THE HOUSE OF BETHANY:

A Study on Footwashing, the Johannine Community & the Family of Jesus

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ABSTRACT

The following study shows that the Apostle John was not the author of the Fourth Gospel, at least within the modern definition of authorship. Rather, it appears to have been the result of collaboration among the members of the Bethany family – Lazarus, Martha, and Mary Magdalene in particular – who were benefactors and sponsors of the Essene community, John the Baptist, and Jesus. Lazarus succeeded Jesus as the kinsman-redeemer of the Messianic harem and developed a theology which coincided with that mission. The Fourth Gospel and the three "Johannine" Epistles reflect that development and provide a basis for understanding why the Bethany Community was marginalized by the general Christian movement. The descendants of Jesus are to be found in the "House of Bethany." The various rites of footwashing are distinguishing features of this Community and are the marks by which its migrations can be identified. The study ends with the Community's presence in southern France.

Cover design by Karey Lynn Stivers

See commentary on inside back cover

Preface

The following is an internal document of the Cambrian Episcopal Church of the Grail. It is not meant for general circulation. It was written for those Catechumens who have reached a level of commitment to this ministry by which they are known as "Friends of the Grail Abbeys."

The House of Bethany may be advertised on the Grail Church website.[1] The reason is to promote interest in the Catechumen Program. At a future time, edited versions of this book may appear in general circulation. What you have in your hands is the complete edition, unless otherwise indicated.

Use the enclosed information with great care. You have been entrusted with unique information which is both challenging and rewarding. Your joy may cause you to forget that the uninitiated will not understand, and in not understanding, may exhibit hostility. The author has taken a great risk in making this material available to you. He could have simply communicated the information orally to his children and closest confidantes. But because he believes a new day dawns in the Kingdom of God, he felt it was time to put it into print.

There is more to be told. Another volume is planned to continue the story. The author wants to avoid the distractions of notoriety until the work is completed. For now, only a handful of individuals have this information, individuals which the author hopes will, at some future time, be instrumental in funding and advocating the next great venture of the Messianic Kingdom.

"That He might rule from the Tree,"

- The Author

2020 entry: Most revisions in this edition are grammatical corrections or typographical. Substantive additions or subtractions will be noted in the footnotes.

[1] As of 2020, the Grail Church does not have a presence on the web. Contact author by post for inquiries or jwstivers1@gmail.com.

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INTRODUCTION

We live in the shadow of the past - and ironically, like a shadow, our knowledge of the past often becomes elusive, mysterious, and distorted – but never entirely disconnected. Beneath our consciousness, the past molds us, shapes us and impels us. In our quest to control our futures, we rebel by either ignoring the past or by reinventing it. But again, like a shadow, the past cannot be disconnected from the reality which gave it life. Ultimately, despite our best attempts, it returns to frustrate us, sometimes to torment us, always to remind us.

The study of Christian antiquities is a long, wearisome process which few endeavor with any determination. It certainly is not profitable, unless it is embellished to satisfy the public desire for something sensational or to decide a current controversy. Except for the small band of paid scholars in our seminaries and universities, only the curious will venture the journey.

The material which you are about to read is not "received" information. It was not passed down in any coherent body of knowledge or catechetical instruction. It was not embodied in a creed for which any known religious institution is its guardian. It does not even represent esoteric knowledge in the sense of an oral tradition which has been passed-down from adept to initiate. Like a shadow, it was discovered.

This study represents an archeological recovery and reconstruction of a tradition – a heritage – lost to us until the discovery of a collection of parchments found in the desert: the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Nag Hammadi Library. Tenured academics will look upon this study as just another thesis to join an over-crowded field of existing theories on the significance of these collections. But it is written with a different purpose in mind. We are addressing issues of faith here. While nothing in these pages can be proven with any final certainty to the skeptical and indecisive mind of the scientist,

there is much to redirect and validate our faith. It is not so much that these lost parchments have provided anything new and startling, as it is that they have given us a new *perspective* on the records we already have: the Bible and the Patristic Writings of the Church. The shadow of the past is reasserting itself.

The printed Bible provided Europe with a new source of spiritual authority during the Protestant Reformation. It helped free society from the bondage of medieval institutions. However, it also created a new form of idolatry which replaced the much maligned Catholic Mass and the medieval adoration of saints. Bibliolatry and *the worship of words* became the new icons of veneration. By the 20th Century, the world was trapped again in an encrustation of accepted and approved *interpretations* of the Sacred Book.

It was never possible that a society so completely disconnected in time and distance from the culture in which the Bible was created could have competently and authoritatively interpreted it and produced a "biblical" society in which justice and happiness prevailed. Something as simple as the Ten Commandments is full of vagaries. "Thou shalt not steal" seems straight forward enough. But the notion of "stealing" presupposes the concept of "property rights." Unless you can define "property," you cannot define theft. Many cultures differ in their definition of property.

The 19th Century discovered this cultural variation on the question of human sexuality. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" presupposes marriage. European explorers and the Christian missionaries who followed them discovered that marriage customs varied widely from one culture to another. What seemed obvious to a pulpit-pounding evangelist of the Tidewater was not so obvious to the Tahitians.

The commandment "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" presupposes a doctrine of God that was understood by the ancient Semites, not a word-parsing, Presbyterian divine. Hence, we are faced with the need to understand the culture in the time these pronouncements were made. That is why these aforementioned archeological discoveries have been so helpful. They have given us the hermeneutical keys we need to decode the texts we already have.

The Bible contains many anomalies, some say "contradictions." I prefer to hold my glass as half-full rather than half-empty, but either way, the anomalies must be explained. They are the shadows which haunt us, that won't go away.

The first leader of the Christian Church was James the Just, the brother of Jesus. We know this from Church Tradition. But we also know this from the Bible itself. The 1st General Council of Christianity is found in Acts 15, and it is James who renders the verdict . . . not Peter, not Paul.

If this is the case, why doesn't the Bible tell us more about him? Why is he a silent, shadowy figure who appears, ever so briefly in Acts, and then in the Epistle of James, which tells us nothing about the man or how he came to be – next to Jesus - the founder of our faith?

In the Gospel of John, the climax of Jesus' career was the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Why is this story lacking in the synoptic Gospels? Far more inferior points of note are shared between them – why not this one?

One begins to feel the impression of a "story behind the story" in these anomalies. What might it be? That is the nagging question which will be faced squarely and honestly in these pages.

The Fathers of the Church did not tell us everything they knew. In 1128, St. Bernard of Clairvaux composed the rule for the Knights Templar. He was the best connected monk of his day. In the rule for this order of warrior monks, he laid down a specific requirement on all the Knights to make "obedience to Bethany and the house of Mary and Martha."[2] This strange and bewildering reference lacks any historical context in traditional theology to explain it.

How could these men render "obedience to Bethany"? Bethany was a ghost town in Palestine. What kind of legacy did Mary and Martha leave that it could be identified as a "house"? He didn't say, but apparently, the Templars knew. When you are finished with this study, you will know, too.

The noonday sun will unite the shadow with the man.

[2] *Rossylyn: Guardian of the Secrets of the Holy Grail* , Tim Wallace-Murphy & Marilyn Hopkins, Element Books, 1999, p. 105 (Footnote 37: *The Sign and the Seal*, Graham Hancock, p. 334 Mandarin Paperbacks, London, 1993)

Recommended Reading 2020: This book serves as a sequel to the textbook edition of *Hierogamy & the Married Messiah*. Also, the author's previous work of *The Mother Heart of God, A Study on the Pneumatic Role of the Woman* (1997, 2003), especially in its discussion of pre-Bar Kochba Christianity as the true world fertility religion would prepare the reader for this study and the appendices which follow.

Chapter One

THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

The Early Fathers tell us that each Gospel writer had a purpose in mind when writing their accounts. Matthew's Gospel is the most complete and balanced account of the life and message of Jesus. Written in Hebrew, we are told that it was intended as a general record of His ministry from the Jewish perspective. It emphasizes the Messianic prophecies fulfilled by Jesus and His Davidic lineage.

Clement of Alexandria, as does Papias, tells us that Mark was an abridged edition of notes he kept from Peter's preaching. It emphasizes the Lord's miracles and His demonstrations of Divine power. It appealed to the Roman mind, which proclaimed Caesar as "a son of God" and needed to see Jesus as more powerful than Caesar if He was to be taken seriously.

Luke, Paul's associate, tells the story from Mary's perspective, the mother of Jesus. In that account we have the stories of His infancy and personal information that could have only come from Mary.[3] It fulfilled a special need in the Gentile churches for better knowledge of the personal side of Jesus and of His teachings on topics of concern to them.

These are tidy explanations which are a part of the apologetic for why the Gospels differ so much from each other. Even though these explanations carry some truth to them, they cast shadows.

For example, it is important to remember that none of the Gospels came originally with their titles - that is, their authorship cannot be found in the texts

[3]Phillip Schaff: *History of the Christian Church,* Vol. 1, p. 662 – "It is the Gospel for women."

themselves. Most people do not know this. The headings and sources are supplied by Church Tradition. There is nothing in the title or the text of Matthew which tells us that Matthew is the author. The same is true for Mark, Luke, and John.

Why does a writer choose to remain anonymous? There might be several reasons. Most often, pseudonyms are chosen by authors to protect themselves from public ridicule or persecution. That is why many books are published posthumously. There might be other reasons, such as modesty, but for the most part, historically, the desire to avoid negative social consequences is the motive.[4]

In the case of the Gospels they were unlike the Epistles in the sense that they were meant for general circulation. They were more likely to fall into the hands of hostile adversaries. It is understandable that the names of the authors were left out of the text.

It is also quite obvious that they were "redacted," a popular term in the lexicon of theologians. "Redaction" is an editorial process in which an author's writing or a collection of writings is arranged and seamed together, with portions excised, for publication for a particular audience. Sometime early in the 2nd Century, the Four Gospels were *redacted* to become the official statements of the Church concerning the life and message of Jesus Christ. As to be expected, material which might not fit the mission of the Church – *as it saw itself at the time* – was excised as either unnecessary or sensitive. The Gospel of John admits as much in narrowing its pericope to matters relating to eternal life:

> *And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.*
>
> - 20:30-31

Mundane issues, such as the identities of the relatives of Jesus, were either irrelevant to the Christian community at the time of this redaction or it was deliberately garbled to protect them.

[4]Scholars also tell us that religious groups in ancient times would sometimes write books to support their cause and then assign the names of prestigious persons to them to provide additional validation.

This process, however noble, had its price. If the motive was the latter, garbling their identities in the texts marginalized them and diminished their influence. If the family of Jesus had become irrelevant, then their absence in the biblical texts represents the final stages of their marginalization. In either case, it reflects the adoption of a new mission for the Church, perhaps even an apostasy. The definition of the Church during this redaction process (probably immediately following the Bar Kochba rebellion) was different from the one a century earlier after Christ's Ascension.

Did John write the Fourth Gospel?

When it comes to the Gospel of John, we are faced with an even more complicated issue of authorship that has sometimes perplexed Church scholars. While Luke presents himself as a gatherer of information from eyewitnesses (1:1-4), the author of John emphasizes his Gospel as the first-hand account of an eyewitness (21:24) - yet he does not declare himself. Church Tradition tells us that John the Apostle is the author, yet the internal evidence points to someone else. If the author had apostolic authority, it was imperative that he declare himself. Paul did so on many occasions. John did so in writing the Apocalypse, a highly-charged and anti-Roman document written at a penal colony on the island of Patmos! If John did not care for anonymity in writing Revelation, how was it that he carefully guarded his identity in the Gospel, supposedly written at the peaceful end of his life and personally handed to his disciples? It suggests the possibility that the writer was not the Apostle John and may not have been an apostle at all.[5]

Because the author claims to have been an actual eyewitness of the events he describes, that fact obviously complicated the redaction process. It was impossible for a later editor to entirely delete problematic references or interject ideas which would harmonize it with emerging Church Tradition, this without creating a disjointed and awkward product. That is one reason why John is not considered a "synoptic" Gospel.

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[5]It might come as some surprise to laymen to discover that there has ever been any controversy over the authorship of the Fourth Gospel. It might even be considered impious to suggest that someone other than the traditional John actually wrote it. On religious topics, we are often deeply troubled by new information which might disrupt traditions which give us comfort. If we find out that John did not write the Gospel which bears his name, what comes next? Will it overturn the value of Church Tradition altogether? That would be the typical response. But the scholar would know that there is more than one Church Tradition. He would look upon this discovery as an opportunity to find a new, and perhaps a more authentic, Church Tradition. That ought to be the goal of every serious student of Christian antiquities.

The very identity of the author is an example of this problem. His identity is well-known to the first readers of this Gospel:

> *This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true.*
>
> - 21:24

Obviously, the very anonymity of this disciple was a deliberate device of a later redactor, either to protect the author or to diminish him. If the original author was John, there would have been no need or desire for anonymity. The redactor would not have felt compelled to interject that anonymity, unless very grave consequences – in his mind, at least – would have resulted from that divulged information, if someone other than John actually wrote it.

