

INTRODUCTION

SECTION ONE: Wrap up From Last Class

The Conspiracy Theory

- 1) This is a recognized, dangerous trend
 - a. It is composed of two logical fallacies:
 - i. A ad-hominem attack
 - ii. An appeal to authority
 - iii. (often) ad-hock
 - b. We learn to see them coming, and avoid them!
- 2) It is disproven by the high number of non-Christian academics in Jesus studies
 - a. "Why would a non-Christian want to study Jesus?"
 - i. Because He is the most significant person in human history!
 - ii. Because He is (arguably) the most *interesting* person in human history
 - iii. Because (sadly) many people lose their faith in advanced Christian academia, and then (what else can they do with their degree and school debts?) they become teachers in the field
 - b. Even Christians will tend to don a perspective of "methodological naturalism" while working and publishing, to shelter themselves from accusations of bias
 - i. This should not be confused with an actual naturalistic belief

The Historical Jesus

- 1) The First Quest
 - a. Part One
 - i. Represented first attempt to go beyond the basic text of Scriptures
 - ii. At first, attempts were simply made to harmonize the four gospels and extrapolate a unified story from them
 - iii. Later, attempts started deleting material, adding material to tell new stories

1. Some were simply fictional accounts
2. Some were more serious attempt to recreate "what really happened"
- 3. Gradually, a terminology developed which separated the "Jesus of History" (aka the real person, named Jesus of Nazareth, who really existed) and the "Jesus of Dogma" (aka the Jesus who was developed and worshipped by the later church)**

b. Part Two

- i. David Strauss wrote "The Life of Jesus" in 1835
 1. He rejected all of the miracles of Christ
 2. After Strauss, naturalistic readings retellings of Jesus' life became the norm
 3. The naturalistic version of Jesus became increasingly associated with the "Jesus of History," and miracles were seen as fabrications by the later church
- ii. Johannes Weiss & William Wiede
 1. Answered Strauss, by pointing out the *apocalyptic* nature of Jesus' ministry, which emphasized Jesus' divinity
 2. Bruno Bauer
 - a. Questioned the historicity of Jesus
 - b. This became a major idea, especially in Germany

c. Critical Review

- i. Albert Schweitzer published "The Quest for the Historical Jesus" in 1906, in which:
 1. He coined the term "Quest for the Historical Jesus"
 2. He critiqued the quest as often being no more than a "pale reflection" of the researchers themselves
- ii. Mark Powell also critiqued the movement, claiming that most "histories of Jesus" simply:
 1. Imposed a "grand scheme" over Jesus' life
 2. Excluded the parts of the Gospel that didn't fit

3. Added the information necessary to make the story complete
- iii. Centuries before, Augustine wrote a fitting critique of the first quest for the Historical Jesus: "If you believe what you like in the Gospel, and reject what you don't like, it is not the Gospel you believe, but yourself." – St. Augustine
- iv. *Summary*: by calling most of the Gospels into question, the first quest ultimately determined that one can know virtually nothing about the real "historical Jesus," and ought to thus be agnostic about his real history, while studying the "Jesus of Dogma," about whom we can know much more.
- d. Period of "No-Quest" (1906-53)
 - i. Inspired by Schweitzer's withering critique
 - ii. For nearly half a century, the "Quest to discover the Historical Jesus" was virtually abandoned
 - iii. During this time, Rudolf Boltmann taught that the Historical Quest for the Historical Jesus was both unnecessary and impossible
 - iv. Also during this time, Karl Barth proposed his division between "*Historie*" and "*Geschichte*" and dialectical theology, in part as a response to Schweitzer's dilemmas
- 2) The Second Quest 1953-c1970
 - a. Launched in a series of addresses by Ernst Käsemann
 - i. Käsemann taught that *theological memories* could be used to discover real facts
 1. Basically, one could discover the "Jesus of History" *through* the "Jesus of Dogma"
 2. He renewed interest in the New Testament documents
 - ii. He applied tools of historical analysis to the New Testament
 1. The Criterion of Dissimilarity
 - a. If something is dissimilar to Judaism (what came before)...
 - b. and Christianity (what came after)...

