catholics, dazzled by his intelligence and overawed by his demeanor. Not everyone, however, was blinded by his light.

Arnold of Brescia was born in the same year as Bernard, 1090, but that was one of few things they had in common. An Augustinian monk with an impeccable reputation, Arnold's life's work was to campaign against corruption, simony, and worldliness in the Church. His chief target was Bernard of Clairvaux, "puffed up with vainglory, and jealous of all those who have won fame in letters or religion, if they are not of his school."

Arnold was a serious threat, and had to be silenced. Exiled from Italy and France, and denounced by Innocent II at the Lateran Council in 1139, he was forced to take refuge in Switzerland. With Bernard in hot pursuit, Arnold eventually found a protector in Bohemia who would not be intimidated. Finding his way to Rome, he began to speak out against hypocrisy in the higher clergy. Though subsequently excommunicated, he was welcomed by the Roman population in general, and became the leader of the experimental egalitarian society known as the Commune of Rome.

While Bernard campaigned across Europe rallying support for the second crusade, Arnold accused the Cardinals of acting like "Jews and Pharisees" against true Christian interests. Pope Eugenius III was charged with "filling his own purse" rather than "imitating the zeal of the Apostles whose place he filled." In due course, Arnold's supporters forced the Pope out of Rome. Naturally, the Commune was regarded as a dangerous challenge to the accepted order of medieval society, and the Papacy successfully conspired with the Holy Roman Emperor to overthrow the fledgling

democracy. In 1155, Arnold was captured, hanged, and burnt at the stake by Papal guards.

When given the opportunity to debate with Peter Abelard, France's leading reformist theologian and logician, and a known sympathizer of Arnold of Brescia, Bernard declined. He did not need to justify himself. You were either with him or against him. His passion was a radical millennial ideology. And it was this ardent belief, and not a righteous desire to rescue Christians from Islamic repression, that enabled him to legitimize the bloodshed of crusader wars. For Johannites, the capture of Jerusalem in 1099 had crystallized messianic expectation. In his tract, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, Bernard wrote

Hail land of promise, which, formerly flowing only with milk and honey for they possessors, now stretchest forth the food of life and the means of salvation for the entire world.⁴⁶

The "means of salvation," was not through belief in the sacraments of the Holy Catholic Church and the redemptive death of Jesus. According to Bernard, "salvation" came to mankind through the Knights Templar by dint of their mission in the Holy Land. Wolfram von Eschenbach advanced the same opinion in *Parzival*.

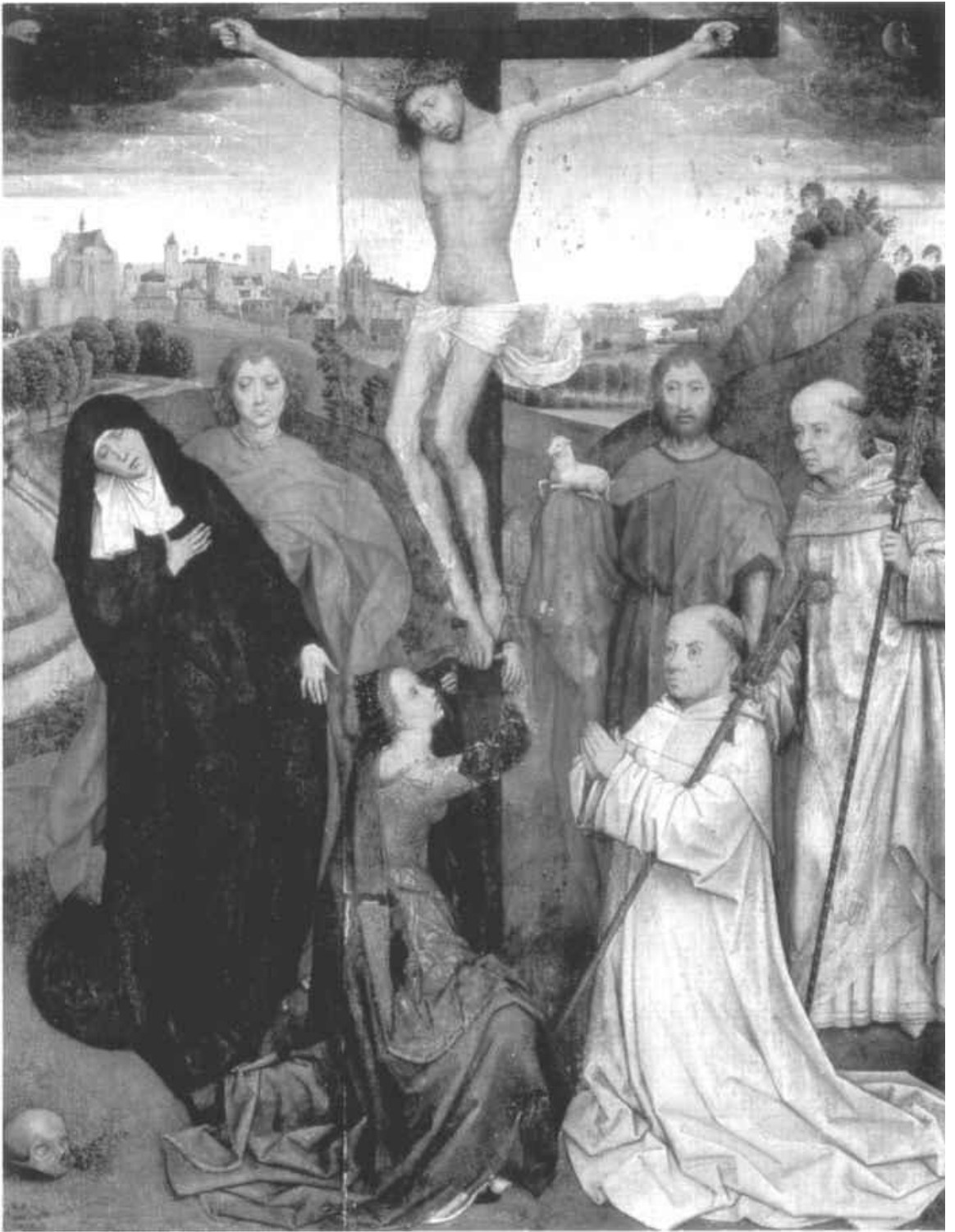


Plate 36. Hans Memling, *Triptych of Jan Crabbe*, fifteenth century.

John the Baptist puts his arm on the shoulder of the kneeling St. Bernard of Clairvaux. Both look away from Jesus, and Bernard is not praying in the direction of the crucifix.

The Grail castle, protected by Templars, was located at “Munsalvaesche,” which means Mount of Salvation, or Mount Zion, which Revelation describes as the home of the Lamb of God in the heavenly Jerusalem.

“It is well known to me’, said his host, “that many formidable fighting men dwell at Munsalvaesche with the Grail....I will tell you how they are nourished. They

live from a Stone whose essence is most pure.”⁴⁷

Bernard died in 1153, so he did not live to witness the downfall of Arnold of Brescia and the forces of accountability and transparency that he represented. His dream, however, lived on. The Knights Templar were secure, the infrastructure was in place, Jerusalem was held, and the Papacy was in the bag. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux was officially canonized in 1172. Arnold of Brescia remains a heretic.

THE BEEHIVE

After his death, Bernard was made the patron saint of bees and beekeepers. Bees and beehives were important symbols in the European mystical tradition, and often featured in depictions of Bernard. As bees work selflessly and obediently for the good of the whole, it is thought that they symbolized industry and self-sacrifice. The purpose or motivation of bees, however, is not work for its own sake, but the production of honey. The significance of bees was linked to the notion that honey was the mythical life sustenance of John the Baptist.⁴⁸ “Honey” was not to be taken in the literal sense. In the Old Testament, the Promised Land was described as “flowing with milk and honey” over twenty times. And for Jewish scribes, “eating honey” meant absorbing the Word of God.

“Son of man, eat what is offered to you; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. And he said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.” Then I ate it; and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.