Other complications to a Johannine authorship present themselves. Further consideration must be made of our Lord's prediction that both James and John would suffer martyrdom. In Mark 10:39, Christ tells them both that they will surely "drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized." No record is made of John's death in the Scriptures as there is for his brother James. Then again, it is curious to note that John is no longer mentioned with Peter in the book of Acts after James' execution. One must remember that Acts is a sketchy account of the origins of the Church by Luke, presumably a later convert.[6] The hero of Acts is Paul and its early chapters merely serve as an introduction of his ministry to the Gentiles. There is little or no biographical information provided for most of the Twelve Apostles. Indeed, in the Syriac tradition John shares the same feast day with his brother James commemorating their martyrdom. And while that alone cannot be taken as proof of an *early* death for John, it does suggest that a *natural* death – as later Tradition would claim – does not square accurately with Christ's prediction.

That the Apostle John authored the Gospel which bears his name was asserted by Irenaeus in his controversy with the Valentinian Gnostics. He is our best source. Irenaeus, of course, was the second-generation disciple of John through Polycarp and Papias. He received this knowledge through his catechetical training. He later became the bishop of Gaul in Lyons and a leader in the Early Church. This is a serious source that cannot be easily dismissed. Even if the internal evidence of the Fourth Gospel points to someone other than

[6]Although Hippolytus names him as one of the Seventy, a second-tier of apostles commissioned by Jesus.

John, it is still necessary that we re-examine Irenaeus' claim.[7]

Scholars have noted that Papias - who Irenaeus says was a student of the Apostle - mentions another John of Asia Minor, sometimes, called "John the Elder," other times "John the Theologian" or "John the Evangelist." They generally point out a confusion of this John with John the Apostle. What adds to the uncertainty is the New Testament practice of ascribing the title "Apostle" to men who were not one of the Twelve. Paul and Barnabas were called "apostles" (Acts 14:14). It is very possible that this John the Elder was addressed as an "apostle" perhaps being one of the Seventy, but not one of the Twelve. Or, he may have been a son of John the Apostle. When one considers that this man lived to "the time of Trajan," if he had been the traditional Apostle John, then he would have been well over a hundred years old.[8]

Most scholars follow Church Tradition – Irenaeus in particular - and assign a late date to this Gospel, as late as the end of the first century. Yet again, the internal evidence points to an early date. The author provides detailed descriptions of places and traditions which could only be appreciated or even understood by people who lived prior to the devastation of the Jewish revolt (70 AD). It would scarcely have any meaning for Gentiles living in far away Asia Minor after familiar landmarks had been obliterated by invading armies. Reference is sometimes made to the author's allusion to Peter's martyrdom as support for a later date (21:18-19), but I think it is safe to affirm that the Gospel has two endings (20:30-31; 21:24-25) and that the latter must have been an addendum written later after these events had occurred.

At this point in the discussion, it might help if we revise our understanding of authorship. We cannot impose our modern conception upon the ancients.

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[7]Internet *Catholic Encyclopedia* entry: "Of still greater importance is the testimony of St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons (d. about 202), linked immediately with the Apostolic Age as he is, through his teacher Polycarp, the disciple of the Apostle John. The native country of Irenaeus (Asia Minor) and the scene of his subsequent ministry (Gaul) render him a witness of the Faith in both the Eastern and the Western Church. He cites in his writings at least one hundred verses from the Fourth Gospel, often with the remark, "as John, the disciple of the Lord, says". In speaking of the composition of the Four Gospels, he says of the last: "Later John, the disciple of the Lord who rested on His breast, also wrote a Gospel, while he was residing at Ephesus in Asia" (Adv. Haer., III, i, n. 2). As here, so also in the other texts it is clear that by "John, the disciple of the Lord," he means none other than the Apostle John.
http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08438a.htm

[8] 2020 footnote: Readers would do well to keep in mind the several "Johns" of the New Testament Church and also the etymology of the name derived from "yonah" for "dove" applied as an epithet.

Just as a *John* Mark recorded for Peter and just as Luke recorded for Mary and other first witnesses, so I think by a similar process, this John may have become the author for the "beloved disciple." He provided apostolic sanction for someone who might not have had the stature to publish and circulate a writing in the churches on his own authority.

A careful reading of Papias can be cited to support such a view:

> *John's Gospel* ***was made public and given to the Churches*** *by John while he was still in the flesh.*[9] (emphasis added)

Considering that there is a difference between "writing" a book and "publishing" it (i.e. making it public), it is possible that this John, whomever he was, came into possession of an older text of this Gospel and did not publish it for perhaps many years because of its esoteric content. Notice, also, that his Gospel was "given to the Churches," an expression which suggests some kind of formal bequest. Irenaeus may have simply failed to see the distinction and assumed that "to publish" meant the same as "to write it."[10]

To further illustrate the problem with sources:

> *Bishop Polycrates of Ephesus (ca. 190) preserved by Eusebius. In listing the 'great luminaries' who have 'fallen asleep' in Asia, Polycrates mentions first Philip the apostle, whom he confuses with Philip the evangelist of Acts, and his daughters and then John, 'who leaned on the Lord's breast, who was a priest, wearing the sacerdotal breastplate, both martyr and teacher.' It is notable that he does not call John an apostle, as he does Philip!*
>
> *- The Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary on the Bible*[11]

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[9]This is not a direct quote from Papias but edited information from a later writer, usually Eusebius, who had access to Papias' writings which are no longer extant. Coming from Fragment 13 of the Vatican Codex Alexandrius, it reads in full: *Here begins the discussion of the Gospel according to John. John's Gospel was made public and given to the Churches by John while he was still in the flesh. An inhabitant of Hieropolis by the name of Papias, John's beloved disciple, has stated as much in the exoteric, that is, the last, portions of his five books. [He made a correct copy of the Gospel at the dictation of John. Of course, the heretic Marcion, who had been censured by John on the ground of different doctrine, was rejected by him. He had delivered to him writings or epistles from the brethren who lived in the Pontus.]*

[10]Don't' forget, this is the man who insisted that Jesus was approaching fifty years of age at the time of His Crucifixion (*Against Heresies*, XXII.5)

[11]Abingdon Press, 1980 p. 709. This priestly status mistakenly ascribed to John will become important later in our discussion.

As for the esoteric content, the Fourth Gospel was universally known by the Early Fathers as "the spiritual Gospel." According to Clement of Alexandria, Mark was an abridged edition of Peter's teachings which left out the esoteric doctrines. One of the stories the traditional Mark left out was the raising of Lazarus. This miracle was considered a part of the esoteric tradition, which, of course, is the climax of the Fourth Gospel narrative.[12]

Anyone who has read the Gospels knows that the Fourth Gospel is different from the others. Like Mark, it does not give an account of Christ's birth and early life. Rather, it begins with a theological prologue and then proceeds with a historical account starting with the ministry of John the Baptist. This Gospel provides many discourses by Jesus not found in the others. And it asserts mystical significance to certain events in Jesus' life (e.g. his pierced side, 19:35). It is very pro-Galilean and anti-Jewish (in terms of the religious establishment), yet somehow offers privileged information from behind the scenes that could only have been known by a well-connected individual. It presents an unflattering picture of our Lord's brethren, asserting that they did not believe in Him, not until after the Resurrection anyway (7:5). The disciples, as in the other Gospels, believe, but do not understand (16:12).

There is only one true hero in the story itself, a hero who never disbelieves, one who is always faithful, and one who has access to inside information: **the disciple whom Jesus loved**. Identifying who that disciple might have been has tantalized Church scholars from the earliest times. The identity of this disciple provides the identity of the author and the founder of the Johannine Community.

The Beloved Disciple

The Fourth Gospel never provides clues which would lead us to believe that John is the Beloved Disciple. In the presumed introduction of this anonymous disciple, he is a hearer of John the Baptist who joins Andrew in following Jesus (1:35-40). We know it is not Peter, nor should it be James or

[12]Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark*, Harvard University Press, 1973. This book is an analysis of a private letter from Clement to a monk in Palestine. Among other things, it provides an excerpt from this larger version of Mark which seems to be part of the story of the raising of Lazarus. Apparently, this resurrection was considered one of the mysteries of the Church, the details of which were not allowed to be mentioned publicly. In our existing Mark, there seems to be excised text between 10:45-46. Jesus is leaving for Jerusalem (10:32 cf. 10:1) only to turn around for Jericho without explanation. The longer Markesan text inserts the raising of Lazarus and a return to Jericho in this gap.

John because the other Gospel accounts tell us that they did not follow Jesus until after He called them from their fishing nets. Nor were they ever followers of John the Baptist.

In the second instance, the anonymous disciple has become "the disciple whom Jesus loved." The scene is the Last Supper and Peter is soliciting his assistance in getting privileged information concerning the Lord's betrayer (13:23-25). We naturally might think that his presence at the Last Supper means that he was one of the Twelve. But it is possible that others were present such as "the women," household servants, the owner of the house in which the Supper was celebrated, and other close disciples. This possibility will be explored later.[13]

In the third account, the anonymous disciple is shown entering the house of the High Priest to witness the trial of Jesus. Peter is left outside in the courtyard (18:15-16). We know of none of the Twelve, other than Judas Iscariot, who had this kind of access. This fact suggests that the disciple was not one of the Twelve.

Fourth, after being informed in the other Gospels that all the disciples fled at the time of Jesus' arrest, we find the Beloved Disciple standing at the Cross with the mother of Jesus and Mary Magdalene. He is told to become the *ga'al* (also *go'el*: kinsman-redeemer) on His mother's behalf (19:25-27), a directive which provides an important clue.

Fifth, this disciple appears again in 20:1-11 when he accompanies Peter and Mary Magdalene to the empty tomb.

In the sixth account, this disciple is in a fishing boat with Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples (21:2-7). He is the first to recognize Jesus haling from the shoreline: "It is the Lord."

Finally, in 21:20-24 the Lord is discussing the disciple's destiny with Peter. Notice how the disciple follows Jesus unbidden. It is as if it was his *duty* to follow irrespective of invitation. This is the kind of behavior we expect from

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[13]In Mark, we are told that "many other women" "came up with him unto Jerusalem" (15:41). Luke's Gospel mentions these women and "his acquaintance" (23:49) who "followed him from Galilee." This was a large company of people who would have been present at the Last Supper, although not seated so close to Him as were the Twelve. Either Jesus had a wealthy sponsor who could provide accommodations for such an impressive host, or, as some have suggested, He was sufficiently connected to the Essene community that He and His entourage could use one of their guest houses during this most crowded season of the year in Jerusalem (O. Betz & R. Riesner, *Jesus, Qumran and the Vatican,* SCM, 1994) (Bargil Pixner, *With Jesus in Jerusalem*, Corazin, Rosh Pina, 1996, p. 73f)

domestics. Domestics were household stewards much like what we find in Genesis of Eleazar to Abraham and later, of Joshua to Moses.

If we use a process of elimination, assuming that the anonymous disciple is never named with the others in his company, we must remove the following possibilities: the Lord's mother, Mary Magdalene, Peter, Andrew, Philip, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee (James & John), Levi (Matthew), Thomas and, of course, Judas Iscariot. Of the Twelve, that leaves the other Judas, James the Less, and Simon the Canaanite. But notice how in each and every instance above, the Beloved Disciple upstages Peter: the presumed chief of the Twelve. The author of the Fourth Gospel *wants* the reader to know that he was closer to Jesus than the greatest Apostle was. And for that reason, it cannot be possible that he was one of the Twelve.

Recent scholarship has offered a compelling case that the three "lesser" apostles – Judas, James the Less, and Simon the Canaanite – were in fact the three brothers of Jesus: Jude, James the Just, and Simeon ("Joses" being a garbled translation of the Greek for "Jesus," who is listed with His brothers).[14] We do know from later Church accounts that Jesus dearly loved James and for that reason appointed him as the bishop of the Jerusalem Church – higher than the Twelve Apostles. But at this juncture in the Gospel narratives, His brethren do not factor into His Messianic movement. The Fourth Gospel expressly excludes them, as noted above. If James were the Beloved Disciple, he would not have offered such a disparaging assessment of their spiritual condition which would have diminished that of his own.

