

The Cambrian Peshier

A Voice of the Desposyni to the Dispersion

Feast for St. Paul's Conversion

January 25th, 2024

Dear Beloved Friends:

What is Happening to Christianity?

It takes time for scholars to process significant archaeological discoveries. The Dead Sea Scrolls, for example, were discovered *circa*. 1948. Confined to the forensic laboratories of researchers for decades, it wasn't until the early 1990s that the Scrolls were made available to the public. It has taken another thirty years to arrive at a consensus for what they mean in the world of scholarship. It will take another decade or two before they will impact the layman and his pastor's sermons.

Of course, there have been other discoveries, such as the Nag Hammadi Library. Processing these discoveries has followed a similar meandering path.

What is happening?

In general, these writings have revived Ebionism, a form of Judaistic Christianity which we catch glimpses of in the New Testament writings, particularly the Book of Acts. Although spoken of disparagingly by church historians (e.g. Eusebius), it seems to be the group of Jewish Christians which pursued the Apostle Paul as a notorious apostate and for whom its leadership consisted of James the Just (the brother of Jesus and the first bishop of Jerusalem in the New Testament record) and of the Apostles who remained with him in Jerusalem.

[Our many Peshiers and books have discussed this view at length over the past thirty years: much of which can be found at the website: <https://2046AD.org>]

This new Ebionism has resulted in new attacks on Paul's position in the early Church and in particular, his Epistles which constitute the larger portion of our New Testament.

While throughout the Christian centuries, Paul has had his detractors; for the Celtic Church, he was still beloved, but because the Church finds its origins in “Jerusalem” (i.e. James, cf. Gladys Taylor *Our Neglected Heritage*) and not Rome, it is neither Paul nor Peter who is considered its apostolic authority. Consequently, his writings have always been held to be less than fully canonical.

As for modern groups with Arian (or anti-Trinitarian) tendencies and which have a renewed interest in the ritual observances of Judaic law, they have seized upon the Scrolls to condemn Paul as an apostate and all his followers, especially among modern Evangelicals, as well. They charge modern Evangelicals with Marcionism.

Unfortunately, the accusation is justified. Many Evangelicals have embraced dispensational doctrines and have repudiated the Older Testament. They have even discarded the teachings of Jesus as antiquated and irrelevant. Like the Marcionites of old, their New Testament consists in the Epistles of Paul, and largely excludes the Gospels.

The New Testament: Not Apostolic

The first thing that must be understood is that the New Testament, as it has come down to us, does not represent the writings of the Apostles. Aside from Paul’s Epistles, a leader who was not one of the Twelve and whose status and role must be defined differently, all that we have left are the Gospels and the General Epistles which bear Apostolic provenance.

As for the Gospel of John and the Epistles which bear his name, we have established that they could not possibly be the work of the Apostle, but rather that of the “Beloved Disciple,” who we have demonstrated was Lazarus and who later becomes Barnabas in the Book of Acts (See “Obedience to the House of Bethany Peshier” and the “Melchizedek Peshier”). As Paul’s benefactor, advocate and colleague, he represents a yet unrecognized figure in the formation of the New Testament Church, but Barnabas was not, strictly speaking, an apostle, either. In fact, he was *anti-apostolic*.

The book of Revelation is clearly the work of a “John” but the earliest fathers (Papias, Polycarp, *et al*) never call him the apostle (that was Irenaeus’ mistake) but rather identify him as “John the Elder” - probably our John Mark of the “paraclete brigade” (see the Melchizedek Peshier, Sept. 2023). We think the internal evidence is overwhelming, but must wait for elucidation another time.

The Gospels of Mark and Luke are obviously not the work of apostles, although the fathers declare that "Mark" represents that of our John Mark and his notes taken from Peter's reminiscences and sermons. Both Mark and Luke are numbered among the Seventy by Hippolytus.

As for the General Epistles, James and Jude are the works of the Lord's brothers (not the apostles) - also known as the "Desposyni". Hebrews is the work of Barnabas according to Tertullian, who is our earliest witness.

1st Peter is acknowledged to be written with the scribal assistance of John Mark (or less likely, Silvanus, 5:12, 13), who was probably the person who composed 2nd Peter - with Peter's approval, of course, who was martyred shortly thereafter. It was written in anticipation of the themes we find in the Book of Revelation and addressed to the same refugee communities in Asia Minor.

None of these writings can be said to be truly apostolic in terms of authorship but certainly bear apostolic "certification." While the Apostles appear to have had a role of validating the Christian message, as "unlearned and ignorant men" (Acts 4:13), it is difficult to believe they were responsible for the sometimes breathtaking compositions of the books of the New Testament.