Ezekiel 3:1-3

So I went to the angel and told him to give me the little scroll; and he said to me, “Take it and eat; it will be bitter to your stomach, but sweet as honey in your mouth.” And I took the little scroll from the hand of the angel and ate it; it was sweet as honey in my mouth...And I was told, “You must again prophesy about many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”

Revelation 10:9-11

John the Baptist “ate wild honey” so he embodied God’s Word. Bernard himself was described as being “honey-tongued,” which did not mean he was a “sweet talker.” The beehive represented the Johannite community, the source on earth for God’s Word, and the true repository of “honey.” Numerous Western European municipalities have bees and beehives on their coat-of-arms, which are vestiges of the Johannite past of their leading citizenry [Plate 55].

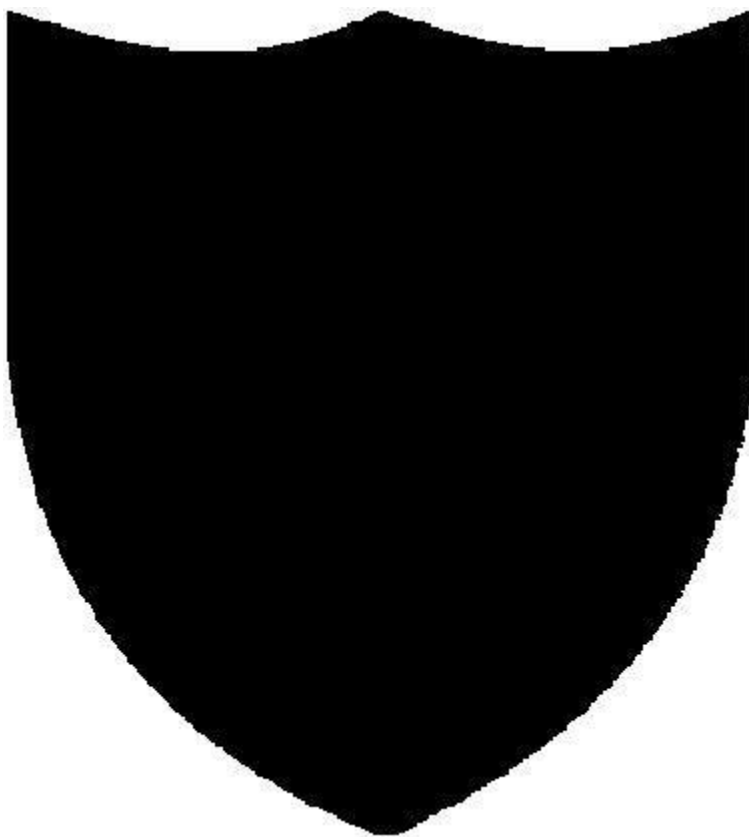
Leonardo Da Vinci was appointed the royal court painter and engineer to King Louis XII of France. When Leonardo ran into legal difficulties with the monks at Milan over his initial painting of “The Virgin on the Rocks,” Louis intervened on his behalf to resolve the dispute. The king was Leonardo’s protector, and as such, it would be naïve to imagine that he was unaware of Leonardo’s Johannite views. On the contrary, Louis sympathized with them. The main emblem on the king’s coat-of-arms was the beehive. When he subdued the Genoese in 1507, Louis famously entered Genoa with bees and beehives embroidered into his tunic and armor [Plate 60].

The bee and the beehive denoted a line of ancestral descent. The bee was a recurring emblem of the French monarchy, used most widely by Louis XIV, but thought to have originated with the Merovingian dynasty which ruled much of France between the fifth

and eighth centuries. Bees were adopted as symbols of Imperial authority by Napoleon Bonaparte in his quest for legitimacy. The “king bee” was associated with royal titles in many ancient cultures, especially in Egyptian civilization. The bee symbol then, implied a messianic connection to those who used it.



Coat of Arms, Wiltz, Luxembourg, Plate 55



Coat of Arms, La Chaux de Fonds, Switzerland



Plate 60. Jean Bourdichot, *Conquest of Genoa*, 1507

THE ALBIGENSIAN CRUSADE

Often referred to as the first recorded case of genocide in Western Europe, the Albigensian crusade called by Pope Innocent III in 1209, was targeted not at Moslems, but at Christian heretics. The Albigensians, more commonly known as ‘Cathars,’ were named after the town of Albi, in southern France, a major centre of the Cathar religion. The Languedoc region of modern day France was the major Cathar stronghold, and at the time was a wealthy and independent state.

Essentially, Cathars were Gnostic dualists who adhered to the ancient Manichean heresy that the material world was created by Satan.⁴⁹ Historians claim that the Cathars were originally converted by Bogomil missionaries who had fled Bulgaria to escape persecution by the Constantinople Church for their Gnostic beliefs. But what so incensed Rome were not the finer points of Gnostic philosophy, but the deeply offensive Cathar teaching that Mary Magdalene was Jesus’ concubine.

The Albigensian crusade lasted almost forty years and resulted in the death of an estimated 100,000 Cathar men, women, and children, and the devastation of the region. Entire populations of towns and villages were slaughtered wholesale. All these events took place during the peak period of Templar influence, in an area of France studded with Templar churches and castles. The Pope commanded Templar participation in the campaign to crush the rebels; no doubt their experience in siege warfare was most welcome. The knights complied, burning Albi and Toulouse in 1209, but afterward they kept a low profile.

Modern writers have suggested that the Knights Templar were either strictly neutral during the conflict or were secretly Cathar sympathizers. This is based partly on the anti-Roman Catholicism of the Templars -- “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” -- but mostly on the veneration for Mary Magdalene that they shared with Cathars. The Templar’s fixation with Mary Magdalene, however, could not possibly have been for the same reasons as the Cathars. If anything, her close association with Jesus would have tainted Mary.

When Philip, King of France, declared war on the Knights Templar in 1307, he handpicked William de Nogatel to be his prosecutor-in-chief. William’s parents had been Cathars, and were tortured and burnt at the stake by the Inquisition. So he was no friend of Rome. But the ruthless manner in which William hounded the Templars, suggested that he had an axe to grind with *them*. He did not regard the Knights Templar as champions of the Cathar cause.

Not only were Cathars vehemently opposed to baptism, they regarded John the Baptist as an envoy of Satan. Jesus was the younger son of God. Satan was the older son of God, and Jesus’ older brother. John was sent by Satan to destroy Jesus. It was sibling rivalry. Cathars believed that the Roman Catholic Church followed the satanic traditions of John the Baptist. The leadership of the Johannite Church would not have tolerated these opinions, and would have sought to eradicate those who preached them by any means possible.

Part of the text of the Bogomil/Cathar, *Book of John the Evangelist* was discerned from archives of the Inquisition at Carcassonne,⁵⁰ and the following excerpts articulate Cathar theology on John the Baptist:

And Satan the prince of this world perceived that I was come to seek and save

them that were lost, and sent his angel, even Elijah the prophet, baptizing with water: who is called John the Baptist. And Elijah asked the prince of this world: How can I know him? Then his lord said: On whomsoever thou shalt see the spirit descending like a dove and resting upon him, he it is that baptizeth with the Holy Ghost unto forgiveness of sins: thou wilt be able to destroy him and to save.

And again I, John (the Evangelist), asked the Lord (Jesus): Can a man be saved by the baptism of John without thy baptism? And the Lord answered: Unless I have baptized him unto forgiveness of sins, by the baptism of water can no man see the kingdom of heaven. And I asked the Lord: How do all men receive the baptism of John, but thine not at all? And the Lord answered: Because their deeds are evil and they come not unto the light.

The Catholic Church insisted on water baptism for salvation, although generally as a onetime only event. However, the writers of the New Testament stressed that Jesus did not practice water baptism,

I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming... he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
Luke 3:16

Now when the Lord knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples).
John 4:2

Compared to his own plan of salvation, Jesus considered water baptism redundant. Preoccupation with baptism was, to all intents and purposes, a hindrance to his mission,

I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!
Luke 12:49

In many ways, the religion of Jesus never stood a chance. His premature death ensured that it did not genuinely take root with his followers. Water baptism was simply another outmoded tradition that Jesus' disciples co-opted from the Baptist movement.