While we might want to explore these possibilities further, space requires that we introduce the most likely possibility that the Beloved Disciple was not one of the Twelve and that the Gospel actually tells us who he is: **Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary**.[15] John 11:5 tells us "Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus." But v. 3 contains a plea from the sisters to Jesus on behalf of their ill brother: **"Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick."** This is profound, almost startling, information. There was no need even to mention his name. These women were assuming an exclusive bond of affection with

[14]Robert Eisenman, *James the Brother of Jesus* (Viking, 1996) and *The New Testament Code* (Watkins, 2006). See also, *James, the First Bishop of Jerusalem* by Elder & Stivers (http://www.grailchurch.org/james.htm)

[15]*Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy*, Gregory J. Riley, (Fortress Press, 1995) "Not all agree that the traditional ascription of the title to John, son of Zebedee (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.1), is justified. Sanders, in an interesting article, makes a case for Lazarus." Footnote: J.N. Sanders, 'Who Was the Disciple Whom Jesus Loved?," in F. L. Cross, ed., *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (London: A. R. Mowbraw, 1957) 72-82." P. 71, fn. 6

Lazarus above even that of the Apostles. We find no other parallel like this in the Bible except for that of David and Jonathan, where it says of them, that their love exceeded that of the "love of women" (2 Samuel 1:26). It was such a great love that it was mistaken for homosexual love (1 Samuel 20:30).[16]

Furthermore, Lazarus is identified as a “friend” of Jesus, a term which has specific meaning in the Fourth Gospel. In John 15:15, Jesus tells His disciples that He will now call them “friends” and not “slaves,” for a slave does not know what his master is doing, while in contrast, the friend has inside knowledge of the nature and purpose of the master’s activities. Up to this point, the disciples are regarded as slaves who are kept ignorant of Jesus’ intentions and contacts. This includes Peter. In contrast, as Jesus’ “friend,” Lazarus - and presumably his sisters, as well - has full understanding of whom Jesus is and the nature of His mission. For this reason, we can now appreciate why Lazarus would upstage Peter in the events outlined above. Peter simply did not have inside information.[17]

As odd as it might sound, the climax of the book is the resurrection of Lazarus (John 11) not the resurrection of Jesus. There is as much textual space devoted to describing this event than even Christ's own resurrection. The raising of Lazarus was performed as a public display of His power. Christ's Resurrection, on the other hand, occurred in the darkness of the morning and His appearances were for the benefit of His disciples, not the general public.[18]

The dialogue which occurs between the Bethany sisters and Jesus in this episode provides an important revelation: **Mary and Martha *talk* like the author of the Fourth Gospel *writes***. This is not the case with the other disciples which retain their Galilean vernacular (Matthew 26:73 e.g. Peter). The

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[16]“See how he loved him” (John 11:36) indicates this very misinterpretation of Jesus’ weeping at Lazarus’ tomb by the Jews. In Clement's letter concerning Mark's "Secret Gospel," there is an oblique reference to an initiatory rite administered by Jesus to Lazarus which enlightens him concerning the mysteries of the kingdom, although it is not described. If this account is true, we can now understand why Lazarus would be the "Beloved Disciple" through whom even Peter had to pass to obtain information from Jesus. If Jesus and Lazarus had the kind of covenant relationship as what existed between David and Jonathan, then Lazarus would have been the natural kinsman-redeemer on behalf of Jesus’ mother. It would have been a covenant which would have bound their heirs.

[17]This is not a novel idea. Other researchers have introduced it in the past to explain certain anomalies in Jesus’ behavior and activities. For example, the man carrying a pitcher who leads the disciples to the Upper Room where the last Passover was to be held - unless we want to ascribe this incident as miraculous, obviously, Jesus was making plans with someone other than His disciples.

[18]John 12:9-12 tells us that the resurrection of Lazarus had more evangelistic value than Christ’s own resurrection.

Fourth Gospel is written from the perspective of the Bethany family. It is *their* view and experience with the life of Jesus which is set forward.[19]

Consider the exchanges between Jesus and Martha in vs. 21-22 and her confession in v.27:

> *Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.*

It is significant that this Gospel, unlike the other Gospels which credit Peter with the first confession of Christ's deity (e.g. Matthew 16:16), identifies *Martha* as the first to enunciate a confession of faith.[20]

"Lazarus" is the Greek form for the name "Eliezer" (also Eleazar) a common Jewish name during the time of Jesus but originally a famous priestly name (Exodus 6:23, 25). An "Eliezer" was the chief servant of Abraham and was the heir apparent before the birth of Ishmael and Isaac (Genesis 15:2). If Lazarus were a Levite servant[21] and the "beloved disciple," it would explain how it was that he knew the High Priest and was able to be present at the trial of Jesus, unlike Peter (John 18:15). It is also claimed of John in early Church Tradition that he wore the priest's miter, as noted above. John, a Galilean

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[19]There have been strong arguments put forward to the effect that Mary Magdalene was the sole author of John. There are too many problems with this view, in my opinion, among them being the fishing expedition in John 21, mentioned above. This text tells us that Peter was fishing naked in the boat. It is difficult to see the propriety of Mary's presence with a naked man. It is preferable to view Lazarus as the Beloved Disciple, with the Gospel's authorship as collaboration between the Bethany family and with the Apostle John, perhaps, as its later publisher. See Mary Magdalene: Author of the Fourth Gospel? by Ramon K. Jusino, 1998 (available on the Internet).

[20]This is important. If later Catholic dogma can claim Peter's preeminence based upon his confession in the synoptic Gospels, it is clear that Martha's confession entitles her to the same status in the Fourth Gospel. The Fourth Gospel ascribes a similar confession by Peter in John 6:69 (most texts render it "Thou art the Holy One of God" and omit "Christ" and "Son of God"). Another is ascribed to Nathanael in John 1:49. But notice how Nathanael's confession comes from his reflexive astonishment. Peter offers his as a plea for the Twelve as a "first among equals." Christ's pronouncement that Peter is the "rock of the church" is omitted in the Fourth Gospel. Neither of these "confessions" rise to the creedal and intensely personal level of Martha's theologically developed confession, who *has always believed* (notice the tense in the Greek here). For those who have become known to us as the "Johannine Community," it would have been *Martha* and not Peter, who was the "Rock" of the Church.

[21]One of the functions of the Levites who were not directly related to the service of the Temple was to sponsor the prospective worshipper as he approached the Altar. This was a carefully regulated activity to prevent the accidental profaning of the sanctuary. It might very well be that Lazarus served in such a capacity for Jesus and His disciples. According to an apocryphal writing called "The Narrative of Joseph of Arimathea" (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, p. 468), Judas Iscariot was the son of the brother of Caiaphas, the High Priest. Judas could have provided this sponsorship, as well, but obviously, not on the night of the betrayal.

fisherman, would not have had such privileges. But Lazarus would have.[22]

Considering that Lazarus' life was in danger, his presence at the trial and the Crucifixion seems to be problematic. However, if there was a covenant bond between these two men, Lazarus would have been willing to risk his life. He seems a more likely hero than John who did not know his own spirit (Luke 9:55). Bethany was a village – probably Levitical - just outside the walls of Jerusalem. To be personally known by the High Priest would have required frequent visits to the Temple over the years. That was not physically possible for John, a fisherman from Galilee, but it was for Lazarus. Just as Jesus had friends in high places (Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea), it is likely that Lazarus did, as well. It was the plea of Caiaphas that the execution of Jesus was all that was necessary to avoid a bloodbath (John 18:14).

Additionally, Lazarus may have been among our Lord's personal deacons. His sisters certainly were. Martha tended to the physical needs of His entourage and Mary washed His feet (12:2). It may be that Lazarus was His best pupil.

John was a fisherman, not a man of letters. We have no indication that would connect him to the world of scholarship. Indeed, the religious rulers took note that he and Peter were "unlearned and ignorant men" (Acts 4:13). He would not have written in the style found in the Gospel. Had he written a Gospel, it would have looked more like Mark, which bears the imprint of his fishing partner, Peter. He would not have written in Greek, but in Aramaic.

However, he did have intimate knowledge about our Lord's family. His mother was Salome, Mary's midwife, and Jesus may have been his cousin through levirate custom. John's connection to the Bethany family probably came through his mother.[23] It would have made him the likely candidate for "Apostolic sanction" of the Gospel which bears his name and could account for why he would have possessed the manuscript or at least a surviving copy of it to give to the churches of Asia.

At this point, I realize I am simply offering a plausible theory that has been offered many times before.[24] Skeptical minds may dismiss it, but probably

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[22]Epiphanius, *The Panarion*. This is another example of how one error in Church Tradition begets others more absurd. There is as much Patristic support for Lazarus' priestly status as there is for John's ("The Clementine Homilies," *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 8, p. 229 calls him a priest, which would make him of the order of Aaron. This source is dated at early in the third century).

[23]See "Salome: Matron Saint of Midwives" by Stivers (http://grailchurch.org/salome.htm). Salome's role as midwife at Christ's birth figures prominently later in our discussion.

[24]Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel of Mark*, "It has often been argued from Johannine evidence that the unnamed 'beloved disciple' was Lazarus" (p. 119). See also Vernard Eller, *The Beloved Disciple.* My opinions have been formed independently of these writers. I offer reference to them

because they have not considered the complications the traditional view creates. We are not attacking the traditional view. Rather, we are attempting to overcome its primitive simplification by providing a more inclusive explanation. We can "write-off" the anomalies and stylistic peculiarities in the record to "Divine inspiration," but we strain its definition to do so. From the Fathers, we learn that Divine inspiration works through the personality of the human writer. The words are not dictated. That is why the various books of the Bible retain their originality, uniqueness, and the styles of their writers. "The spirit of the prophets is subject to the prophets" (1 Corinthians 14:32). God transforms human nature when He communicates, He does not obliterate it. Our preconceived notions of Divine Inspiration and fears of impious doubt interfere with our quest for the truth.

Allowing a role to the Apostle in the making of this Gospel does not contradict the assertion that Lazarus was its true author. John's familiarity with the family of Jesus through his mother, Salome, would have given him access to a copy of it, if not an opportunity to provide input. It is possible that he was the sole possessor of the surviving copy which could have been lost to the Church had he not preserved it and passed it on to his disciples.

The Smoking Gun

While the Gospel itself may not provide anymore support for Lazarus as its author than what has been mentioned above, there is, however, convincing evidence in the Johannine Epistles (1, 2, and 3 John).

Scholars are unanimous in recognizing these Epistles as penned by the same person who wrote the Gospel. 2 John is a personal letter addressed to a "lady" by someone who is well acquainted with her children (apparently, she is a widow, because no mention is made of her husband). He is simply identified as "the elder" who shares a common spiritual heritage with her:

> *I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, <u>but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.</u> And this is love that we walk after his*

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because they involve more complete studies on the question of authorship than what is provided here (see footnote 12).

commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

- v. 4-6 (emphasis added)

"The Elder" here is referring to a direct quote of Jesus found in John 13:34 and 14:15, 21. These statements were given by Jesus in the *private* discourses to His disciples on the night of His betrayal - the night of the Lord's Supper and Footwashing. *This woman was there* when Jesus made these statements, and the writer here is simply reminding her of those words which they both can corroborate and take comfort in.

This "elect lady" - which means "chosen feminine lord" (or chosen mistress) - has a sister. She is called "thy elect sister" and she has children, also. So, here we have a man who is now old ("elder" should not be understood in its ecclesiastical sense in this passage) addressing a woman well known to him and those with him, for her sister's children dwell among them.[25]

Who would fit this profile? The only known biblical candidates would be Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. Would he not be an old man by this time with two sisters?[26] Were not both of these women special to Jesus - "chosen"? We can say Mary certainly was. She was "chosen" (elected) to be the first to see the risen Lord and to proclaim His Resurrection (John 20:17).[27] Martha makes the first confession of faith, as mentioned earlier. Lazarus attained prominence after his own resurrection, so much so, that the High Priests counseled together to have him assassinated (John 12:1-2, 9-11), although some may have believed that he could never die (John 21:23-24). Synchronicities like these are why some scholars believe that Lazarus was the true author of John.

[25]Many commentators interpret this letter allegorically. The “sisters” are churches. But a well-grounded rule of hermeneutics teaches that a literal interpretation must be preferred unless it leads to absurdities. There is no compelling reason why this Epistle cannot be interpreted literally.

[26]Epiphanius, who is not always reliable, says that Lazarus was about the same age as Jesus. *The Secret Gospel of Mark* describes him as “a youth” in a linen garment, the garment of priests, at the time of Jesus’ arrest.

[27]Most scholars agree that the Mary of Bethany and Mary Magdalene was the same woman. This is further supported by Tatian’s *Diatesseron*.

Fortunately, the Second Epistle does not leave us to doubt. It states plainly to whom the letter is addressed. In the Greek, the word for "lady" is *kyrios.* **In the Aramaic, it is "Martha."** Martha means "lady" in the language spoken by our Lord and the language of Palestine. Thus, when 2 John opens with its salutation, it is addressed to *Martha*. And when it says above "I beseech thee, *lady* . . ." it is really saying, "I beseech thee, *Martha*." The truth has been veiled in the translation where the etymology of the name has been preserved but not its nomenclature. This is startling evidence and takes our theory from the realm of plausibility into that of probability.

Perhaps, the matter of authorship, as narrowly defined by modern custom, cannot be settled conclusively in such a short treatise. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to take notice that the "perspective" of the Fourth Gospel is one from that of the Bethany family and that is what concerns us here. By extension, we can say with confidence that they were the founders of what has come to be known as the "Johannine Community."

Chapter Two

THE ELUSIVE COMMUNITY

In some ways the idea of a "Johannine Community" is problematic. We find no evidence of a distinctly orthodox or even heterodox "Johannine tradition" in western Asia Minor where we are told John spent the final years of his life. That is not to say that John was not there. Indeed, the book of Revelation (which represents a very different writing style than the Gospel, so much so, that its authorship and canonicity were doubted by some of the Early Fathers)[28] asserts that John was there. That he had a long and effective ministry seems to have solid support. It is even possible that what has come to be known as "John's Gospel" may have been introduced by him at the close of his life. However, we do not find that John's Gospel became the favorite in that region until well into the 2nd Century. Rather, it was a lost "Gospel According to the Hebrews" that was preferred in western Asia. After editing, Mark was preferred by the heretics, Marcion in particular.[29]

Furthermore, authentication of the Epistles of "John" finds its earliest support in the Muratorian Canon of North Africa (Carthage), a western source not an eastern one. Had the Apostle actually penned these Epistles, we would have expected a source of authenticity in Asia Minor. We find none until much later, Papias notwithstanding.[30]

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[28]"Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria (d.ca. 265) and Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea (d. ca. 340) were doubtful that the same hand produced both the gospel and Revelation" (*Interpreter's Commentary*, op cit., p. 708).