That leaves us with Matthew remaining. It is not the work of an apostle either, but a redacted version of the Hebrew "Gospel according to the Nazoraeans" which could have been sourced from Matthew's shorthand, but probably was a compilation of notes assembled by James and also Stephen as the heir apparent to the episcopal throne. Stephen's defense of Acts 7 is solidly grounded in Matthew's account.

In the final analysis, the writings of the New Testament - outside that of the Pauline Epistles - should be considered "Desposynic" rather than apostolic. While they contain, here and there, the teachings of the Twelve (e.g. Peter's sermons recorded in Acts), none of them can be considered as a forthright presentation of "apostolic doctrine."

The Clementines: the Alternative Apostolic New Testament

There is an alternative New Testament in the Clementine Recognitions and Homilies which ostensibly contain the "canons" and "constitutions" as elucidated by the various apostles collectively and individually. It is from such that we have "The Didache" or a short treatise called "The Teachings of the Apostles."

We agree with William Whiston that these works are based upon 1st Century accounts but because they were edited later by Catholic partisans (Rufinus in particular), outside of "The Didache" they cannot be relied upon as stand-alone source material. Although scholars have carefully parsed the originals from Rufinus' obvious editorializing, they still seem to be contrived interlocutions. It is difficult to believe that they represent the actual, real-time sayings of the Apostles.

Modern biblical scholars have begun to question the whole tapestry of apostolic Christianity. Robert Eisenman's impressive tomes often take us down the convoluted paths of identity switching in the New Testament and he wonders out-loud whether there were ever really "12" Apostles at all. The notion of "apostles" might have been created as a substitute narrative to replace the subversive activities of the "Davidians" especially the "brothers" of Jesus who also share the same names as the apostles: James, Simon, Judas, and Joses (and if we include others of the clan, such as John Mark, we have another "John" in place of the Apostle).

The Church of the Paracletes

But we need not go down that hapless path. As we have explained elsewhere, the Fourth Gospel clearly diminishes the role of the apostles - especially Peter - but also that of the Lord's brethren, who do not "believe" until after Christ's Resurrection. Without naming him, the author of the Fourth Gospel wants the world to know that it is not James or Peter who is the authentic and original "friend" of Christ, but the Beloved Disciple, who was so "from the beginning" and is alone the guardian of the Jesus Movement.

The final chapter has Peter asking Jesus, "What shall this man do?" to which Jesus responded in effect: "None of your business, he's my servant not yours." One is tempted to anticipate that the Author is preparing a polemic against the emerging doctrine of apostolic succession and the notion of an "apostolic see." But we don't see it materialize until the Johannine Epistles many years later.

We think that this Gospel was composed by Barnabas (aka Lazarus) in Cyprus after his split with Paul. Barnabas and his nephew, John Mark, were upset at the divisiveness which arose in Antioch between Paul, Peter and the emissaries of James from Jerusalem. This disappointing falling-out occurred in the afterglow of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. Barnabas was, at first, with Paul and opposed the "Judaism" of the Jamesian Church. However, he came to also oppose the free-wheeling "Herodianism" of Paul's eclectic heterodoxy.

Even though Barnabas would resurface in Paul's Epistles as a shadow apostle (1 Corinthians 9:6 with another mysterious "Stephanos" - "Little Stephen") and John Mark would be summoned by Paul back to Rome with Timothy (1 Timothy 4:11), Divine providence would not be so favorable.

John Mark would be troubled that Paul so quickly dismissed James' ruling against eating "meats offered to idols," which he was about to teach the new converts (at the onset of the Second Mission) in Galatia, Corinth, and elsewhere. It would surface in an anonymous condemnation of the Nicolaitanes in Revelation (2:15-16). While Mark would interpret Paul's writings irenically, rather than critically (2 Peter 3:15-16), he would point out that Paul's teachings were open-ended and allowed for misinterpretation and doctrinal problems among his converts, if not outright apostasies.

Problems with Paul's doctrine in the New Testament era have not gone unnoticed by church historians. The one easily recognizable correction is that of Paul's "faith alone" doctrine which James refutes with his "faith without works is dead" argument. But there are others, such as Paul's disobedience against James' Noahide ruling in Acts 15 (cf. Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8; 10). However, Paul's latent Docetism (Philippians 2:7, 8) would be a more serious error requiring a refutation by Barnabas/Lazarus in his "the Word made flesh" doctrine iterated frequently in the Fourth Gospel and his Epistles.