FREEMASONS

The loss of the Holy Land, coupled with the official demise of the Knights Templar, signified that the Church of John needed a new strategy. Centuries passed before such a high public profile could be risked again. Following the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, the Catholic Church lost its stranglehold over certain parts of Europe. Legends of the Templar's survival surfaced in areas where the Church was seriously weakened. Of the organizations claiming to be heirs of the lost Templar legacy, largest and most powerful was the Freemasons.

The United Grand Lodge of England was officially established in 24th June 1717 (the supposed birthday of John the Baptist, and Day of the feast of St. John the Baptist in the Catholic Church), but it had existed as an unofficial secret society long before. John the Baptist is the patron saint of Freemasonry.

Researchers have traced the roots of modern Freemasonry to Templars who immigrated to Scotland to avoid persecution. Conclusive proof remains elusive, but Templar support appears to have been the deciding factor in the victory of Robert the Bruce over the English at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314. The date of the battle was set on the Templar's holiest day of the year, June 24th.

Allegedly, the Sinclairs of Rosslyn were initial sponsors of the Knights Templar in Scotland. For two centuries, the Templars were merged with the Hospitallers into a single order known as The Order of the Temple and St. John. This Order was later outlawed by the Scottish Reformation Parliament.

Ever since their formal inception, Freemasons have been the subject of controversy. Popes have excommunicated them, and Archbishops of Canterbury have denounced them. Wild speculation about Freemasonry is always current, and books on Masonic conspiracy theories constitute a profitable niche market. Most modern Masons are baffled by this negative attention, and attribute it to their movement's secretive traditions, which have made outsiders suspicious and quick to reach unwarranted conclusions. Although Freemasonry prides itself on a tradition of philanthropy and spirit of altruism, as far as the outside world is concerned, Freemasonry exists only to benefit Freemasons.

As with the Knights Templar, Freemasonry is based on ceremonial initiations and rites of passage through a series of hierarchical grades. And similar to the Templars, as Freemasonry grew in power, prestige, and wealth, its ideological aspects diminished and became a concern only for those at the highest levels. Modern Freemasonry has lost connection with its origins, and the vast majority of Freemasons are ignorant of the meanings behind their rituals and symbolism. They might claim, for example, that Freemasonry's foundations date from the building of Solomon's Temple, or to ancient Egypt and the building of the Pyramids, but whenever they are asked, members are at a loss to explain why John the Baptist should be so important to them.

Freemasons claim to be deist, but affiliated with no particular religious or theological viewpoint. Masonic lodges do not have pictures or statues of Jesus displayed, nor does Jesus feature in Masonic teachings. Yet for some reason they chose to put John the Baptist on the highest pedestal, and who had more religious conviction than he?

OLIVER CROMWELL

Some of history's most influential figures are suspected of having been Freemasons. In certain cases, George Washington for example, Masonic links are beyond dispute, but for others, such as Sir Isaac Newton, the connection is unproven. Oliver Cromwell (1599-1656) is thought to have been a Freemason, and many historians believe Freemasons were in leadership positions on both Parliamentary and Royalist sides during the English civil war.

Cromwell was far more radical than other Freemasons of his era. John the Baptist loomed large in his life. He was christened in the church of St John the Baptist in Huntingdon on April 29th, 1599, and eight of his children were baptized there. He went to school at the John the Baptist Grammar School, which had formerly been a monastic hospital from the late twelfth century -- zenith of the Templar era, when numerous churches and hospitals dedicated to John the Baptist sprung up in England.

In 1645, during the siege of Chester, where the King's forces were holding out, the

hospital of St. John the Baptist (founded around 1190) was demolished to provide stones for defenders to reinforce the city walls. Once in power, Cromwell provided a new site and lands to the local city corporation for the rebuilding of the hospital.

When mutiny broke out in the ranks of the Parliamentary army, Cromwell chased down the leadership and imprisoned them in the Church of John the Baptist in Burford, Oxford, built circa 1175. He even gave them a sermon from the church pulpit.

Cromwell had an ideological agenda towards religion. He was passionately against Roman Catholicism, which he denounced as the “anti Christ,” and destroyed as many Catholic churches as he was able. He particularly sought to demolish statues of the Madonna and Child. Older churches that had Templar affiliations, which included Rosslyn Chapel, were undisturbed. In fact, Cromwell’s men were billeted there during the siege of Rosslyn Castle.

Throughout the period of his rule (1647-1659) Cromwell banned Christmas, declaring it an ordinary working day of no special significance. Easter and other Christian holidays were also cancelled. Furthermore, all Church baptisms and marriages were prohibited. This ban, apparently, was not universally applied, and certain churches were excused. One such church was the Church of St. John the Baptist in Ruardean, Gloucestershire, which dates from the twelfth century. The church building is noticeably carved with Templar symbols, including a St. George on horseback spearing a dragon over the inner arched doorway entrance, very rare in English churches. A baptismal font in the church is genuinely dated at 1657, and thus was built during the period that baptism was forbidden. The font has an octagonal base, which is unusual in Christian churches, but not in Templar churches and Masonic Lodges. During Cromwell’s rule, baptism into the ‘Johannite’ church was sanctioned and encouraged.

As ‘Protector’ of the realm, Cromwell disestablished the Church of England and abolished the Anglican Hierarchy. He welcomed all manner of radical Protestant sects into the ranks of his “New Model Army,” and allowed Jews to re-enter the country with no restrictions on practicing their religion. But Cromwell’s tolerance was not without limits. He explained the boundaries of his forbearance to the Catholic Irish defenders of New Ross in 1649, while negotiating the surrender of the town, -- “if by liberty of conscience you mean the liberty to exercise the Mass... where the Parliament of England has authority, that will not be allowed of.” In a letter to the Irish Catholic Bishops later that year, Cromwell wrote, “you are part of the Anti-Christ and before long you must have, all of you, blood to drink.” His condemnation of the Catholic Mass made him an exonerator of the Knights Templar, who were condemned by the Inquisition for refusing to say the words of the Mass sacrament.

Expressions of Christianity that were centered on traditional interpretations of Jesus were anathema to Cromwell. He was not, as some have suggested, a socialist or communist, and he was absolutely not an atheist. He did not advocate a specific theology belonging to a particular Christian sect. In his public statements, he only counseled the Puritan ascetic lifestyle -- a way of life owned by John the Baptist.

After Cromwell’s death, the monarchy was restored, and King Charles II ordered his body exhumed. Finally, he suffered the Baptist’s fate. Cromwell’s corpse was beheaded in a special ceremony, and the head was displayed in public for twenty years.

JOHANNITES IN AMERICA

In recent years, popular books and films have theorized a revisionist history of the discovery of America. The central hypothesis is that the Knights Templar knew of America's existence long before the voyages of Columbus. Colonization and conquest of the American continent was a long term covert Johannite project. After their expulsion from Europe, Templars visited American shores and brought with them the legendary Templar treasure. America was the Promised Land, not merely a refuge from the Inquisition, but home of the New Jerusalem. Even the word "America" was a Johannite title, derived from a Mandaean tradition of a mythical "star in the West" named "Merica."

None of these claims have been proven. However, legitimate conclusions concerning possible Johannite influences on the origins of America can be drawn from one historical fact -- the Coat of Arms of Puerto Rico.

Christopher Columbus discovered Puerto Rico in November 1493. For a supposedly Catholic sponsored expedition, it is remarkable that no Catholic priests were allowed on his vessels. The flagship, *Santa Maria*, flew the Templar ensign. According to Columbus' diary, his mission was bankrolled by Johannite nobles such as Rene d'Anjou, and not by Queen Isabella of Spain, as legend claims. Puerto Rico was originally named San Juan Bautista (St. John the Baptist), but the island was neglected until 1508, when Juan Ponce de Leon, who had traveled with Columbus in 1493, invaded with a small retinue of soldiers and became Puerto Rico's first governor. Native inhabitants, whose primitive weaponry was no match for the Spaniards, were turned into slaves and forced to do mining work. Later, when the island's name was changed to Puerto Rico, its capital was named San Juan (Saint John). Puerto Rico's Coat of Arms, recognized by the Spanish crown in 1511, is a strong declaration of allegiance to the Johannite Church [Plate 37].