[29] This appears to be the Gospel used by Justin Martyr, the earliest apologist. See *Hierogamy & the Married Messiah* for a complete discussion.

[30]First John has no clear patristic citation until well into the 2nd Century.

If our thesis holds up that Lazarus was the true author of the Fourth Gospel, then it would be a misnomer to call the group it represents as the "Johannine Community" at all. **Rather, it would be more accurate to say "the Bethany Community"** – and for that reason, this study will proceed to identify it as such.

Because the Fourth Gospel is not reflective of any known Christian community from the 1st and 2nd centuries – known to Church historians anyway - it suggests that we are looking in the wrong places. There are some groups which were later endeared to the Gospel, and because of its influence, became Johannine communities. However, they would have been so in a *derivative and receptive* sense. Rather, we are looking for the community which *produced* this Gospel.

The assumption that John is its author and that it addresses controversies relevant to western Asia – Ephesus in particular – has left us with an inadequate historical profile. If we proceed assuming a different author and different controversies, a historical reconstruction then becomes possible.

Heterodoxy in the New Testament Church

At this point in our discussion, we must return to the questions raised in the Introduction and try to understand what they mean. While we will want to affirm an underlying unity of faith among the early leaders of Christianity (especially in terms of the Divine covenants), nevertheless, there were significant differences among them.

There was dissension between Paul and Peter, as indicated in Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. In Acts, there was dissension between Paul and Barnabas. In 1 Corinthians, there was contention between Paul and other unnamed contemporaries. Paul was a controversial figure, but because he was the central hero in much of the New Testament writings, this should not surprise us. Had the stories of the other Apostles been passed down to us, it is reasonable to assume that more accounts of apostolic disagreements would have been recorded.

In analyzing the Gospel records, some techniques of the higher critics become appropriate. It is useful to ask "Why did the Gospel writers select the stories they did and why did they leave out the others?" In the Fourth Gospel, the stories are important, but it is also important how certain people are mentioned in relation to others.

There are three prominent figures with which the Beloved Disciple either compares himself in his Gospel or mentions because of some relevant issue at the time of his writing. There are two lesser figures.

From each of these three, later Christian movements emerged which claimed them as figureheads and the source of their spiritual authority:

The first is John the Baptist who represented the Essene movement which might be described as proto-Christian and which later fractured into numerous independent groups, including the Christian communities.

Simon Peter is the second who represented what came to be known as Establishment Christianity, the Church of the Pauline mission, of orthodoxy, and later of Rome.

Thomas Didymus, who represented what were the early Persian and Syrian Christians east of the Roman Empire, is the third. These later became known as Nestorian Christians and for over a half millennium were the largest body of Christians in the world, stretching from Armenia to India and some say, China.

The lesser figures were Philip and James the Just. James is not named in the text but in his association with the "Lord's brethren," he is clearly marginalized. This implies a rift between the Bethany family and the Jerusalem Church.

In reference to Philip, we have the Valentinians, an early Gnostic sect which relied upon a "Gospel of Philip" for its doctrinal authority. Obviously, the Valentinians were a 2nd Century movement and the Fourth Gospel represents a mid-1st Century development. So, it seems difficult to believe that the Fourth Gospel was responding to proto-Gnostic doctrine, unless there was something in Philip's teaching which anticipated the later Valentinian movement. Such questions will be explored as we examine these various figureheads.

The Baptist

Only since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls has Christian scholarship come to appreciate the pervasive influence of John the Baptist in the early Christian era. Some are convinced that he was the "Teacher of Righteousness" identified in the Scrolls,[31] a possibility that has caused researchers to take

[31] *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis, The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism*, Gabriele Boccaccini (Eerdmans, 1998). Boccaccini argues to the contrary, but even in disputing it, indicates how compelling the argument is to so many scholars. Perhaps it was an oversight, but I find it interesting that his Indices list John the Baptist without qualification as "the Teacher of

renewed interest in various sects – such as the Mandaeans – which have claimed him as their founder, or at least, as one of their great prophets.

Other writers have found him to be the inspiration for cryptic heresies, such as the Templars, Masons, Cathars, and other groups punished by the Medieval Inquisition. Obviously, the author of the Fourth Gospel is not responding to these later movements. However, it is sometimes helpful to remember that a tree is identified by its fruit. If these various groups claim the Baptist as their source, perhaps it is worthwhile to re-examine the source to see if any connection is possible.

Early Christian writings suggest the point of origin for John's theological training to be Egyptian, probably the Essene community near Alexandria. And while the Gospels declare John's support for Christ's Messianic claims, his disciples were less certain.[32] Even John held doubts at one point after his arrest, a fact that probably can be explained by the Qumranian Messianic expectations: the Essenes believed there would be two Messiahs, one from Levi and one from David.[33] If John was once the "Teacher of Righteousness" of the Scrolls, or at least his prophetic successor, then he would have considered the possibility that he himself was the Levitical Messiah who would restore the true worship of God at the Temple – and that Jesus was the Davidic Messiah who would come to his rescue and liberate him from Herod's dungeons. Since Jesus did nothing to help John, it seemed to him not to fit his Messianic expectations – hence, the query, "Should we look for another?" (Matthew 11:3).

After the Resurrection, lacking any firsthand confirmation that Jesus was alive, the disciples of John proceeded as if Jesus was another martyred prophet, as their own leader had been at the hands of Herod. They continued with their missionary activities where Paul finds them in the book of Acts as far away as Ephesus and Corinth.[34]

Righteousness" on page 187.

[32] "And, behold, one of the disciples of John asserted that John was the Christ, and not Jesus. . ." – "Recognitions of Clement" (*Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, p. 93).

[33]Eisenmann insists the Scrolls, particularly the Damascus Document, envision one Messiah. But that view is not consistent with the historical experience of Israel which always had *two* anointed leaders: the King and the High Priest.

[34]Apollos was a prominent evangelist teaching Baptist theology. Paul converted a Baptist community in Ephesus. If there had been any "Johannine Community," it would not have been associated with the Apostle John, but with the Baptist John (Acts 18:24-28; Titus 3:12). It is possible that the priestly tradition ascribed to the Apostle John mentioned earlier really comes from the story of the Baptist John. John was a son of the high priest (Luke 1).

It is at this point that these early accounts tell us that Simon Magus emerges as John's successor and as an apostate. We find this noted in the apocryphal writings of Clement, which then describe extensively the various confrontations between him and the Apostle Peter.[35] Of course, we are introduced to Simon Magus in Acts 8, where we find him in Samaria attempting to purchase magical powers from the Apostle. Peter curses him and Simon withdraws apologetically. Acts does not tell us about Simon's association with John the Baptist or what became of the Baptist community. It is likely that many of his followers became disciples of Jesus (Matthew 14:12). The Beloved Disciple appears to have been a follower of John himself.[36] But as is often the case with many spiritual movements, the death of the founder results in schism and various splinter groups which continue in the founder's name.

The author of the Fourth Gospel is responding to the fracturing which has occurred at the beginning of the Christian movement between the followers of Jesus and the followers of John. He is appealing to the followers of John – although not those of Simon's, apparently - with these important claims:

First, he sets forth Jesus as a true manifestation of the Light of God and that His teachings were a faithful continuation of John's doctrines. This is especially evident in Christ's discourse on spiritual rebirth in John 3.

Second, the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as a greater spiritual authority of the Baptist because He works miracles. John did not work miracles (John 10:41).

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[35]*The Recognitions of Clement, ANF,* vol. 8, p. 75-350. From the *Clementine Homilies*, *Ibid*, p. 233 – Of Simon Magus: "But that he came to deal with the doctrines of religion happened on this wise. There was one John, a day-baptist, who was also, according to the method of combination, the forerunner of our Lord Jesus; and as the Lord had twelve apostles, bearing the number of the twelve months of the sun, so also he, John, had thirty chief men, fulfilling the monthly reckoning of the moon, in which number was a certain woman called Helena, that not even this might be without a dispensational significance. For a woman, being half a man, made up the imperfect number of the triacontad; as also in the case of the moon, whose revolution does not make the complete course of the month. But of these thirty, the first and most esteemed by John was Simon."

[36]*Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy*, Gregory J. Riley, Fortress Press, 1995: "The movement of John the Baptist had great influence on Jesus and his followers. Jesus was baptized by John (Mark 1:9-11 and parallels), and may have been one of his early disciples. Indeed, Bultmann postulated that the Gospel writer was himself a convert from among the disciples of the Baptist, and took over a hymn used among them for his prologue" p. 75. Footnote 19 Cites C. H. Dodd: "So argues Dodd from the description of Jesus by John . . . "a follower of mine is coming." *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* and footnote 20 Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John.*

Third, the author claims that he became a follower of Jesus because of John's own witness. John declared Jesus to be "the Lamb of God." His ministry served to prepare Israel as a forerunner to Jesus as the true Messiah.

And fourth, John was dead, but Jesus was still alive, having been raised from the dead. The author of the Fourth Gospel appeals to the Baptist community to join with the Jesus movement because it represents the future and not the past.

In our purpose of locating the Bethany Community, we must identify who might have been concerned with the followers of the Baptist. At the time of the writing of this Gospel, the Baptist community is still near and a subject of immediate attention. If we can establish who were the active followers of the Baptist's doctrines at this time and where they were, we can proximate the *locus operandi* of the Bethany Community.

We have footnoted the Clementine literature in the above references to describe Simon Magus and his activities. The Clementine Epistles (*Recognitions* and *Homilies*) purport to be first-hand accounts from Clement (later ordained bishop of Rome) of the debates and miraculous contests between Simon and Peter in Caesarea. These reports were sent to James the Just as the chief bishop of the Church at Jerusalem. We also find the presence of other disciples in Caesarea at this time, including the Bethany family. Early indications are that this might have been the setting where the Fourth Gospel was first composed.[37]

Simon Peter

In the Fourth Gospel, Peter retains his stature as the leading disciple. He is still loved and respected by its author, but he is upstaged by the Beloved Disciple. In contrast, for the author of the book of Acts, Peter is the only visible head of the Church, although we learn later (Acts 15), that James, the Lord's brother, is the true director of the Jesus movement.

For the audience of the Fourth Gospel, enough time has elapsed that now Peter is considered the true head of the Church and James seems to have simply

[37]These writings were not really written by Clement, which is why they are called by scholars "The *Pseudo*-Clementine Epistles." But that does not diminish their historical value. As in all historical novels, there is a general structure of authenticity. For example, in the famous story of "The Devil and Daniel Webster," we all know it is a fictional tale about Daniel Webster. But there is still accurate information to be found in it: Daniel Webster did really exist and he was a famous New England Senator and a lawyer. The descriptions of 19th Century America are also true as also the political controversies of the time. We cannot dismiss an ancient source because it presents its material in apocryphal fashion.

faded away. Since the Baptist community has not yet been entirely displaced, it suggests that the Fourth Gospel was written sometime in the middle of the 1st Century, within twenty years after the Pentecost of Acts 2 – which is early. James is still the undisputed leader of the Jerusalem Church during this period. His absence from the Gospel text suggests three possible scenarios, which may partially overlap:

1) Either an excision by a later redactor has occurred, or

2) There is a separation by time and distance, or

3) There is a genuine rift between the community which the author represents and the Jerusalem Church.

If the recipients of the Gospel live a great distance from Palestine, it must be in a place where Peter has recently evangelized and the followers of John the Baptist, also. Their shadows linger in this Gospel account.

A Diasporic and Gentile audience would be probable in such a scenario, because the author finds it necessary from time-to-time to provide an explanation for certain Aramaic terms and customs. Yet, at other times, specific geographical descriptions are given which would seem irrelevant, unless the audience had some interest in those details. It suggests that these people might be proselytes who have made pilgrimages to Palestine in the past and can visualize the events the author is describing because they have been there.

If the recipients are separated by time, it would suggest that the readers included the children of the exiled Bethany Community itself.

While an excision by a redactor is believable in the synoptic Gospels, it is unlikely in the Fourth Gospel. The Fourth Gospel provides the most biographical information on the brothers of Jesus - and it is negative. The writer *wants* the readers to know that the Jamesian Desposyni were "Johnny-come-latelys" to the Jesus movement. He *wants* them to know that he is the most authentic guardian of Jesus' message and mission. Why that might be is not immediately apparent from the Gospel itself. We must turn later to the Johannine Epistles in order to understand why there might have been a parting of the way between the Bethany Community and Jerusalem.

If the middle of the 1st Century is a valid time-frame for this Gospel, then we would find Peter no longer in Caesarea, but in Mesopotamia, Babylon in particular (1 Peter 5:13). These were the Parthian kingdoms identified with the northern tribes of Israel relocated in Persia. He wrote an epistle to these

peoples – called the Diaspora - as did James. It was later that Peter would go west to Rome.