- c. ...it is likely to be true
 - 2. The Criterion of embarrassment
 - a. Something which is embarrassing to later Christians was unlikely to have been fabricated by them
 - 3. Multiple Attestation
 - a. Others later added the criterion of "multiple attestation"
 - i. information which is repeated in multiple independent sources is likely to be true
 - ii. E.g. the crucifixion
 - iii. Summary
 - 1. Käsemann taught that Jesus was likely *not* God to first Christians, since it would be unlikely for Jews to believe that God became man
 - 2. This quest was mostly German
- 3) The Third Quest (1970's-present)
 - a. The methods moved beyond Germany
 - b. New Criterion were added
 - i. Universally accepted:
 - 1. Historical plausibility
 - a. A thing which is plausible, given known historical facts, is more likely to have taken place
 - 2. Rejection/exclusion
 - a. SINCE Jesus was rejected by both the Jews and the Romans, what sort of things He is recorded as saying might have gotten Him killed?
 - b. E.g. claiming to be "Lord," claiming to be "I am," threatening to destroy the temple, etc.
 - 3. Congruence
 - a. Utilizes the other methods: based on what is already established as true, what else seems to fit with them?
 - ii. Debated

1. Traces of Aramaic
2. Traces of a Palestinian Environment
- iii. Contemporary archeology
 1. New finds (including the Gnostic Gospels) were brought into the discussion

4) Critical Review

- a. WLC notes that the criterion of this quest can *only be used positively*. That is, they can be used to *support* the historicity of a passage, but not to disprove it
- b. The contemporary scene is very diverse, with widely divergent ideas about who the Historical Jesus was
- c. The problem of subjectivity still plagues the Historical Jesus project
 - i. J. D. Crossan notes that many scholars in his field, "Do autobiography and call it biography."
- d. Miracles
 - i. It must be noted that "methodological naturalism" continues to be a mainstay of Jesus studies
 - ii. There are two ways evangelicals can confront this:
 1. WLC, as a philosopher, proposes engaging David Hume, and the developments in Western thought that lead to a rejection of miracles in academic research, since:
 - a. The existence of God can be proven from a number of arguments
 - b. The arguments historically used to exclude miracles from academia (aka David Hume's "Miracles") are philosophically fallacious
 - c. Miracles have been observed and even studied scientifically all over the world
 2. (More commonly) we can accept "methodological naturalism" as a valid interpretive framework, without actually becoming atheists in the process!
 - a. When doing Jesus studies, a researcher dons the "white garb" of methodological naturalism, even if they are a Christian

- b. This will reveal different (and sometimes less accurate) information, as seen last week

SECTION TWO: Six Questions

1) "Did Jesus ever even exist?"

- a. Actually, there is more evidence for the existence of Jesus than for many historical figures, including your own great-grand-mother! ☺
- b. **N.T. Wright quote**
- c. (seg. What kind of info?)

2) "Was Jesus a myth?"

- a. Actually, there was very little time between Jesus' death and the NT sources and doc's
 - i. Jesus died in AD 30-33
 - 1. Paul's source may date to AD 40, Gal. 1:18, 1 Cor. 15:3-11
 - 2. Paul wrote Galatians in AD 48
 - 3. Paul wrote 1 Corinthians in AD 55
 - 4. Mark's sources may date to AD 40-50
 - 5. Mark wrote between AD 55-70
 - 6. Matthew & Luke wrote between AD 60-80
 - 7. John wrote between AD 85-95
 - ii. With all these dates, we must subtract 33 to get the distance from Jesus to the sources: the time span is incredibly small!
 - iii. The John Rylands Fragment puts a cap on New Testament
 - iv. *What happened 30 years ago in your community? (Think of events in the mid 80's. Is it reasonable to think we could find good info from that time?)*
- b. Studies have shown that myths take centuries to develop
 - i. There is a natural resistance to the development of myths while the *real history* of the person is still alive
 - ii. Usually, it takes multiple centuries

- iii. Far from the memory of Jesus fading, there were *still people alive* who remembered Jesus, and they are appealed to as support for the New Testament
 - 1. 1 Cor. 15:6
 - 2. John 19:35, 21:24
 - 3. 2 Peter 1:16
- iv. A myth is an actual genre: the New Testament does not fit into the ancient myth genre
 - 1. It claims to be real history
 - a. 2 Peter 1:16
 - b. Luke 1:1-2
 - 2. It contains innumerable historically-verifiable anchor-points
 - a. Luke 3:1-2**
 - 3. It doesn't "feel" like a myth
 - a. C.S. Lewis quote
- c. The stories about Jesus are just a repetition of the ancient myths about dying and rising gods
 - i. This is a very old idea
 - 1. A relic of the first "quest" for the Historical Jesus
 - 2. C.S. Lewis interacts with it because he is not aware of later developments
 - ii. This idea has been rejected by Secular Academia because:
 - 1. Because the similarities are only apparent
 - a. See *WLC*, 247-9
 - b. Actually, the "dying and rising again" motifs are seasonal, and cyclical
 - c. Actually, virgins do not really give birth
 - d. Actually, the gods that die do not really rise again
 - i. Some take up residence in the after-life
 - ii. Some rise spiritually (not bodily)
 - iii. Some did not really die (only wounded, or dismembered, but can be reassembled or healed)