In the center of the shield, the Lamb of God holds the Templar standard of Saint George, and sits on the Book of Revelation and the seven seals of the Apocalypse. Beneath, the Latin Vulgate *Joannes est Nomen ejus*, means "John is his name." Words written by Zacharias in Luke 1:68. Among the symbols surrounding the Lamb is the flag of the crusader kingdom of Jerusalem, and the crowned lion, familiar symbol of the messianic bloodline. At the sides, the crowned letters "F" and "Y," representing King Ferdinand and Queen Ysabel of Spain, are dwarfed by the larger crown above the shield. This crown does not signify the Spanish monarchy, but is the symbol of the messianic royalty of the Lamb of God. The crown belongs to the dynasty of John the Baptist. It is inconceivable that the Puerto Rican Coat of Arms was designed by Roman Catholics.



Plate 37. Coat of Arms, Puerto Rico. Illustration by Mark Gibbs

The Latin inscription means “John is his name.”

It is common knowledge that Freemasons were instrumental in the foundation of the United States of America,⁵¹ and that George Washington, the First President, was a Mason. In fact, numerous American Presidents have been Freemasons. As with Cromwell, Washington was publicly circumspect about his religious beliefs. Though often assumed to have been a devout Christian, the word “Jesus” occurs nowhere in any of Washington’s surviving letters. On his deathbed, Washington refused to see a clergyman. He did not receive a Christian burial, and was laid to rest at Mount Vernon with full Masonic honors. The Washington Monument, built to honor his achievements, is a pyramid-capped Egyptian obelisk. His acknowledged inspiration owed more to esoteric Egyptian lore, than to Jesus Christ. Early Christians made the same observation about Simon Magus, the most infamous Johannite of them all.

At West Point military academy in 1779, Washington conspicuously led a Masonic procession to celebrate John the Baptist, which included a number of speeches, sermons

and toasts. This function was a highly effective recruitment event on a grand social scale. Masonic lodges in the region mushroomed in number shortly afterward, and despite being a secret society without transparency or public accountability, the Masonic network soon dominated the institutions of the young democracy. Separation of Church and State was a definite Masonic goal. Although lauded today by civil libertarians, it was not designed to further the cause of freedom and democracy, but to replace the trappings of Christianity in public life with the symbolism of an elitist cult. Numerous public buildings constructed in the nation's capital and beyond were decorated with Masonic symbols, zodiacs, and pagan gods. Elaborate Masonic ceremonies preceded the laying of the cornerstone, and records show that these events were not dated in the traditional manner, i.e. by counting the years after Jesus' birth. The year was given as the number of years since the Declaration of Independence. So instead of say, 1806, the date was officially recorded as year 30.

Not all Americans were satisfied with the role of Freemasonry in the development of the nation. The country appeared to be under the control of a privileged and tightly-knit clique, who were above the law and responsible only to each other. By the 1830s anti-Masonic feelings, exacerbated by the acquittals of Freemasons in high profile court cases, were running high in the general population.

During this time, the mason-dominated Congress of the United States commissioned the sculptor Horatio Greenough to make a marble statue of George Washington [Plate 38]. When the statue was unveiled to the public, however, it caused a storm of controversy. It was moved to various locations, but nobody wanted it. The official explanation for the statue's unpopularity was that its classical style was not to the taste of the American public. Now it is a tourist attraction in the Smithsonian Institute.

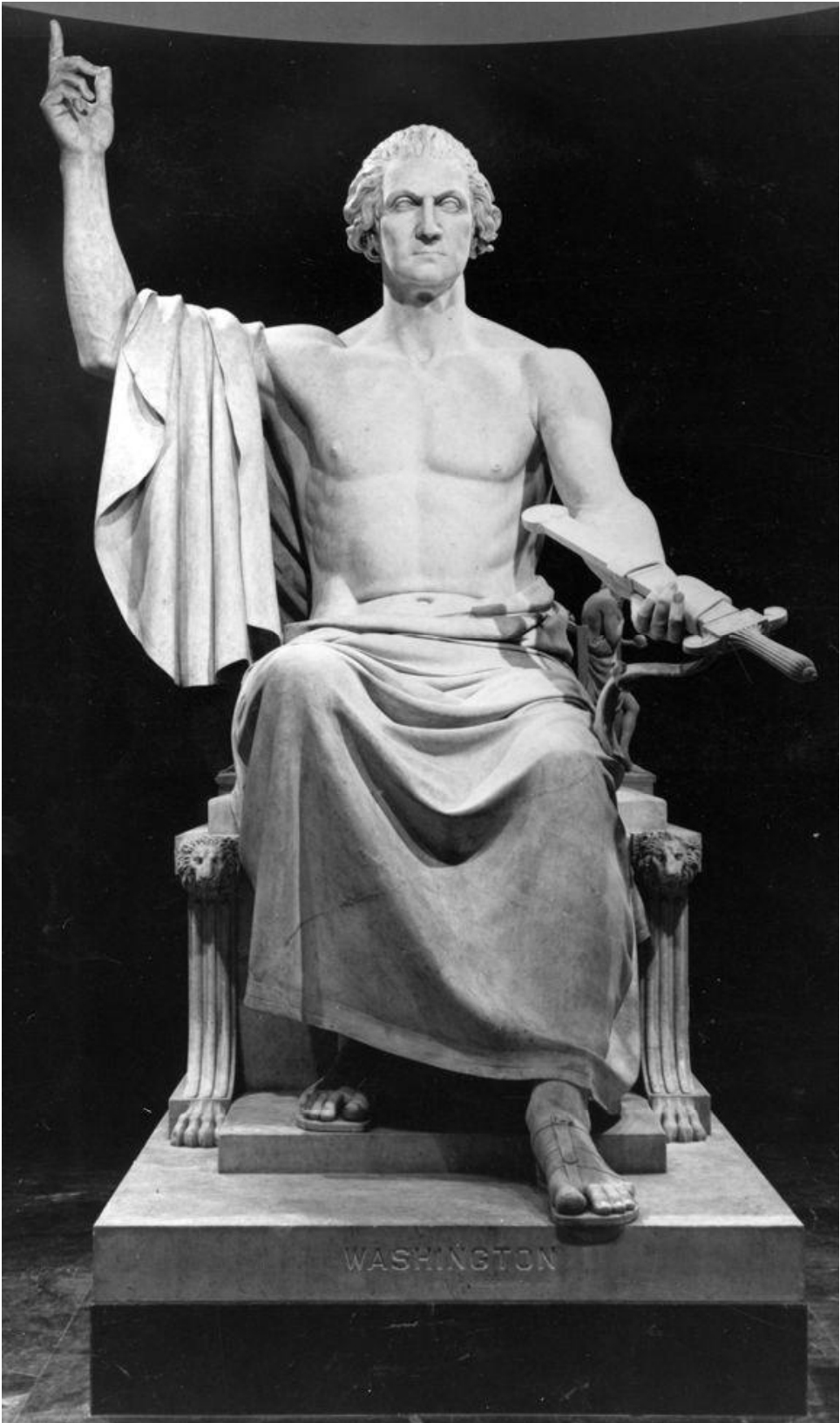


Plate 38. Horatio Greenough, *George Washington*, Washington DC (Art Resource)

Greenough had earlier visited Italy, and had possibly been influenced by what he had seen there. The argument follows that his statue of Washington was modeled on classical Greek images of Zeus, and so was considered blasphemous by Christians. But Greenough's depiction of Washington was based on the traditions of the Florentine Renaissance masters, so pagan influences were mixed with Johannite symbolism. For this

reason, Washington's right arm was raised and his right forefinger pointed upward in the classic "John gesture." The sculpture of Washington reflected the hermetic school of thought to which the mason-dominated Congress subscribed.