We know that there was contact between the Apostles and these lands. The first movement of migration for the early Christians was east to Syria (Antioch), to Edessa (Armenia), and beyond. Many of the Baptist's followers drifted east, also. We have good evidence that the Bethany Community, having been forced out of Jerusalem, first went north to the Phoenician port city of Caesarea, as a part of this migration north and east.[38]

But the problem with this view is that, for these people, James is an important figure at this time period. The influence of James and the Desposyni would be felt in the Eastern Church for centuries yet to come. It seems difficult to believe that the Fourth Gospel – if written as early as suggested - would be addressed to an audience where James was held in such esteem, yet so totally ignore him. The Fourth Gospel is focused on Peter. This fact suggests a rift, yet it also suggests a later date, after Peter had gone west, but before his death. The final chapter was added to the Gospel after Peter had been martyred, an event of recent memory. Apparently, such an audience is unaware of James' activities, James having himself been martyred about the same time as Peter.[39] And in the light of the mission of Apollos in Acts, the presence of the Baptist's followers appear to have spread westward, as well as eastward. So, now we are looking for a community with a *western* presence juxtaposed among active proselytes who have embraced either the Baptist or Peter, probably late in the sixth decade of the 1st Century.

In the mind of the author, James should not represent Christianity at all, because he really represents the leading faction of the Essene movement which embraced Jesus as a messianic figure but not as a final divine Messiah of Israel. He is closer to the Ebionite position of Adoptionist theology, which even in His Ascension, Christ is looked upon as an Enoch figure. James is seen as a proto-Christian and not representative of the authentic Christian message – and true church – which Lazarus and his sisters espouse. For them, James is still the follower of Judaism. While Luke's account in Acts 15 will show significant diplomacy by James in favor of the Pauline mission, a fact which suggests profound external pressure, this event occurs long after the Bethany family has

[38] *The Recognitions of Clement* places the Bethany family in Caesarea at this time along with other disciples. Caesarea was the principal port city for ships sailing west (vol. 8, p. 97, 132).
[39]This fact suggests a composition after the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 and after Paul's vigorous fund-raising effort for the Jerusalem Church – a time frame closer to the later 50s or early 60s.

left Jerusalem.[40]

Church Tradition makes Lazarus the first bishop of Cyprus, a short sailing distance from Caesarea. The Bethany family did not continue east with the Jewish Christians. Nor did they go north into Asia Minor and Greece, the lands of the Pauline mission. Preliminary evidence points west.

We should wonder why the author of the Fourth Gospel would repeatedly find it necessary gently to diminish Peter's stature in the Church. Might it have been to compensate for the veneration which the Gentile Christians had for him? After all, Rome did eventually validate the supremacy of its bishopric by claiming Peter as its founder, never mind Paul.

However, in what context was it necessary for the author to commend himself to this audience? Had Lazarus and his sisters been so completely marginalized by the Apostles that they no longer had influence on the Christian movement in general? When might this have occurred, and why? Did they have followers upon whom the apostolic successors were making demands, usurping the Bethany leadership? We will return to these questions later.

Thomas Didymus

In distinction from the faith of the Bethany family, we have the unbelief of Thomas. As is known from later developments, Thomas took his mission to the Far East, as far as India and some say, China. Regardless, the Christians which formed in these regions – beginning at Edessa and proceeding eastward – became the Church of the East. These Christians were called "Nestorians" at a later time, but at the time of the Fourth Gospel, there existed embryonic groups which believed that the resurrection of Jesus was a spiritual one only, and not physical.[41]

Some scholars have supposed that the writings ascribed to John were written to combat Docetism, a Gnostic movement which denied that Jesus was truly a fleshly human being. Based upon the Manichean notion that matter and flesh were intrinsically evil, it seemed to be morally reprehensible to believe that Jesus could have been contaminated by such a condition. Hence, the

[40]Contrast James' pro-Gentile position in Acts 15 with his apparent duplicity to entrap Paul in Acts 21.

[41]*Resurrection Reconsidered: Thomas and John in Controversy* Gregory J. Riley, (Fortress Press, 1995):"As this study will demonstrate, the *Gospel of Thomas* declares that the body will not be raised by so interpreting the sayings of Jesus. In John, a Johannine version of the same sayings claims the opposite. In fact, several aspects of John and *Thomas* may be seen as points in a 'conversation' between the two communities." P. 68

Docetists believed that Jesus only "appeared" to be in the flesh. This seems to be a Marcion view, as well.

This heresy seems to be suggested in the condemnation found in 1 John in which all who deny that "Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is antichrist" are excluded from the fellowship of the Bethany Community.

But the Docetists were a 2nd Century phenomenon, not a 1st Century concern for which the Fourth Gospel is written to address. In singling out the doubting Thomas, the author does not contend with those who do not believe in the fleshly Messiah, but rather with those who denied a fleshly *resurrection*. In short, this appears to be an *Ebionite* position, which was contemporary with the situation of the 1st Century Church in Palestine and perhaps Syria. Some of them believed a kind of divinity for Christ which was limited to the Jewish doctrine of the ascended prophet who is made into a "son of God" by the measure of Divine grace which is imparted to Him. The notion of the Incarnation was a confusing doctrine – even a pagan one – to many Jewish Christians.

The Gospel of Thomas may have been in circulation at this time in some form. It was probably used in the Alexandrian Church, since it was part of the Nag Hammadi corpus that was discovered in Egypt.

However, scholars have suggested that the Gospel of Thomas was more likely written in Syria. It reveals an Essene influence, as do the Synoptics.[42] Unlike the Synoptics, it recognizes the preeminence of James, revealing an Ebionite position, as well:

> *The disciples said to Jesus, "We know that you will depart from us. Who is to be our leader?" Jesus said to them, "Wherever you are, you are to go to James the righteous, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being."*
>
> - Saying #12

Like the Synoptics, it disparages the task of reproduction (Saying #79):

> *For there will be days when you will say, "Blessed are the womb which has not conceived and the breasts which have not given milk."*

[42]*The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. James M. Robinson, "The Gospel of Thomas," Introduction by Helmut Koester, p. 123-125, Harper & Row, 1988

Unlike the Synoptics, it embraces the Sabbath (#27):

> *If you do not observe the Sabbath as a Sabbath, you will not see the father.*

Yet, it does not defend circumcision (#53):

> *His disciples said to him, "Is circumcision beneficial or not?" He said to them, "If it were beneficial, their father would beget them already circumcised from their mother. Rather, the true circumcision in spirit has become completely profitable."*

One cannot help but admire this short Gospel (which may simply have been an evangelist's mnemonic collection) for its directness, simplicity, and balance. It is clearly within the Jamesian tradition and really does not represent the issues in the Thomas Community which so troubles the author of the Fourth Gospel.

There is one hint, however, of the rift between the Jamesian Church and the Bethany Community. It is found in the last Saying of the book (#114):

> *Simon Peter said to them, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life."*
>
> *Jesus said, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."*

While the stark contrast between Peter's harsh chauvinism and Jesus' tepid response might immediately offend modern sentiments, the notion of "becoming male" is an Essene concept that lingers, even in our feminist age. Today, women still come to work in masculine attire, and the notion of femininity, as being something unworthy of the completed human, is a sentiment which continues to plague us.

It is probable that this Saying represents a garbled account which, among others, explains why this Gospel never found its way into the Canon. Jesus probably meant, "Covenant status" when He said "male." Males could enter the "congregation of the Lord" and Jesus meant, by imparting the Holy Spirit to women ("pouring out upon all flesh" – Acts 2), He would make them worthy of covenant status equal to males in the Christian community.

The subtle message of this Saying found in a decidedly Jamesian document will be explained later. But what can be said at this point is that the Jamesian

Church – as did the whole of the Essene community – embraced a "warrior-monk" theology in which normal family life was viewed as less spiritual, if not deleterious, to the Christian mission. This was later absorbed and expanded in Pauline doctrine and anticipated the later Catholic tradition. The alleged asceticism of James was much admired by later clerics who saw it within the context of a celibate clergy. This Saying would have us believe that women can become spiritual only if they abandon their femininity and their matriarchal vocation. And as it will be shown later, this was a "shot across the bow" of the embattled Bethany Community which still clung to the Messianism of the Davidic Covenant as described in Psalm 45.

There were other books which circulated in the Thomas Community and raised the issue of a spiritual resurrection, both for Jesus, and for His followers in a purely spiritual parousia: the *Book of Thomas the Contender* and the *Acts of Thomas*. These writings represent a more overt contention with the notion of a physical resurrection. Although Gnostic documents, they nevertheless provide evidence of a proto-gnostic and Ebionite tradition which existed very early in the greater Syrian region. In responding to this tradition, the author of the Gospel uses Thomas as a proxy for James. Obviously, the author does not want to confront James and the Ebionite tradition directly. It indicates that James is still alive and still the leader of the Christian movement or his immediate successors are Judaizers.[43]

The Apostle Paul also confronts this controversy in Corinth (1 Corinthians 15) and elsewhere. Epiphanius claims that the followers of Simon Magus also embraced docetic tendencies:

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[43]*The ancients quite properly called these men Ebionites, because they held poor and mean opinions concerning Christ. For they considered him a plain and common man, who was justified only because of his superior virtue, and who was the fruit of the intercourse of a man with Mary. In their opinion the observance of the ceremonial law was altogether necessary, on the ground that they could not be saved by faith in Christ alone and by a corresponding life. There were others, however, besides them, that were of the same name, but avoided the strange and absurd beliefs of the former, and did not deny that the Lord was born of a virgin and of the Holy Spirit. But nevertheless, inasmuch as they also refused to acknowledge that he pre-existed, being God, Word, and Wisdom, they turned aside into the impiety of the former, especially when they, like them, endeavored to observe strictly the bodily worship of the law. These men, moreover, thought that it was necessary to reject all the epistles of the apostle, whom they called an apostate from the law; and they used only the so-called Gospel according to the Hebrews and made small account of the rest. The Sabbath and the rest of the discipline of the Jews they observed just like them, but at the same time, like us, they celebrated the Lord's days as a memorial of the resurrection of the Saviour. Wherefore, in consequence of such a course they received the name of Ebionites, which signified the poverty of their understanding. For this is the name by which a poor man is called among the Hebrews* – Eusebius (See *Hierogamy and the Married Messiah* for a complete description.)

> *He used to delude the Samaritans, deceiving and enticing them with the illusions produced by his magic arts, and to say that he was the great power of God come down from above. To the Samaritans he would say that he was the Father, to the Jews that he was the Son, who having suffered had not suffered, but only seemed to.*[44] (emphasis added)

The Fourth Gospel invokes Thomas and his faith in the risen, *fleshly* Christ to respond to, what might be called, the Thomasian Community. In the mind of the author, Thomas must be absent, otherwise, he would set things right. Perhaps, he is now thousands of miles to the East on his mission and the converts he has left behind have drifted from sound doctrine.

Whatever the Bethany Community might have been at this point, we find that it is concerned and in dialogue with groups which are beyond the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem and Judea and which represent early deviations from the received doctrine of what Jesus said about Himself. In its constellation of leaders, no one is evil. All can be invoked to validate the author's view of the Christian faith. The only evil ones are the members of the religious establishment in Jerusalem.[45] This anti-Semitism strongly suggests a 1st Century date for the Gospel – after the dispersion forced by Saul's (Paul's) persecution, but before the Roman persecutions.

Caesarea or Cyprus still remains as the most likely point of origin for Lazarus and his sisters when writing this Gospel. They are still close enough, almost central, to the development of Christian communities around them. At this stage, Paul's mission is to the north. The work of Thomas and Peter lies to the east. To the south is Jerusalem and Alexandria. At this early time, only the west remains unevangelized. But all eyes are turning westward and in a few decades, traditions will sprout up to claim the presence of Paul, Peter, and the Bethany family in the western regions of the Roman Empire.

James the Just & Philip

The absence of James suggests he has gone underground and operates behind the scenes. According to the Clementine writings, James was a victim

[44]*The Panarion*, Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis (Oxford, 1990), p. 61. But this could be have been a teaching ascribed to Simon by a later follower.

[45]John 5:16, 7:1, 13, 9:18, et al. The absence of James in the text is significant. His alliance with the Judaizers would have been suspect to this Gospel writer (Galatians 2) and in singling out the "Thomasians," he is really warning the Ebionites.

of Saul's murderous zeal and had been left for dead on the steps of the Temple, while the mob proceeded to stone Stephen. His broken body is taken by his friends "to Jericho" – a place Eisenman believes refers to Qumran.

In any case, he does not surface again until the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. By then, the Bethany Community is gone.

In Acts, Philip the Apostle has been replaced by Philip the Deacon in care of the widows in Jerusalem. He, too, appears in Caesarea (Acts 21:8). Why the Fourth Gospel makes mention of this disappearing Apostle causes some wonder. In this Gospel, Philip is the natural contact person for "Greeks" who want to talk to Jesus but apparently never get the chance (John 12). The text itself offers His response to an undisclosed request – (Could it have been excised by a later redactor?) - in which He rejects the opportunity to change His mission. Did these people want Jesus to leave Jerusalem and come to a foreign land where He would be better received? And why was that of interest to the Bethany Community? Were they contemplating a migration? If so, then we have another indicator of a westward movement of this group.[46]

It is not clear why the early Gnostics used Philip's name for their Gospel. Of all of the Gnostic writings of the 2nd Century, the Gospel of Philip was the most orthodox. There is not much in this text which suggests the heresies of which they were later accused. Valentinus himself almost became the bishop of Rome. Then again, we do not know that the Valentinians actually produced the Gospel of Philip, rather that they were fond of using it. They liked the Fourth Gospel, also.