- iv. Some go to "nether-world" and return every season
- v. Mythological gods sometimes procreate through inanimate objects, or without another agent: but in this case, no woman is involved
- vi. Mythological gods sometimes procreate through liaisons with human women: in this case, the women are no longer virgins after the encounters
- vii. The concept of a virgin giving birth, miraculously, with no sexual intervention, is a novelty of the Christian religion

2. Because of the "Jewish Reclamation of Jesus:

- a. Scholars have realized that Jesus and His followers (especially the New Testament) were "Jewish," not Greek
- b. Many distortions of the Bible are undone when we understand the "Jewishness" of the Bible, and of Jesus
- c. Saying Jesus was influenced by Greek mythology is like saying that contemporary, fundamentalist Islam is influenced by Western Cowboy motifs!

d. Actually, most of the earliest documents and sources proclaim Jesus' divinity

3) "Are there any reliable sources about Jesus?"

- a. Cf. Quote
- b. The Bible, and it's sources
- c. Josephus
- d. Tassitus
- e. Etc.

4) "Do the Gnostic Gospels give better information about Jesus?"

- a. Note: There are a number of books not accepted in the Canon
 - i. Apocrypha

1. The Old Testament Apocrypha
 - a. Written between what we call the "Old" and "New" testaments
 - b. It is considered by Protestants as helpful, but not inspired
 2. The New Testament Apocrypha
 - a. Books written by Christians in the late first, early second century
 - b. These books were considered helpful, and quoted by some Church Fathers, but eventually were rejected as fully "Canonical"
- ii. Pseudepigrapha
1. These are books which are falsely ascribed to authors
 2. Christian pseudepigrapha
 - a. Some Christians wrote books in the second century, and used the names of the apostles to give them credence
 - b. Some were motivated by attempts to fill in the gaps in the Gospels, to solve apologetic problems, or to prove a theological point of view
 - c. These were identified and rejected early by the Church Fathers: contemporary academia upholds their decisions
 3. Gnostic and other pseudepigrapha
 - a. These were books written by early Christian heresies
 - b. These books were identified and rejected by the early church, and faded out of history
 - c. Some have recently been rediscovered
- b. Claims: "The Gnostic Gospels are..."
- i. ...the first, and most ancient Gospels
 1. Actually, the four Canonical gospels are more ancient
 2. The Canonical gospels were written between c50-c100 AD (remember Jesus died in AD 33)

3. The earliest Gnostic Gospels date from AD 120 *at the earliest*, and most are much later.
 4. The Gnostic Gospels have many sections that are clearly *derivative*, and assume the existence of Christianity and the Canonical Gospels. Therefore, *could not* have predated them.
- ii. ...Are more accurate than the Canonical Gospels
1. Since they come much later, they are recognized by contemporary scholars as contributing little to Jesus studies
 2. The Gnostic Gospels can provide some insight into second, third, fourth and (perhaps) first century Christianity, but,
 3. After some initial excitement, Jesus scholars have returned to the Canonical Gospels, and to their sources, as the most important sources for information on Jesus
- iii. ...Were rediscovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls
1. This is simply false
 - a. The Dead Sea Scrolls came from a Jewish sect, known as the Essenes, who hid texts at a site known as Wadi Qumran
 - b. This site was discovered between 1946-56. It contained multiple sources of every book of the Old Testament, except Esther. These sources were hundreds of years older than any other Old Testament source, and remain the most important sources for Old Testament text criticism
 - c. This sect was annihilated by the Romans in AD 70, while the New Testament was still being written
 - d. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain no New Testament documents, and *certainly* contain no Gnostic Gospels!
- iv. ...Portrayed Jesus as non-divine