The popular backlash against Masonry split the Masonic movement. Dissenting Masons, dissatisfied with the direction of the leadership and the exclusion of a specific theology from public life, instituted and evangelized a new religion for the United States. Intended to preserve Johannite traditions behind an outwardly Christian appearance, the Mormon Church was founded by Joseph Smith. The son of a Mason, Smith was also a Mason as were *all* the original members of the Mormon Church.

Masonic symbols adorn Mormon Temples. Mason compasses and squares are even stitched into the fabric of Mormon underwear to remind them of their oaths to maintain sexual purity. Mormon rites-of-passage closely parallel those of the Masons, which is not disputed by Mormons. The beehive, the essential Johannite totem, was a central component of Masonic iconography and the most prominent symbol of early Mormonism. The beehive became the state symbol of Utah, the Mormon state. Evidently, the founders of Mormonism believed that they, and not the Freemasons, were the authentic torch bearers of John the Baptist's legacy.

Mainstream Freemasonry initially condemned the Mormon Church, accusing it of stealing its rituals and of betraying its secrets. The Mormon Church responded by prohibiting membership to Freemasons. The two organizations were at loggerheads until a mutual truce was agreed about twenty years ago.

Mormon Temples are not places of worship in the normal church sense. They are for ceremonial purposes centered on ritual baptism. Joseph Smith claimed that John the Baptist appeared to him and bequeathed the keys of the Aaronic priesthood. These had been taken away from the failed Church of Peter, with Jesus' agreement. These priestly keys are symbolically passed to Mormon initiates during baptism by the spirit of John the Baptist himself. In this way, Mormon theology restored John the Baptist his lost priestly Messiah status.

The Mormon concept that all people are destined to become 'gods' is a teaching also found in the Gnostic texts at Nag Hammadi. Mormon scholars have claimed that this proves Mormonism's early roots. Furthermore, certain passages from the Book of Mormon are remarkably similar to, and appear to have been copied from, verses in the gospel of John, a quasi-Gnostic document. However, as explained previously in this chapter, early Gnosticism derived from Baptist, not Christian sources.

Masonic authors have stated that some rituals of Freemasonry resemble those of the Mandaeans, and also appear to be directly connected with practices at Qumran.⁵² Surprisingly, Mormon scholars are reluctant to claim a Qumran connection. But then again, no Christian or quasi-Christian theology could peacefully co-exist and also acknowledge Jesus as the "Wicked Priest," even if they could survive the idea of John the Baptist as the "Teacher of Righteousness."



Statue of John the Baptist in Temple Square, Salt Lake City. John bequeaths the keys of the Aaronic priesthood to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdrey

Joseph Smith held the view that Masonic ritual was a corrupted form of the original Priesthood, but claimed that “many things were perfect” in Freemasonry.⁵³ He was also quoted as saying that the Christian Church was an “apostate religion,”⁵⁴ but Mormonism is not anti-Jesus. By presenting Jesus as a cosmic celestial savior figure, but requiring John the Baptist for individual redemption, Mormon theology attempts to square the circle. Thus it unites the elder and younger messianic brothers. The problem is that despite the impressive religious facade, the unity is forced and is without substance.

The symbol of the cross is not used in Mormonism because, as in ancient Judaism, the salvation dynamic is centered on lineage. Hence the Mormon Church’s interest in tracking and recording the world’s genealogical information. Undoubtedly, it has been successful in terms of growth, and is now recognized as one of the world’s fastest-growing religions. All things considered, Mormon theology is no less plausible than that of any other church.

The success of the Freemasons in the American Revolution gave encouragement to Freemasonry in Europe. Many writers believe that the French Revolution was instigated and nurtured by Freemasons, and that while he was the leader of the French forces fighting on the American side in the Revolutionary War, La Fayette was himself inducted by George Washington. The Jacobin Club, a central focus of the revolutionary movement in France, was founded by prominent Freemasons.⁵⁵ Robespierre was head of the Jacobin Club when the reign of terror begun.

The king of France was beheaded, but then the revolutionaries went much further than Cromwell. Church lands were confiscated and all religious orders suppressed. The cathedral of Notre Dame was looted and converted into a Temple of Reason. In June

1794, Robespierre proclaimed the cult of the Supreme Being. Among the thousands killed during this period, an unknown number of Catholic priests were massacred. The Catholic Church was never in any doubt that the whole enterprise was orchestrated by Freemasons.⁵⁶ However, none of the Masons' Christian opponents ever explained that the source of extreme hostility toward the Church was rooted in Jesus' perceived betrayal of John the Baptist.

Napoleon Bonaparte, no great lover of the Catholic Church, flirted with Johannism for his own reasons. He made the bee his personal symbol, and kept the Mona Lisa in his private bed chamber. He even authorized the quasi-restoration of the Knights Templar in 1804 by a small group of Masons. This Order prospered a short while, but soon split into Johannite and Catholic factions. After the Grand Master, Bernard-Raymond Fabré-Palaprat (1773-1838), founded the 'Johannite Church of Primitive Christians' in 1812, he demanded that all Templars should adopt his "faith." This caused a schism that remained unresolved until the order folded in 1866.

Modern Johannite churches have been started by Masons who felt that Lodges do not provide enough spiritual food. By its own admittance, the Apostolic Johannite Church has a priesthood which is entirely comprised of Masons, but membership is open to the general public. The word 'Christ' is used regularly in their pronouncements, but Jesus has no official part in their creed. If used in reference to an historical man, 'Christ' is understood as John the Baptist.

The modern Baptist movement in the West appears factionalized and diluted. It was never able to overcome the powerful mythology of Jesus and its hold on popular imagination. As time passed, numbers dwindled as adherents lost their passion. Diehards joined or formed secret societies. And of course, we don't know much about them. The fabled Priory of Sion, much loved by conspiracy writers, is likely to be a Johannite cult. Grand Masters of the Priory assume the title "John" for reasons unspecified. The famous French chapel at Rennes-le Chateau that has mysterious and well-documented ties to the Priory of Sion is decorated inside in a manner that gives John the Baptist precedence over Jesus.

It is fair to say that as the Christian Church split into numerous and conflicting branches, so too did the Baptist movement. Ultimately, and if they hope to persuade the scientifically-trained modern mind, neither religious ideology can be successfully revived in a previously experienced format.