If the Fourth Gospel was written in either Caesarea or Cyprus, the only Philip of consequence would have been the Deacon, not the Apostle. Since these two men were repeatedly confused by the Early Fathers, it suggests that perhaps they were the same man. The lists of the Apostles vary in each Gospel. It is possible that Philip was an important figure to the Bethany Community, someone who in the Fourth Gospel is a cheerful and earnest disciple who loves to bring people to Jesus (1:46). He is the first disciple personally sought out and called by Jesus (1:43). If he was also the deacon of Acts 6, then he was a guardian of the Church widows. Acts tells us that he had four daughters of his own who were prophetesses (21:9). Obviously, he was no domineering patriarch, but rather a leader who respected the spiritual gifts of women.

[46]Later Celtic tradition places Philip in Britain.

Summary

For purposes of our discussion, we have established that Lazarus is the author of the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles. He was the Beloved Disciple who had intimate knowledge of Jesus' message and mission. With his sisters, he was the founder of what scholars have called "the Johannine Community," but what we have now called in this study, "the Bethany Community."

The Fourth Gospel responds to trends in the Christian movement of its time by singling-out certain events in the life of Jesus as commentary on those new developments which spring from what the author believes to be a faulty understanding or inadequate record of Jesus' ministry. In doing so, he draws distinction between his community of followers of "the Way" from the larger Essene movement led by John the Baptist. He further distances the Bethany Community from the Jerusalem Church, from Peter, and from the Thomas Community by correcting either their misplaced emphasis on their leaders or a misinterpretation of their teachings.

Now, we are prepared to examine in particular what portion of the followers of Jesus the Bethany Community may have actually represented.

Chapter Three

THE MESSIANIC HAREM

At this point in our discussion, we must redirect our attention to other developments which occurred early in the Christian movement. As you recall, the Beloved Disciple was commissioned by Jesus to care for His mother, to become her adopted son. The text tells us that he took her "unto his own," presumably to a home nearby. A short time later, Jesus' mother is listed with the "other women" who came with Him from Galilee that are staying in the "upper room," waiting for the day of Pentecost. This place is large enough to accommodate over a hundred people.

The entourage which came with Jesus to Jerusalem was quite large. No number is given, but we are told in the other Gospels that there were "*many* women" who had come with Jesus (Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:41; Luke 23:49). These women have been identified with the Messianic harem over which Jesus was its guardian and lord.[47] They had followed Jesus to Jerusalem expecting his coronation as King of Israel. In Davidic style, they would be placed in the palace as the royal harem. With circumstances changed, they became by Acts 6 – some months later – the widows of the Church.

In taking custody of the mother of Jesus – the Queen Mother - the Beloved Disciple became the protector of the Messianic harem. Considering that Mary Magdalene is listed with this harem, Lazarus seems to have been the logical choice as the royal chamberlain. Both Martha and Lazarus are described as wealthy persons in various traditions.[48] Lazarus had a rich man's tomb

[47]*Hierogamy & the Married Messiah,* James Stivers: 2004, p. 100-107. The presence of so many women was uncharacteristic of the Essene communities which were overwhelmingly male. Jesus was proceeding as if he were the "greater Solomon" – the great Bridegroom of Israel.

[48]Eisenman, *The New Testament Code* (Watkins Publ., 2006), p. 239-242. If Talmudic sources

identical in kind to that of the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea. He had both the means and the disposition to be the kinsman-redeemer.

From the early chapters of Acts, the role of the Apostles and of the "Desposyni" (as the Lord's brethren became known) appears to be that of recruitment pending the imminent return of the Messiah. Restoration of the Throne of David in Jerusalem was still on the agenda, both from the beginning and later.[49] But what was to be done with the women?

As time went on, the Apostles felt encumbered with their care. They asked to be relieved of the responsibility and others were given the task (Acts 6). After the persecution of Acts 7-8, the Messianic harem disappears.

If the Bethany Family had the financial means to care for these women, then we may assume that the Messianic harem went with them. No longer sponsored by the Apostles or the Desposyni, these women would have looked to the Bethany Family as their benefactors and spiritual authority.

Also, consider that all harems have eunuchs – real or nominal – which serve as deacons to assist the women in their daily care. These eunuchs would have escorted the women on their flight out of Jerusalem and they would have passed themselves off as their husbands or fathers to the public. It was customary for the Davidic harems to disguise themselves in dangerous times.[50]

Harems include the children: pre-pubescent boys and virgins. While prominent figures, such as leading wives and eunuchs, might be mentioned by name in the biblical text, children and maidservants are usually left unmentioned. However, their presence can be reasonably assumed. So, as far as the Bethany Family is concerned, any relocation would have involved hundreds of people – special people. These people were the Messiah's family and represented the part of the Church which was destined to earthly dominion following the success of the Gospel.

What follows from this train of logic is simply this: **the Bethany Community (or that which was later misidentified with John) was originally the Messianic harem**.

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are to be believed, they were perhaps the richest people in Palestine.

[49]*Magdalene Gospel*, Acts 1:6 – "And they asked him if he will restore the kingdom of Israel, and will do away with the foreign king, and with Pilate, Caesar's subordinate, and will rule himself, or perhaps appoint one of the family of David [to rule]?" "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David. . ." (James in Acts 15:16).

[50]*Hierogamy & the Married Messiah*, Ibid. p. 93-99. This was true of all royal harems which refused amalgamation with an invading conqueror.

The Question of Polygamy in the Early Church

And those entering the ark: "two by two they went into the ark". And as for the Ruler, it is written: "He shall not multiply wives unto himself". But David had not read the sealed Book of the Torah, which was in the Ark, since it was not opened in Israel from the day of the deaths of Eleazar and Joshua and the Elders who served Ashtarte.[51] *And they hid it and it was not revealed until Zadok arose. And the works of David rose up, except for the blood of Uriah.*

- *The Damascus Document*[52]

The Damascus Document is considered a Qumran document even though it was discovered elsewhere before the Dead Sea corpus. Qumran was a center for the Essene movement, so this Document represents to a significant extent the doctrine of the Essenes. We have already mentioned the Essene "warrior-monk" theology in which the men of Israel were preparing for a holy war with the pagan Gentiles. Although there was a pacifistic wing of the Essenes who were waiting for heavenly intervention, the majority were expecting only heavenly *assistance* for what was otherwise expected to be a military struggle by the "Sons of Light" against the "Sons of Darkness." These were those believers whom James describes in Acts as "zealous of the law" (Acts 21:20).

In Essene doctrine, the primary source of ritual defilement was sexual impurity. Hence, even married men were limited to sex during estrus. After conception occurred, sexual relations were forbidden because it grew from lust and not from the sanctified desire to procreate. Association with Gentiles caused defilement because Gentiles had sexually unclean habits. Dietary laws existed to prevent the Jew from casual social contact with sexually defiled Gentiles.

It must be remembered that Christians were not known as Christians until later in the 1st Century. Like the Essenes, they were followers of "the Way." Actually, we can probably say that the first Christians were simply Essenes who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. This might be why the New

[51]The writer here associates polygamy with the Ashtarte religion and believes that Joshua and the earliest Israelites – the ones who practiced polygamy – were followers of this Yahwehist brand of fertility religion.

[52]*The Dead Sea Scrolls and the First Christians,* Robert Eisenman, (Element, 1996) p. 360

Testament does not identify the Essenes as a separate group like it does the other Jewish sects: Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians. They did not see themselves as distinct from the larger Essene movement.

Certainly in *the Damascus Document,* we find a nomenclature very similar to the first Christians. These believers, too, were followers of "the Way." It speaks of a "New Covenant" which shares the same goal as the Christian mission outlined by James in Acts 15:16, "where for it, at some point, 'the fallen tent of David' was going to be re-erected."[53]

The sharing of goods in Acts 2 and 4 is uniquely Essene, a fact which Josephus made note:

> *When adherents arrive from elsewhere, all local resources are put at their disposal as if they were their own, and men they have never seen before entertain them like old friends.*[54]

In fact, so close are the parallels between this document and other prominent Qumranian writings with early Christian teaching, that Robert Eisenman – a foremost scholar in Christian antiquities – has argued the case convincingly that James is the "Teacher of Righteousness" identified in the Scrolls.[55]

In leading the Essene movement after John the Baptist, certainly James has marginalized his opponent in Simon Magus. But the Scrolls identify a more dangerous opponent who has opened the floodgates to the Gentiles by lowering the standards of the Law. This rival Eisenman identifies as Paul and his mission to enroll disciples into the Church (i.e. "congregation") without the rite of circumcision. While James sides with Paul in his Noahide ruling of Acts 15, James' zealot supporters still embrace their nationalistic agenda and reject the legitimacy of Paul's converts. Called "Judaizers" in the New Testament, these Jews believed in Jesus but still insisted on keeping all of the details of the Law of Moses. It was a rift that grew until not even James could hold the factions together. The coalition fell apart after his martyrdom in 64 AD and led to the uprising which ended in the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.

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[53] *The Messianic Code,* Eisenman, Ibid. p. 85

[54] *Jewish War II, 124* as quoted by *Jesus the Master Builder, Druid Mysteries & the Dawn of Christianity* by Gordon Strachan (Floris Books, 1998), p. 172. Strachan's chapter on "The Essene Connection" relies predominantly on O. Betz and R. Riesner's *Jesus, Qumran and the Vatican* (1994) and Bargil Pixner, *With Jesus in Jerusalem* (1996).

[55] "James the *Just*": "Just" being the word *zadok* – "righteous."

For the earlier time-frame of the Damascus Document, the chief opponent of the movement was the moral laxity of the ruling establishment, principally the Herodians who claimed to support Judaism and lavishly funded the Temple. At one point, Herod the Great was a benefactor of the Essenes and had given them a section of Jerusalem to live. Some of them did so. The "Essene Gate" was on the road to Bethany and it is probable that most of Jesus' activities in the city occurred in the Essene quarter.

The Herodian practice of polygamy appears in the Damascus Document as one of those moral issues over which contention simmered between the Essenes and the Herodian family:

> *To name a few other such First-Century dating parameters: there is the insistence on 'fornication' as descriptive of the behaviour of the Ruling Establishment in the 'Three Nets of Belial' section of the Damascus Document. In it, regardless of its meaning in any other context, 'fornication' is specifically defined in terms of 'polygamy,' 'divorce,' 'marrying nieces' and, curiously enough, 'sleeping with women during their periods,' all things that, taken as a whole, can be said to be descriptive of 'Herodians' and not 'Maccabeans'.* [56]

It is clear that the Essenes opposed the idea of polygamy for its rulers, and James – if he ever hoped to lead them successfully – had to concur with that ban. We must now confront the question: What was Jesus doing with all of these women?

We know that Jesus did not follow many of the Qumranian practices, the most memorable being over the issue of fasting. Jesus called himself the "bridegroom" and saw no need for practicing asceticism – even though He did initiate His ministry with a "fast in the desert" (Matthew 4).

If Jesus was eclectic, violating the Sabbath and failing to observe other restrictions (he let lepers and menstruating women touch him, for example), it appears that He considered Himself above the law as the lawgiver.

We might find in this scenario an explanation for why Jesus did nothing to rescue John the Baptist out of Herod's prison: He disagreed with John's public

[56]Eisenman, Ibid., P. 53

condemnation of Herod's incestuous marriage. John's rebuke reflected the fanatical extremism of Qumran. One of the women who followed Jesus and helped fund his activities was a Herodian (Luke 8:3). Obviously, He did not consider her unclean. Jesus' inclusive behavior ran counter to Qumran and the Essene movement in general. It ran counter to John's presumed prophetic role.

If the women who followed Jesus – such as the women named in Luke 8 – were members of the aristocracy, they would have been Jews who had made accommodations with the ruling establishment, including the Herodians. While they may have funded various "patriotic" movements like the Essenes, they would not have embraced revolutionary movements. John's public condemnation of a civil ruler was revolutionary and beyond his role as a forerunner. It was something Jesus was not willing to embrace. He saved His curses for the hypocritical religious rulers (Matthew 23).