In Paul's Defense

Like many churchmen, Isaac Newton would lay the blame of the heretical "Paulinism," not at its source in Paul, but on those who would come later:

[Apostasy] began to work in the disciples of Simon [Magus], Menander, Carpocrates, Cerenthius, and such sorts of men as had imbibed the metaphysical philosophy of the Gentiles and Cabalistical Jews, and were thence called Gnosticks. John calls them Antichrists . . . (Observations, Anodos Edition, p. 80)

In his defense, Paul's readers do not correctly parse his statements. The Epistle to the Galatians, for example - which may be his more emotional and less disciplined of his epistles - nevertheless, is prefaced in its opening statements as a commentary upon the "Jews' religion" - i.e. Judaism - which, as a student of Gamaliel (Acts 5:34, cf. 22:3), he knew something about. This opening disclaimer which he states twice (1:13 & 14) controls the scope and definition of terms throughout the entire Epistle. For Paul, this "Judaism" was "Phariseeism" which taught that *Moses received an oral law at Mount Sinai along with the written law*. We know the written law

as the Decalogue and the statutes (Exodus 20-23). **But when Paul said “the law given at Sinai,” it was this heretical corpus of the Pharisaical oral tradition – received by angels - which he denounced: the very same “traditions of the elders” condemned by Jesus Christ (Matthew 15:2).** Ignorant Gentiles would mistake “the law” to be a Pauline repudiation of the moral law, a misreading which continues to this day and which was a thing warned against by John Mark (aka 2 Peter 2:16): Pauline teachings which “the unlearned” will “wrest to their own destruction.”

Paul’s detractors, of course, were “former” Pharisees who had become “Christians” who wanted to still keep these “traditions” - circumcision, various extraneous sabbatical standards, washings, kosher laws, etc. - and in general, disfellowship themselves from Gentile believers.

John Mark’s “Revelation of Jesus Christ” would take turns denouncing these Pharisees, Sadducees, and Paulinist libertines in its early chapters. And those who see the book as simply an “anti-Paul” polemic conveniently overlook these other allusions.

We must not forget that Mark as Peter’s amanuensis refers to Paul as “our beloved brother,” even if not an apostle, whose writings contain “a wisdom given unto him” (v. 15). In saying this, Mark, if not Peter, offers a clear ratification of Paul’s Epistles when properly understood. Thus, while Paul was rejected by the Jerusalem Church after James was gone, he was clearly accepted by the Church of the Paracletes, the Church of the Desposynic Succession, of the Bethany family, the Seventy, and the Church of the Westward Expansion.

As we have shown elsewhere (*The House of Bethany*, Stivers, 2007 – an earlier book not to be confused with the Peshier by that name), it was not Paul’s so-called “Docetism” which troubled the writer of the Johannine Epistles, but rather the anti-messianic doctrine of the emerging apostolic succession which was attempting to supplant the Desposynic caliphate among the Gentiles. It was the emerging apostolic episcopacy which rejected the episcopacy of “the Father and the Son” which became the real danger.

Paul’s Conversion

Paul’s first conversion account as recorded in the Book of Acts was vetted and accepted by Barnabas (Acts 9:27). Like it had been for Stephen, Paul saw the resurrected Christ who manifested Himself from Heaven.

Paul's later encounters and visions with Christ occurred long after his split with Barnabas and appear to be problematic. We have reason to believe that Paul was adrift and confused, much like a shell-shocked soldier from the trenches.

He clearly disobeyed the warnings of the prophets to not to go to Jerusalem. While Paul may have felt this was the only path to gaining an audience with the Emperor, it still remains questionable as to whether that was even desirable, unless somehow in Paul's visions, God taught him his destiny: to be the nemesis of Judaism and the destroyer of the sacred city. His appearance in the historical records of Josephus as "Saulus" the rioter and Vespasian's war counselor may have been what he foresaw (cf. the Qumran Peshier, Thanksgiving, 2020).

This remains an unsettled chapter in Church history which may never receive a final resolution. But we ought to take heed to Paul's admonition in Romans 14:4,

Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?

A Servant of Jesus,

James

Collect for the Day:

O God, by the preaching of your beloved Paul you have caused the light of the Gospel to shine throughout the world, Grant, we pray, that we, having his wonderful conversion in remembrance, not be in disobedience to the heavenly vision, but to renew our dedication that all the world may hear it again in every age; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

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The Cambrian Peshier is the pastoral epistle of the Cambrian Episcopal Church of the Grail, a fellowship and abbey adhering to a spiritual tradition from ancient Wales. We use the Authorized Version of the Bible (King James Version) as our default translation and the Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopalian Church for liturgical guidance. We are not an affiliate of any denomination.

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