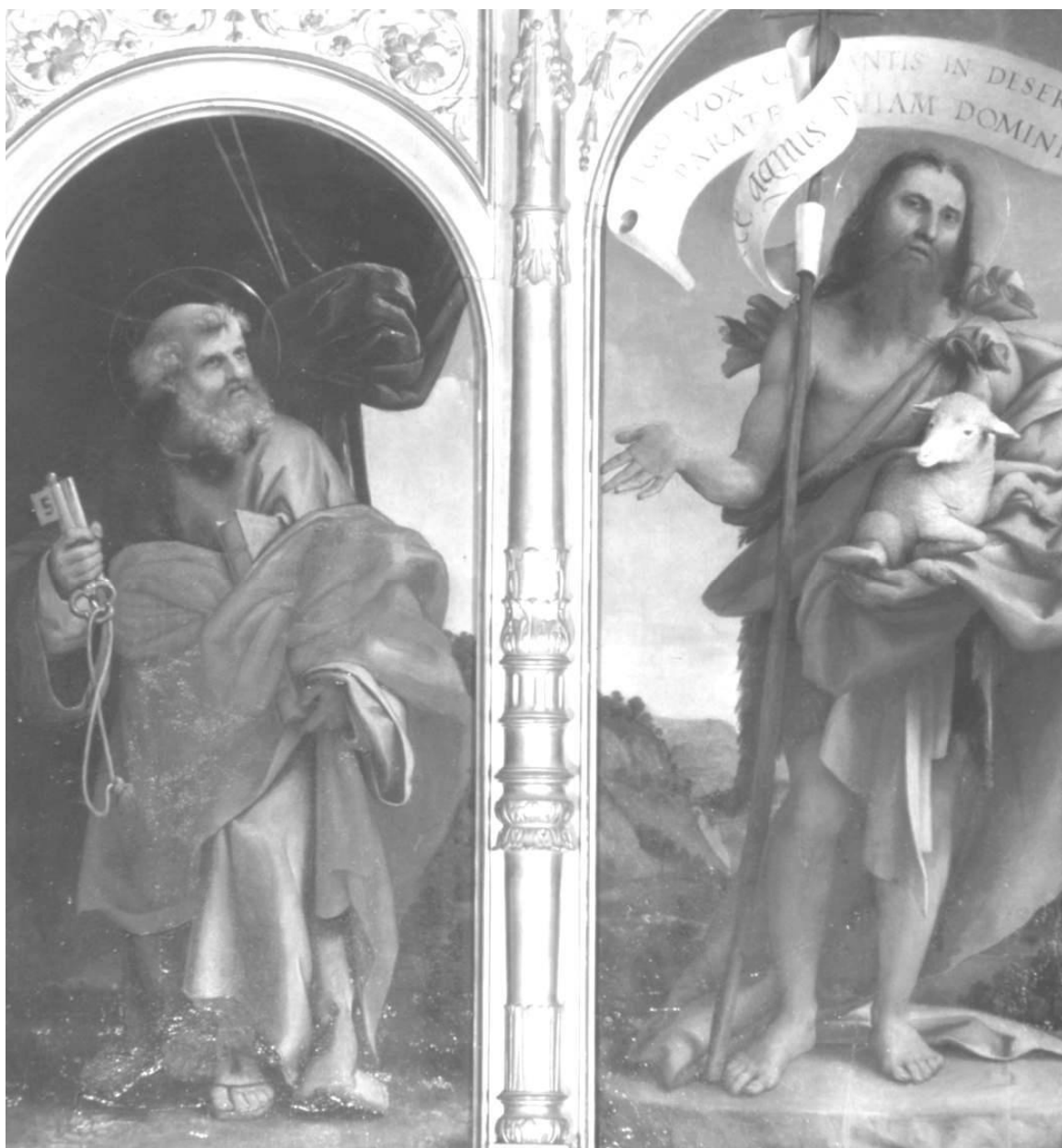


Plate 39. Lorenzo Lotto, *Peter and John the Baptist*, sixteenth century .

Peter, looking warily at John, clutches the keys to the kingdom of Heaven. Despite John's plaintive request, Peter refuses to hand over the keys. (Art Resource.)

9 Conclusion

This book only scratches the surface of its subject matter, and many important issues are not addressed. However, although historians and religious scholars might squirm at some of the assertions made, if the basic premises are sound, then the ramifications are quite literally cosmic. If they are flawed, then this book can easily be dismissed as just another conspiracy hack job, and will be quickly forgotten.

By reading the scriptures in the manner in which they were meant to be read, free from preconceptions, alert to subtleties of the narrative, and conscious of the traditions from which they sprang, the tired and obsolete myth of virgin birth has been, hopefully, laid to rest. The gospels can no longer be treated as courtroom depositions -- just the facts ma'am. Persuasion, not reportage, was their purpose. Theological argument was their method.

Naming the father of Jesus may upset the Roman Catholic Church, but that is not the intent. It should liberate them. Whether they will see it that way is seriously doubtful. Yet didn't Jesus say, "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."? And who wants to believe the world is flat once he knows it is round? If one benefits from the idea of a flat world, if one's life has been staked on it, then one must simply ignore reality in order to carry on. Perhaps this is the meaning of blind faith. You believe in something even when you know it is not true. At any rate, the ball is now firmly in the Church court.

The real issue is not that Jesus had a biological father, by itself that information should not be shocking. What is crucial is that his father was Zacharias, who was also the father of John the Baptist. This forces a radical reassessment of the relationship between Jesus and John, and transforms its incidental status to a central plank of New Testament studies.

At the moment, we do not comprehend exactly what was meant by the term, "the kingdom of God," but both men preached that its coming was "at hand." It is improbable, however, that the kingdom of God is the Christian church, as some would have us believe. Neither is it a nebulous zone of the afterlife for believers only. All we can say with certainty is that so far none of us have ever lived in it. And on the evidence presented in this book, the disunity between Jesus and John the Baptist is a major reason why. "A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand."

The archetype of sibling rivalry, so long neglected and misunderstood, is of paramount importance not only in ancient Jewish tradition, but for everyone. Of course, harmony between siblings is important within any family, but it appears that, as in our personal lives, so it is in the grand scheme of things. Issues left unresolved, will return to haunt us until they *are* resolved. Sibling conflict, therefore, manifests in the global family. And as the truism goes -- those who don't learn from the past are doomed to repeat it. And make no mistake; we are all products and victims of our collective past. Each of us, the physical manifestation of an ancient ancestral bloodline, carrying the baggage of forbears whose thoughts and actions formed the world we inherited.

We must accept that ancient Hebrews had a profound understanding of human origins, which influenced their religion and philosophy of life. Modern research into genetics, DNA, and cellular biology is still in its infancy stages. At the moment we can only intuit spiritual consequences of different bloodlines, based on research into the ancient texts. Genealogical descent is a complex issue and not one that can be adequately covered by

this book.

Although Islam was founded after Christianity, it represents the tradition of John the Baptist as older brother to Jesus and the Christian Church. Arab or Moslem people claim descent from Ishmael, firstborn of Abraham, so they also represent the older brother to Isaac, from whom Jews claim descent. Zacharias, the second Abraham, represents the religion of Judaism. All three religions derive from Abraham's family one way or another. And the paradigm to solve their problems resides in their Holy Books -- hidden in plain view. The onus is on the Christian side to act -- he is the younger brother. He has the wealth, the power, and the capability to win over the older brother. It sounds as simple as ABC, but in practical terms would require a radical spiritualization of political, social and economic policies at the highest levels that would necessitate sacrifices that are unimaginable in our world today.

The most powerful forces behind the geo-political struggles in the Middle East are not concerns about oil, money, or even land, but are ancestral affiliations cloaked by religiosity. Christianity and Islam, which derive from the same starting point -- the Qumran community share the responsibility to resolve the disastrous heritage that the conflict between Jesus and John bequeathed to history. But they will not be able to do this without first acknowledging it. And that begins with recognition of the parentage of Jesus. And that is extremely unlikely to happen whatever evidence is presented.

Islam's denial of Jesus' divinity, suggests that his parentage was common knowledge among the early followers of Mohammed. The doctrine of virgin birth was adopted, in apparent contradiction, only to proselytize Christians.

The most important point of the sibling rivalry dynamic is that neither side is intrinsically better than the other. There can be no single victor. Peace occurs when the brothers unite of their own free will. Cain asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" and the same rhetorical question has been asked ever since. God gave no answer, but presumably man's responsibility was to figure it out for himself.

Embedded in the collective unconscious, the story of Adam's family is genetically programmed as the original archetype for the entire human race. But it is a blueprint for disaster. The messianic ideal, therefore, is to unravel its consequences on the worldwide level. But in terms of the established religions, there is little chance of unity between them without recognition of a higher set of truths than those to which they currently subscribe. And therein lays the problem. As long as it remains more important to believe than to understand, nothing will change.

Notes

Chapter 1: Importance of Blood

¹ Josephus, *Vita*, 1:6

² Ibid, 1:1

³ Josephus *Antiquities* 13: 288 pp. The Pharisees demanded the resignation of John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.E.) and his son Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.E.), because John's mother had been taken captive in the war against the Greeks and so could not be the legitimate wife of a High Priest. Josephus refutes the charge as unfounded.

⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18:29-30

⁵ I Tim 1-4

⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities*: 11:8

⁷ Gen 1:28

⁸ Mark 3:21

⁹ Rom 1:3

¹⁰ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20:264

¹¹ From the German *Quelle* meaning "source." The name given by scholars to a hypothetical lost text, used by Matthew and Luke, containing a collection of Jesus' sayings.