While Jesus was no Herodian (Luke 13:32),[57] the women who followed Him were familiar with Herodian polygamy and may have been ready to embrace Him as a Solomonic-style Messiah.[58]

Psalm 45 explains how important the Messianic harem is to establishing the Kingdom of God. If this Psalm may be considered prophetic of the Messianic kingdom - and most agree that it is - then we must conclude that this was the core method of what Jesus did or intended to do after His Resurrection as the Messianic bridegroom. As explained in a previous study:

> *It says in v. 16, "In the stead of thy fathers shall be thy children whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth. . ." In other words, instead of a foreign King's son inheriting his respective kingdom, his grandson, from the daughter he gave in marriage to the Messiah and who was reared in the Messianic household, would inherit the kingdom.*
>
> ***This was how the Messiah's kingdom would overspread the nations of the earth: through intermarriage.***
>
> *The Fathers taught that these prophecies, like Psalm 45 and the*

[57] Mark 12:13 – Jesus warned His disciples against adopting the teaching of the Herodians which involved magic and state religion. The Herod's were superstitious, believing in omens and reincarnation. (rf. Matthew 2:3; Luke 9:9; 23:8)

[58] This is not to mention His intimate connection with the Parthian kingdoms where rulers practiced polygamy on a grand scale. Parthia represented the "lost" Ten Tribes of Israel. The Magi were Parthian kings and the title "King of kings," later ascribed to Jesus, was a Parthian title as indicated on its coinage.

> *Song of Solomon, were about Jesus Christ. Not only would Jesus the Messiah be married and have children, He would be a polygamist, as well. He would receive brides from the rulers of nations. He would have many wives and many children and many princes would be born in his house. They would become the rulers in the earth and succeed to the thrones of the nations from whom their mothers had come.*[59]

Obviously, the Fathers saw these prophecies symbolically, not literally. Otherwise, they would not have followed the path of sexual repression, celibacy, and misogyny of later years.

A literal application of this prophecy by Jesus may also explain the cool reception with which Jesus was received by His brethren. If they saw Him as an aspiring Messiah who contradicted the description of a monogamous and strictly Jewish one set out by the Essenes – Qumran in particular[60] – then for them, He would have been a deficient Messiah, perhaps even a false Christ. His lack of loyalty to the nationalistic cause, especially if it involved marriage with foreign women, tainted Him with idolatry. His absence because of His Ascension and delayed Parousia would certainly have provided opportunity for the monogamous doctrine to reassert itself in the Early Church. If the Order of Widows in Acts 6 represents the remnant of this prospective Messianic harem, we can understand the consternation of the Apostles in deciding what to do with them. James may have wanted to disperse them with men of the Church (James 1:27).

The idea of a polygamous Jesus is jarring and extremely offensive to the modern Christian. Christian believers really have no acclimation to the culture in which Jesus lived, or an understanding of the prophetic literature which defined His mission. James, too, seems to have had problems with a polygamous Jesus. *The Apocalypse of James,* an early 2nd Century document from the Nag Hammadi Library, quotes James as saying to Jesus:

> *Yet another thing I ask of you: who are the seven women who have been your disciples? And behold, all women bless you.*[61]

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[59] *Hierogamy & the Married Messiah,* Stivers, p. 163-164

[60] . . . "but in the Temple Scroll including, at least where *'the King'* or *'Ruler'* was concerned, *marrying non-Jews* and *'taking more than one wife during the lifetime of the first'* as well. Eisenman, *Ibid*., p. 555

[61] *Ibid.,* The Greek word here for "women" is *gune,* and can be translated "wives" as easily as "women."

Whether Jesus was having sexual relations with these women or not does not mitigate this highly unorthodox behavior which violated Essene tradition. Having one woman as a traveling companion was scarcely permissible, but seven women invited scandal.

We need not rely upon Apocryphal writings to establish the fact that Jesus shared private space with these women. Luke 8:1-2 already declares these women as His maidservants (i.e. "ministers"), a fact readily acknowledged by Early Church tradition:

> *For these reasons, we assert that the ministry of female deacons is especially required and urgent. For our Lord and Savior was himself served by deaconesses, such as Mary Magdalene . . . along with still other women.*
>
> - *Didascalia of the Apostles*[62]

The obvious escapes most commentators concerning this practice of Jesus during His years of ministry. Within the Torah tradition, these women "deacons" that served Jesus were His maidservants. And according to biblical law, they would have been His concubines, as well (Exodus 21). He would have been morally derelict had He *not* used them as concubines:

> *If she please not her master, who hath betrothed her to himself, then shall he let her be redeemed: to sell her unto a strange nation he shall have no power, <u>seeing he hath dealt deceitfully with her.</u>*
>
> - Exodus 21:8 (emphasis added)

It might be argued that Jesus did not "purchase" these women, but that they were free and offered to follow Him as disciples and servants out of love and not legal obligation. How that changes anything is not immediately clear. Whether they offered themselves – as Abigail did to the homeless David – freely or were purchased, they still were under His legal coverture. Yes, they provided funding from their own resources, but again, like widows, women of independent means could still be married as concubines. They had the power to enter covenants. The fact that these women traveled with Jesus, shared

[62]Aime Martimort: *Deaconesses, An Historical Study* (Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 38. The Greek term "deacon" means a household servant. "Minister" refers to the assistance of slaves.

private space with Him, and ministered to Him (cooking, cleaning, mending, conversing, etc.) were, for all practical purposes, married to Him. Otherwise, they would have been camp girls (prostitutes), a conclusion which ought to be more offensive to our pious detractors who cannot accept the notion of a married Jesus, let alone a polygamous one.

For the Essenes, and presumably for James and the later Jerusalem Church, the notion of a polygamous king (e.g. Herod) was highly offensive. If the Damascus Document is reflective of the Jamesian Church, we must surmise that only the Resurrection of Jesus was sufficient to overcome the hostility to His emerging Messianic claims.

The rationalization for King David's polygamy in the Damascus Document is truly startling. It claims that he did not have access to the Law of Moses because it was locked away in the Ark of the Covenant. We are led to believe he practiced it in ignorance.

This argument seems disingenuous. How believable is such an excuse for the King "whose delight is in the law of the LORD" to simply say he did not have access to it? What Law was it that he meditated upon "day and night?" Either the record we have about David is erroneous, or the writer of the Damascus Document was himself misinformed. It is difficult to believe that this document represents the opinions of James, although it might have reflected that of John the Baptist and later the "Judaizers" who were the zealot supporters of James and the Jerusalem Church.

Regardless, we must underscore the schism in the New Testament Church between those who were previously affiliated with the Essenes and those who were in the Messianic harem. They would have reclassified the maidservants of Jesus as "widows of the Church." For them, there was no room for the notion of a polygamous Messiah. They would have relegated these women as misguided – perhaps "star-struck" – disciples with no future in the Messianic movement, except as helpers and teachers to women converts and "supplicators" in prayers and fastings.

To the contrary, Lazarus and his sisters had a very different opinion on the matter. That difference becomes obvious when the "Johannine" Epistles are re-examined with this premise in mind.

The Sons of the Messiah

The elder unto the elect lady and her children. . . 2 John 1

The children of thy elect sister greet thee. 2 John 13

We know from the Second Epistle of John that both Martha and Mary had children. Considering that Lazarus was their younger brother – who was about the same age as Jesus – these women would have been older and beyond the normal childbearing years at the time of Christ's Crucifixion.[63] What we must now entertain is the supposition that these women, as the wives of Jesus, had already borne children to Him in His youth – and that these women were older than he was.

Likewise, considering that the normal age for the first intercourse of a Jewish male was 16, Jesus could have fathered many children by them (and others) between His sixteenth and thirtieth years.[64]

While the circumstantial evidence which points to a spousal relationship between both Mary and Martha and Jesus has been established in other writings[65] – a fact which we usually avoid because of public sensibilities against bigamy – and hence, that their children were those mentioned in the Epistle, is there any direct evidence which might point to these children in 2 John as being of Messianic descent? Inferences can be justified, but inferences from inferences are tenuous and usually require fresh evidence.

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[63] Epiphanius claims that Lazarus was 30 years old when resurrected and that he lived another 30 years and that he was the younger brother of Martha and Mary (*Panarion*, 66:37.6).

[64] ***Was Jesus Married****?*, William E. Phipps, Harper & Row, 1970 (republished 1989) p. 47. In the apocryphal book, "The Gospel of the Nativity of Mary," a Scripture is quoted not found in our Bibles which says, "Cursed is every one who has not begotten a male or a female in Israel." ***(ANF, vol. 8, p.384)*** The book of Jasher has Jacob's son, Benjamin, starting a family at 10 years old! (45:21). This idea also gives new meaning to a statement ascribed to Jesus by the Early Church Fathers, to the effect, saying, "My mystery is to me and to the sons of my house" (Clement of Alexandria, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, p. 459). Clement prefaces this quote by saying, "For it is not in the way of envy that the Lord announced in the Gospel . . ." Apparently, Clement had a Gospel which contained this statement by Jesus. Was it in the "Secret" Gospel of Mark? And why was it not preserved by the historic Church?

[65] *Hierogamy & the Married Messiah,* p 109- 110, "Hippolytus is another example of orthodox fumbling on this issue. In his commentary on the Song of Solomon (which is not available in English), he makes the allegory a real representation of a marriage between Jesus and Mary Magdalene, which he uses as a symbol for the union between the Church and the Divine Logos. But in a confusing turn, he makes Mary a composite figure for both Mary and Martha of Bethany. Thus, making Christ a bigamist!" For an English translation of the pertinent passages, see Susan Haskins, ***Mary Magdalen, Myth and Metaphor****,* (Berkeley, 1993).

Martha and Mary could have had children by other men *prior* to their encounter with Jesus. While that is possible, it seems unlikely – given Lazarus' status as their kinsman-redeemer according to the law of the *levirate*.[66] They would not have been destitute or abandoned. We cannot imagine how, otherwise, that they could have ever become Jesus' responsibility, unless they were married to Him. If we accept the proposition that Martha and Mary were *ever* married to Jesus, then they would have been married *only* to Him. These children mentioned in 2 John must be His, unless we are prepared to overcome the formidable ethical and practical issues arising from the intimacies these women had with Jesus while not being married to Him.[67]

If these children mentioned here are children by other men *after* their encounter with Jesus, then we must wonder if these women were adulteresses. If Jesus was resurrected and was alive, then these women were not widows in any real sense, although in the absence of the Ascended Lord, they were left in a celibate state, pending His return. Like a husband on a long journey, they would not have been at liberty to remarry.

Perhaps in a legal sense these women were widowed. Jesus did not appear to the authorities to prove His resurrection. Had they chosen to remarry, His public execution along with His physical absence would have protected them from the charge of adultery in a legal sense. But morally, they would have been adulteresses because both they and the disciples had seen Jesus alive.

But such arguments are an inference from an inference. We need more evidence which tie these children to Jesus. Does the second Epistle offer any *positive* evidence which would suggest that these children must be treated differently than common believers? Do any of the Johannine Epistles ascribe privileges to these members of the Bethany Community which are unique to them? Indeed, they do.

While the Fourth Gospel appears to have been written with a larger audience of Christians in mind, the three Epistles are addressed to the Bethany Community, specifically. I do not think any scholar would seriously contest the assumption that they all can be used to accurately describe the Bethany Community (or by common ascription, the "Johannine" Community). We will proceed on that assumption.

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[66]The reader is familiar with the law of the levirate from *Hierogamy & the Married Messiah* (textbook edition). Leviticus 22:13 imposes strict rules for the return of a priest's daughter to her father's house. Note that childlessness is required only of daughters divorced from "strangers." Both Mary and Martha would have been the daughters of a Levite and perhaps a priest.

[67] See the Hierogamy book on the subject of footwashing as a matrimonial service.

Scholars have sometimes complained that the 1st Epistle of John is confusing, even rambling in its discourse. It does not appear to be a completed letter, for it lacks both a salutation and a benediction. Some have suggested that it represents a collection of thoughts or notes written at different times and then compiled together into one letter. Others have thought that it represents a pre-Christian document which was later updated with Christian interpolations.

It is possible that each of these suggestions have an element of truth in them. Lazarus could have written notes to himself in anticipation of a treatise on important issues for its recipients. Considering that he had been a follower of John the Baptist and that his family was once supporters of the Essene movement, it is likely that he had either copied or composed statements of faith and wisdom sayings during his youth and then later amended them for this letter.

The letter also ends abruptly with a new topic. It lacks a conclusion and suggests that a later redactor has excised the rest of the Epistle.

The letter sometimes sounds contradictory. In the most glaring instance, the readers are told that they all have sin (1:10), yet in another, that they cannot sin (3:9).

The letter has been published in haste to respond to an emergency. There is a crisis of faith in the Community he addresses (4:4). There is also persecution and a looming crisis ("It is the last time" – 2:18). There is division and acrimony. The letter emphasizes love and condemns hatred in numerous places.

These urgent circumstances can explain the sometimes incoherence of the letter. However, what can also explain the confusion is the lack of initiation for the reader. While to the initiate, a document can appear random and senseless, to an adept – someone who knows the code – it can suddenly make sense.

There are three audiences to whom this Epistle is addressed: *fathers, young men, and little children* (2:12-14). These respective verses appear to be a poem or a hymn sung in the Bethany Community. The saying represents the three stages of life in a family. The fathers are the ones who have known the tradition "from the beginning." They are the founders of the Bethany Community.

The "young men" are the second-generation members of the Community. They are the first recipients of the tradition from "the fathers" who must now contend with the larger world, including the general Christian community, which does not recognize the legitimacy of their status.

The "little children" are the third-generation members of the Community, the sons of the young men. They are innocent to the conflicts which the "young men" must engage in against "the wicked one" to keep them safe and to protect their heritage.