1. Actually, the Jesus of the Gnostics was a super-spiritual figure, who provided a path of enlightenment (similar to the Buddha)
 2. Far from teaching Jesus was "just a man," the Gospel of Thomas (and others) taught that He was divine, and that all could likewise become divine and ascend through secret knowledge
- v. ...Taught a pagan religion which elevated the "sacred feminine"
1. This teaching, common in Egyptian "mystery-cults" was antithetical to Platonism and Neo-Platonism, and thus was not present in the Gnostic Gospels
 2. It would have been abhorrent to the Gnostics, who saw the world (including sex) as evil, and saw the spiritual world as good
- vi. Taught that Jesus had a wife
1. This is based on the Gospel of Mary
 - a. **Show picture** (very fragmented!)
 - b. The text is incomplete: it is hard to know what exactly it says, leaving people to fill in the gaps
 - c. Clearly, Mary is the "chosen disciple" in this gospel, who is supposed to communicate hidden truths
 - d. *We need to remember that as a document written in the 2nd Century, it contributes nothing to our knowledge about Christ*
 - e. However, it is unlikely that even here, Mary is the wife of Jesus, since this would seem to go against Gnostic sensibilities (it would be like giving the Buddha a wife during his period of "enlightenment")
 - f. Also, a more reliable source seems to indicate Jesus remained single (1 Cor. 9:5)
- c. Reality:
- i. The so-called "Gnostic Gospels" are among the documents rejected by the early church

1. They were rejected far *before* the council of Nicea
2. They were not considered for orthodoxy because they failed the tests of:
 - a. Catholicity (use throughout the church/empire)
 - b. Orthodoxy (agreement with other scriptures)
 - c. Authorship (proven authorship by a recognized apostle)
3. They were mentioned by some Church Fathers in early lists of heresies rejected (doctrinally) by the Early Church, in the second and third centuries
4. They have recently been rediscovered
 - a. The so-called "Nag Hammadi Library" was discovered in the Upper Egyptian town of Hag Hammadi in 1945: it contained twelve leather-bound papyrus codices, including the only intact copy of the Gospel of Thomas
 - b. Fragments have been found throughout Syria and north Africa, especially in Egypt
5. Contemporary Scholarship has affirmed their late dating, the non-Christian nature of their theology, and the derivative nature of their writing, placing them clearly *after* the canonical gospels

5) "Did Jesus become God, and the Bible become the Bible, at the Council of Nicea?"

a. Claims:

- i. The divinity of Christ was voted on
- ii. The non-divine gospels (dozens!) were rejected and burned
- iii. All of the major elements of Christian practice, especially the Sabbath, Christmas and Easter, were voted on
- iv. (Implied) The church was corrupted from the influence of Constantine, and the influences of power & wealth

b. Reality:

- i. The Council of Nicea was the first of seven "Ecumenical Councils," presided over by Roman Emperors, and attempting to unify Christianity.

- ii. It is true that the date of Easter was debated
 - 1. This had been an ongoing discussion, which had threatened to split the church in the second century
 - 2. At issue were differences between the solar calendar (used in the Latin West, also known as the Julian Calendar) and the older, lunar calendar used in the west
- iii. Christmas was not debated at this time
- iv. Sunday was not debated at this time
 - 1. Christians from the very earliest centuries worshipped on Sunday
- v. The divinity of Christ was not debated at this time
 - 1. The divinity of Christ was never an "in-house debate"
 - a. It was debated between Christians and Jews
 - i. E.g. Justin Martyr, "Dialogues with Trypho"
 - b. It was debated between Christians and Greeks
 - i. E.g. Origen, "Contre Celsus"
 - 2. However, Christians always worshipped Jesus as God
 - a. Jesus was God in the New Testament
 - b. Jesus was God for the Church Fathers
- vi. The Trinity was debated
 - 1. The question of exactly how God could be "one," while Jesus was both God and distinct from God, was a very complicated issue!
 - 2. The main question at the council of Nicea was Arianism
 - a. Some Christians (as well as later Christians) believed that Jesus was *homoousios*, that is, "of the same nature as God," whereas,
 - b. Arians (and modern Jehovah's witnesses) believed that Jesus was *homoiousios*, "of like substance"
 - c. The content of this debate is very pertinent in contemporary discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses, since they represent a

contemporary resurrection of ancient Arian ideas

3. Ultimately, the question was settled through careful examination of the Scriptures, as well as the use of pre-existing creeds (see my paper)
- vii. ...however, it is simply inaccurate to see any questioning of the divinity of Christ at this time, because *there was no faction at the council of Nicea, or anywhere in the Anti-Nicene Fathers that considered Jesus non-divine*