¹² Matt 10:26, Luke 12:2

Chapter 2: Family of the New Abraham

¹ Septuagint means "seventy," usually abbreviated to "LXX." The name is derived from a tradition that 72 Jewish scholars translated the Torah into the Greek language in Alexandria, for one of the Ptolemaic kings. Generally considered to have been completed in stages between the 3rd and 1st centuries B.C.E. The Septuagint is quoted by the New Testament writers.

² Luke 1:1-4, "In as much as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, just as they were delivered to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may know the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed."

³ Micah 5:2, "You Bethlehem in Ephrathah, small as you are to be among Judah's clans, out of you shall come forth a governor for Israel, one whose roots are far back in the past, in days gone by." Most Jews understood this to mean that the future king will have

Davidic ancestry, Bethlehem simply being the birthplace of David. It did not mean that the Messiah must be born there.⁴ Jane Schaberg: *The Illegitimacy of Jesus*, p 86-87

⁵ Numbers 18:15:16, “the firstborn of human beings you shall redeem.... Their redemption price, reckoned from one month of age, you shall fix at five shekels of silver.”

⁶ 1 Sam 2:30-35

⁷ Samuel is described three times in 1 Samuel as “ministering to the Lord.” Furthermore, he makes burnt offerings [1 Sam 7:10], which are the preserve of the priesthood as mandated in Leviticus 21:6, “They shall be holy to their God...for they offer the offerings by fire to the Lord.”

⁸ The New Oxford Annotated Bible, 2001, p 39

⁹ Acts 8:9-24

¹⁰ Clementine, *Recognitions*, 3:39

¹¹ Clementine, *Homilies*, 2:16

¹² Malachi 3:1 -- 4:4-5, “See I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me....the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight -- indeed, he is coming.....Remember the teaching of my servant Moses....Lo, I will send you the prophet Elijah before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. He will turn the heart of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents.”

¹³ The Kabbalah, a collection of Jewish mystical traditions, states that the brothers Moses and Aaron are the model for the Messiah and Elijah. “They all arose and said to Moses. ‘Who is your expert disciple? We have heard that it is said, ‘everything should be put aside until Elijah comes. He said to them: ‘Certainly so it is, for he is a knowledgeable disciple...As it is said of Aaron, ‘*He shall be thy spokesman...for I was slow of speech and slow of tongue*,’ for the Holy One, blessed be He, made me slow of speech in the Oral Law, and slow of tongue in the Written Law...so in the future to come, Elijah will be my spokesman. He will come and settle all the doubts, and explain them to us at That Time.” [Zohar 3:27B-3:28a]

¹⁴ Exodus 12:42

¹⁵ Luke 9:30, “Two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was to accomplish at Jerusalem.”

Chapter Three: Zacharias and Mary

¹ In the rabbinic writings, there are numerous stories of Mary, which revolve around the accusation that she was an adulteress. One charge in particular that spread was that Mary had been impregnated by a Roman soldier, Pandera. This was picked up and repeated by Roman rhetorician Celsus, who wrote a tract against Christianity, according to Origen, a third century Church Father.

² See Tim Wallace Murphy and Marilyn Hopkins. Rex Deus: *The True Mystery of*

Rennes-Le-Chateau. The authors propose an interesting theory that there were boarding schools for both boys and girls on the Temple grounds. They also theorize that the girls were impregnated by priests on reaching puberty to maintain the purity of the priestly bloodline.

³ Protovangelium 10:1

⁴ Ibid 12:1-2

⁵ See Lynn Picknett and Clive Prince, *The Templar Revelation: Secret Guardians of the True Identity of Christ*, pp 30-42

⁶ In the absence of any obvious meaning, it has been suggested that the “John gesture” is a reference to Jesus’ second coming, meaning he will return literally from the skies above. This theology, however, would have been alien to Renaissance thinkers.

⁷ Genesis 5:18-24, Hebrews 11:5

⁸ Protovangelium 24:2

⁹ 2 Chronicles is the last book in the order of the Hebrew Bible. However the Books of Chronicles are ranked among the Kethubim, the third section of the Tanach, because they are considered the least important books and not because of dating. The books of the Kethubim did not join the cannon until the second century CE.

¹⁰ Epiphanius, *Adv Haer.* xxvi. 12

¹¹ Deuteronomy 22:25-26, “But if ...a man meets a young woman who is betrothed, and the man seizes her and lies with her, then only the man who lay with her shall die. But to the young woman you shall do nothing; in the young woman there is no offense punishable by death, for this case is like that of a man attacking and murdering his neighbor.”

¹² The original Arabic text has not yet been published in English translation. However, it is available online at www.sacredtexts.com. Translation by Taher Al-Shemaly.

¹³ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 13:10,5, 13:13,5. The Hasmonean high priests John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.E.) and his son Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.E.), were rejected by the Pharisees on the charge that they were both illegitimate. They were the son and grandson of the wife of a high priest who had been taken captive in war, which meant she could no longer be considered the legitimate wife of a high priest.

¹⁴ Joachim Jeremias: *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, page 340

¹⁵ See Jacob Neusner: *The Mishnah, A New Translation*, Yebamot 4.13, p 348 ¹⁶ Mishnah, *Quiddishim*, 4:13

Chapter Four: Angel of the Lord

¹ Genesis 3:24

² Genesis 49:10

³ Mark 3:20, 3:31, Matthew 12:46-48, Luke 8:19

⁴ Malachi 2:1-8

⁵ Jubilees 31:14-15

⁶ 1QSb 4:25

⁷ Protovangelium 13:1

⁸ Ibid 14

⁹ Luke 1:22

¹⁰ See ES Drower, *Peacock Angel*, 1941

¹¹ Gen 6: 1-2, “the sons of God saw that the daughters of man were fair; and they took to wife such of them as they chose.” New Testament, Jude 6-7, “the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains in the nether gloom...just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which likewise acted immorally and indulged in unnatural lust.”

¹² Zech 1:1 ¹³ For information on how Christian scribes corrupted parts of the New Testament, see Bart D Edelman, *Misquoting Jesus*, Harper San Francisco, 2005

Chapter Five: The Kingmakers

¹ 1 and 2 Maccabees are accepted in the Catholic and Orthodox canons. Protestants and Jews regard it as generally reliable history, but not a part of Scripture. Some Protestants regard 1 Maccabees as part of the Apocrypha, useful for reading in the church, though not canonical.

² Josephus, *Antiquities*, 15:378

³ See Israel Knohl, *The Messiah before Jesus*, p59

⁴ Hagigah 2:2

⁵ I Enoch 10:12

⁶ Leviticus 21:9

⁷ See also Jude 6-7

⁸ Protovangelium 13:1

⁹ Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, 74-75

¹⁰ Philo, *Hypothetica* 8.11.1

¹¹ Strabo, *Geography* 16.2.36pp

¹² See J. Magness, *The Archeology of Qumran and the Dead Sea Scrolls* ¹³ See Yizhar Hirshfeld, *Qumran in Context, Reassessing the Archeological Evidence*, p161

¹⁴ Josephus, *Antiquities* 17:298

¹⁵ See Israel Knoll, *The Messiah Before Jesus*

¹⁶ Mishnah, Hagigah 2:2

¹⁷ Jerusalem Talmud, Hagiga 2:2

¹⁸ Mark 3:22

Chapter Six: Sibling Rivalry

¹ The one notable exception is Young Oon Kim, *Unification Theology and Christian Thought*, 1980.

² See Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers, *The Power Of Myth*

³ Hebrews 12:24

⁴ Genesis 4:7

⁵ Genesis 32:13 -- 33:11 ⁶ Psalm: 22:1

⁷ Matthew 11:14

Chapter Seven: Dead Sea Scrolls

¹ Pliny, *Natural History*, V, xv

² Josephus, *Life*, 2:11

³ There is a brief mention of Jesus in *Antiquities*, 18:3,3. It is a blatant interpolation by a later Christian editor. Josephus declares Jesus to be the fulfillment of divine prophecy, the Christ who resurrected after three days, and of whom it may not be lawful to call a man.

⁴ Josephus, *War*, 2:8,12

⁵ 11QTemple 64: 7-12

⁶ See John Allegro, *The Dead Sea Scrolls and The Christian Myth*, pp26-30

⁷ Most notably Robert Eisenman, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Uncovered*. The author has developed a theory that the Qumran was the home of the early church. The Teacher of Righteousness was James, the brother of Jesus. Paul was the Wicked priest. He believes there are no references to Jesus in the Qumran texts, because he only exists as an invention by the Pauline faction. Also Barbara Thierring, *Jesus the Man*, 1992. She postulates that John the Baptist is the Teacher of Righteousness and Jesus the Wicked

Priest, but has engulfed this idea by wild speculations that have discredited it.

⁸ See R. E. Taylor, *Radiocarbon Dating*, 1987, p. 105

⁹ Hershel Shanks, *Biblical Archeological Review*, Mar/April 1993

¹⁰ Gaza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, p.13

¹¹ The source for the story of Jonathan Maccabeus is the First Book of Maccabees chapters 10-13, and Josephus, *Antiquities*, chapter 13.

¹² See, Michael Baigent and Richard Leigh, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Deception*, p. 157

¹³ Daniel 11:30

¹⁴ There was a brief three-year interlude when Herod Agrippa was installed as a vassal king, 41-44 CE.

¹⁵ Verbatim translations taken from the translation of Gaza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 510-512

¹⁶ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18: 3,1

¹⁷ Hymn 14, 20. p. 279

¹⁸ Hymn 18, XVII, 30-35

¹⁹ See Edmundo Lupieri, *The Mandaean: The Last Gnostics*, p. 230

²⁰ Mark 6:20

²¹ Josephus, *Antiquities*, 18: 5,2

²² Hymn 2, 16-17

²³ Hymn 22, 28-29

²⁴ Hymn 14, XV, 1-2

²⁵ Hymn 18, XVI, 35

²⁶ Hymn 18, XVI, 35

²⁷ Hymn 18, XVI, 25-30

²⁸ Hymn 14, XIII, 38-40

²⁹ Hymn 18, XVII,5-6

³⁰ Commentary on Habakkuk, IX, 8-11

³¹ Ibid, XII, 1-5

³² Luke 8:3

³³ Mark 16:1

³⁴ Matthew 11:13

³⁵ Commentary of Psalms, IV, 5-7

³⁶ Hymn 12,7

³⁷ Hymn 12, 10

³⁸ CD 10-11

³⁹ 1QT 15:9-14. The Temple Scroll explains an offering of seven baskets of bread not mentioned in the Mosaic Laws

⁴⁰ “For I assign you a number of days, three hundred and ninety days, equal to the number of the years of their punishment; and so you shall bear the punishment of the house of Israel.”

⁴¹ Ibid, VI, 15-20

⁴² Ibid, VIII, 5

⁴³ Ibid, VII, B2, 14

⁴⁴ Luke 16:10

Chapter Eight: Legacy of Messianic Division

¹ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 1971

² Ephraem, *Hymns on the Nativity* 27:2-3, 18:2

³ Ireneaus, writing in the preface to *Against Heresies Vol III*

⁴ Clementine, *Homilies*, 1:60

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VI, ii

⁷ In the Malay languages spoken in Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia

⁸ See Christopher Knight, Robert Lomas, *The Hiram Key*, p74

⁹ See Jorunn Buckley, *The Mandaean: Ancient Texts and Modern People*

¹⁰ See Edmund Lupieri, *The Mandaean; The Last Gnostics*, p 46. Abel, Seth and Enoch function as intermediaries with man and the divine. Seth was an important figure for the

Dositheans at Nag Hammadi. Enoch was central to the Essenes at Qumran.

¹¹ Edmondo Lupieri, *The Mandaean: The Last Gnostics*, p24

¹² GRS Mead, *Book of John*, p84

¹³ Ibid, p81

¹⁴ Ibid, p71

¹⁵ Ibid, p74

¹⁶ Ibid, p85

¹⁷ Ibid, p85

¹⁸ Ibid, p88

¹⁹ Mk 1:7, Matt 3:11, Luke 3:16, John 1:27

²⁰ See Edmundo Lupieri, *The Mandaean: The Last Gnostics*, p249

²¹ Ibid

²² See Mike Harding, *A Little Book of the Green Man*, Aurium Press, London ,1998

²³ See Wellhausen, *Life of Mohammed*, Encyclopedia Britannica, XVI. 571, 9th Edition

²⁴ See Roberts, Paul William, *In Search of the Birth of Jesus*, 1995.

²⁵ Second Treatise of the Great Seth, VII 49, 55-56

²⁶ See Robert Eisenman, *The New Testament Code*, p101

²⁷ See Akron Darul, *Secret Societies*

²⁸ Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* II, 28, PL 21, 536

²⁹ Röhricht, *Regesta*, p59.

³⁰ F. Gabrieli, *Storici arabi delle Crociate*, Torino 1969, 83-84

³¹ See, Prince and Picknett, *The Templar Revelation*, p

³² “Allocution of Pio Nono against the Free Masons”

³³ See Henry Lincoln, *Keys to the Sacred Pattern*

³⁴ From a letter of criticism sent to the House of the Temple, London. Found folded with copies of the Templar Rule and a copy of Bernard of Clairvaux’s *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, dated 1130.

³⁵ Written by John of Salisbury (1115-1180) in his *Policraticus* dated 1159

³⁶ See Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, p.252

³⁷ Ibid, p.426

³⁸ Ibid, p120

³⁹ See Knight and Lomas, *The Second Messiah*, 2001

⁴⁰ John 1:29

⁴¹ Revelation 14:4

⁴² Revelation 19:14

⁴³ See Trevor Ravenscroft, *The Spear of Destiny*, p16-21

⁴⁴ Ephesians 5:13

⁴⁵ John1:28

⁴⁶ See Tim Wallace-Murphy and Marilyn Hopkins , *Custodians of Truth*, 2006, p126

⁴⁷ See Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, p 252

⁴⁸ Mark 1:6. Matthew 3:4, “his food was locusts and wild honey.”

⁴⁹ Mani was a third century Persian who founded the much persecuted religion of Manichaeism. Understood as a syncretic mix of Zoroastrian, Christian and Buddhist beliefs, it held that the universe was the battleground between two Gods. The physical world was created by the ‘evil God’ of ‘darkness,’ and the high realms of the spiritual world belonged to the ‘good God’ of ‘light.’ Mani claimed to have the key to salvation and to defeat of the material world. Christianity and Islam tried to wipe out Manichaeism, but it resurfaced in the Balkans during the eleventh century in the ‘Bogomil’ movement, so called after a priest named Bogomil.

⁵⁰ See M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1924,

⁵¹ It has often been reported that, of the 56 original signatories of the Declaration of Independence, over 40 were Masons.

⁵² See, *The Hiram Key*, p75-76

⁵³ In a letter to Parley P. Pratt, Heber C. Kimball quotes Joseph Smith: “There is a similarity of Priesthood in Masonry. Brother Joseph says Masonry was taken from the Priesthood, but has degenerated. But many things are perfect.”

⁵⁴ He was quoted by Benjamin F. Johnson, one of his closest friends, “Freemasonry is the apostate endowment, as sectarian religion is the apostate religion.”

⁵⁵ See Jim Marrs, *Rule by Secrecy*, p22

⁵⁶ "From the official documents of French Masonry contained principally in the official "Bulletin" and "Compte-rendu" of the Grand Orient it has been proved that all the anti-clerical measures passed in the French Parliament were decreed beforehand in the Masonic lodges and executed under the direction of the Grand Orient, whose avowed aim is to control everything and everybody in France." From the 1917 Catholic Encyclopedia article Freemasonry citing "*Que personne ne bougera plus en France en dehors de nous*", "*Bull. Gr. Or.*", 1890.

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