The Epistle is written, then, primarily to the Bethany Community, which, if our thesis is correct, consists of literal descendants of Jesus Christ mingled with their supporters. Two classes of Christians are represented, and we will discuss them shortly.

Chosen Wives

As for the direct evidence which supports our proposition,

First, we find that Mary and Martha are described in 2 John verses 1 & 13 as "elect," or more properly "chosen." This kind of expression suggests status in a community which consists of members of a harem. Harems have brides who are "chosen" and favored over others. There is often competition to win the attentions of the husband. If the woman succeeds, it enhances the position of her offspring.

In the case of Martha and Mary, we know from the Gospel stories that they were favored, and the Fourth Gospel describes them as "loved" (John 11:5) Considering that they eventually provided support and coverture to the larger harem after Pentecost, I do not think any would have disputed their preeminent status in the harem.

Born Christians

Second, if we turn our attention from the women and their relationship with Jesus and instead, look at these children, we might find better evidence to support our proposition.[68] If we can establish that these children have received the benefits of Christ's Atonement as a *birthright* and not by right of adoption, then I think we have identified persons different from the common believer.

There are not many references to the Atonement in the First Epistle. The one cited below (2:2) refers to it as "propitiation" – a shelter of protection. In 3:16, Lazarus contrasts Christ's Atonement with the actions of Cain who killed his brother. While Cain killed his brother, Christ was killed *on behalf* of His

[68] Keep in mind that 2 John is specifically addressed to these women and *their children*. Verse 12 promises future communications and suggests that the full Johannine corpus was written for their benefit as a substitute for a personal appearance "that your joy may be full" (compare with 1 John 1:4): meaning that 2 John was written first, and that the matters promised to be addressed by a face-to-face visit would have to be resolved by the Epistle known to us as 1 John, which is also addressed to the "little children." (2:1 *et al*).

brethren. Lazarus uses His death as an example of brotherly love "because he laid down his life for us." He was the worthy "Son of the Father," unlike Cain.

In all of these instances, the familial image of a loving father or brother is foremost, not the notion of a sacrificial death to appease the wrath of a vengeful God. Even Christ's advocacy is with "the father," not an offended potentate (2:1). The "blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1:7). Its value is not in justification, but rather its sanctification, the result of "walking in the light." For Lazarus, the Atonement resolves a relational problem that restores love and "fellowship" with God, not the satisfaction of a pecuniary obligation.

In contrast, the historic tradition of Christian theology teaches that salvation is a work of "sovereign grace." There is nothing in man that can commend itself as worthy or deserving of God's grace. All have been consigned to hell, and it is only through God's mercy that the Atonement is efficacious in the saving of sinners. The notion that any person can be "deserving" of that mercy is certainly inconsistent with this tradition. That anyone – Jews included – could be saved because of a racial inheritance; the Church has rejected it as contrary to sound doctrine.

However, if Jesus did have children, they would have been spared the curse of Original Sin in the sense that they would not have had the first Adam as their federal head. Rather, their biological father – Jesus – would have served as their federal head, not by adoption, but by birthright.

The same would have been true of all mankind had Adam never sinned. Sin for Adam's offspring would still have been possible – given that all must have their moral agency tested. Had any of the offspring of sinless Adam themselves sinned; they would still have had a sinless federal head. Forgiveness would have been possible without atonement. The very notion of atonement implies "covering." With sinless Adam as their federal head, he would have been their "covering." Forgiveness of sin would have depended upon his advocacy.

Of course, that is not how things turned out. Instead, the sins of the whole world are potentially resolved by Christ's Atonement because it had the effect of replacing the federal headship of sinful Adam with that of His own. Christ became the advocate for those who would unite themselves to Him by faith. Adoption through faith is necessary for the Atonement of Christ to be appropriated to those who repent of their sins.

But would it have been different for His own children?

Yes, it would have been different because they would not have had to be delivered from "sin" but from specific "sins" which they may have committed. Of course, "sin" in the physical frailties of the old Adam was still inherited by the offspring of Jesus, just as they were for Him (their physical beings being partly derived from their mothers),[69] but the *moral depravity* of a sinful nature would not have been inherited. The sin of Adam could not have been communicated to them, for he was no longer their federal head. Those who were to be adopted through faith would have to await the general resurrection. Their right to earthly dominion and fulfillment of the Adamic Covenant would be delayed until the new Creation. In contrast, however, the children of Jesus would possess the right to dominion *now* and in this world. And it is arguable from the "Grail tradition" - the theological tradition which is embraced in this book - that it is *their* righteous rule which is required in order to establish the Messianic Kingdom and to complete the task necessary for the new Creation ever to come.

The question before us, then, is whether the Johannine Epistles present a view of the Atonement which supports this proposition. Do we find in these Epistles the Atonement appropriated to the members of the Bethany Community differently than it is to the Christian community at large? Is it communicated as one of "right" rather than one of "grace," as a matter of inheritance rather than mercy?

If the First Epistle was written to a mixed company – the descendants of Jesus and their supporters – we would be dealing with two classes of Christians: those by birth and those by adoption. We would expect awkward references which would attempt to address those of two different statuses. Those references would be later interpreted by theologians as imperfect if not defective examples of biblical teaching.

For example, 2:2 tells the readers that Jesus Christ "is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

Why would such a statement be made? This same author obviously wrote John 3:16 ("For God so loved the world. . ."), so why would some of his readers have the impression that the Atonement of Christ is a propitiation only for them, a notion which would require the author's correction? This is especially puzzling in contrast to what the author says, as if in regression, about the world just a few statements later: "Love not the world" (v. 15).

[69]And also derived from the pre-glorified body of Jesus, prior to His Atonement and Resurrection.

Of course, theologians jump in and try to iron things out. A whole array of literary and doctrinal terms is employed to harmonize statements such as these into one rational explanation. If we were Arminians, we would say that the writer is embracing the possibility of universal salvation for all mankind. If we were Calvinists, we would attempt to argue that even though divine grace is sufficient to save all of mankind, it is not efficacious because of predestination. But in either case, we would be missing the point that the writer is identifying two classes of humanity which benefit from Christ's Atonement: the Bethany Community and everyone else.

We might say that this class division represents typical Jewish xenophobia which disdains anything Gentile. But again, we established earlier in our discussion that the Bethany Community was "anti-Semitic" and pro-Gentile in its orientation. It is obvious that the Bethany Community regarded itself as special, but certainly not because it was Jewish.

Other scholars will try to tell us that the writer is really saying that Christ's Atonement is beneficial to "Christians" and also to the world. But that is a nonsensical statement, because if the people of "the world" embraced Christ's Atonement, then that would make them Christians, too. Rather, we have two classes of *Christians* represented here. The writer regards the recipients of his Epistle as special Christians who are different from the Christians of "the whole world." What would have made them special?

They would have been special if they were the guardians of the children of the Messiah. Given the household theology of that era, they would have seen themselves as beneficiaries of their affiliation with the family of Jesus, just as, for example, Eleazer might have been as the chief steward of Abraham's household or the survivors of the siege of Jericho who stayed in Rahab's house. The theology of the Passover comes into play here, as well. Those who stayed inside the house marked by the blood of the Passover lamb were protected. Everyone survived because they were identified as one family group.

We fail to appreciate this distinction from traditional adoptionist theology that finds the New Covenant household to be fulfilled in the institution of the Church which is protected by the blood of Jesus. We would fail to see that this is a reference to a more specific household of faith, were it not that this Epistle adds new statements which complicate traditionalist theology.

If we say that we have not sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. - 1:8

In the light of what has been said above, the author here speaks of "sin" in terms of the *capacity* to sin. He wants his readers to understand that just because they are free from Adam's sinful nature; it does not mean that all of their actions are praise worthy. Some of their choices are actually sins. He does not want them to fall into the self-righteousness for which the Pharisees were condemned by Jesus or to embrace a "saved by race" mentality.

> *If we confess our sins, **he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins**, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*
>
> - 1:9 (emphasis added)

This text is most problematic for traditional theologians, for it presents Divine forgiveness as an *entitlement*. To the pious mind, it seems most unbecoming to suggest that God could ever be "unfaithful" or "unjust" should He decide not to forgive a person. But for the audience to whom this Epistle is addressed, that is exactly what the author is claiming. God would be a covenant-breaking God if forgiveness did not follow in due course from confession.

This perspective corresponds with the notion outlined above where it was said that the appropriation of the Atonement should be a matter of birthright for those who do not have Adam as their federal head according to the flesh. This privilege would not be true of those who have been adopted as an act of grace – who are beneficiaries of Christ's headship according to promise at the general resurrection but are currently trapped by the Adamic creation.

Would this be evidence of Messianic status in the Bethany Community? Compare this text with what God said of David's heir in 2 Samuel 7:14-15,

> *I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: **But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul. . .***

Clearly, this text supports a view of mercy that is extraordinary. *The Messianic office is one of Divine sonship*, even if the man is of human origins. How much more would be the offspring of the Incarnate Son of God!

Nowhere else in the New Testament do we have such a representation of the Atonement of Christ. It is never presented as one of entitlement. Not even James and Jude – themselves heirs of the Davidic Covenant – speak of the work of Christ in this way. In the mind of the author, the recipients of his Epistle must enjoy a status superior even to the descendants of King David.

Lazarus here uses inclusive terminology to show that this promise belongs to the entire Messianic household, himself included. Apparently, he felt it was a *family* covenant which embraced the physical descendants of Jesus *and their servants*. And while we cannot rely on this text alone to support our proposition that Jesus was the father of these children – who are grown at this point with children of their own – it is certainly clear evidence consistent with our proposition. 1 John 1:9 indicates an attitude by the writer that does not fit traditional soteriology and strongly suggests the recipients of this Epistle were of Davidic descent, at least, if not Messianic descent.

Messianic Viceroys

Third, if these children can be described as receiving an *initiatory rite* which is different from that of the common believer – one which is unique to those of royal descent – then we have found the Messianic household and the children of Jesus.

The writer does refer directly to the "Messianic doctrine," translated as the "doctrine of Christ" in most Bibles, not referring to the teachings of Jesus but rather the teaching *about* His messianic status:

> *Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.*
>
> - 2 John 9 (emphasis added)[70]

It is fairly common knowledge that "Christ" means "Messiah" in the Greek. "Messiah" means "anointed one" and originally referred to the kings and priests of Israel who were "anointed" for their office. Thus, there were many "anointed ones" (i.e. "messiahs") in the history of Israel. And this would be the basis for why Ignatius could claim that Christianity preceded Judaism. Judaism is a religion centered on teachers of the law. Christianity, on the other hand, centers its faith on a divinely appointed leader who is representative of the Covenant.[71]

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[70] The absence of the definite article here in front of "Christ" – as elsewhere – suggests that it is being used as an adjective to describe the doctrine, thus the term "messianic doctrine."

[71] "For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity. . ." Compare Jeremiah 23:4 with these words from Ignatius, an early Apostolic Father: **"For we ought to receive every one whom the Master of the house sends to be over His household, as we would do Him that sent him. It is manifest, therefore, that we should look upon the bishop even as we would upon the Lord Himself."** - Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians

"And do ye also reverence your bishop as Christ Himself, according as the blessed apostles have enjoined you. He that is within the altar is pure, wherefore also he is obedient

The question arises in looking at this text is whether it is correct to see it as simply a reference to the teaching of the historical Jesus, or is it referring to a "Messianic doctrine" which predates the historical Jesus. The text associates the "doctrine of Christ" with the notion of Divine Fatherhood and Sonship. We know that the confession of Jesus as both Messiah and Son of God are necessary to saving faith (e.g. Peter's confession in Matthew 16 and Martha's in John 11). But was the doctrine of Messianic sonship – as a "son of God" original with the advent of the historical Jesus?

The answer is "no," clearly not. The very text from 2 Samuel 7 quoted above is an example (from among others) that the idea of Messianic sonship existed as far back, at least, as the Davidic Covenant.[72] Every descendant of David anointed for royal service was a "messiah" and considered a "son of God." That the historical Jesus was identified as Messiah and Son of God was nothing unusual or different from Old Testament revelation concerning the rulers springing from the loins of David. The value of the confession, of course, according to traditional doctrine, is that Jesus was *the* Messiah of all messiahs, and *that* confession is salvific because of who Jesus really was: the *incarnate* Son of God as the pre-existent Divine Logos described in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel.

However, the traditional translation and interpretation obscure what the writer is really saying here in this text: that **the apostates** rejected the messiahship of the historical Jesus **because they had already rejected the doctrine of messianic sonship**. This is important. The Messianic doctrine had clearly defined the Messianic office and that fact should have prepared them and the world to receive *this* Son of God – the historical Jesus as the pre-existing Divine Logos - the Savior who was to come in the flesh as the Messiah.

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to the bishop and presbyters: but he that is without is one that does anything apart from the bishop, the presbyters, and the deacons. Such a person is defiled in his conscience, and is worse than an infidel. For what is the bishop but one who beyond all others possesses all power and authority, so far as it is possible for a man to possess it. Who according to his ability has been made *an imitator of the Christ of God*? And what is the presbytery but a sacred assembly, the counselors and assessors of the bishop? And what are the deacons but imitators of the angelic powers, fulfilling a pure and blameless ministry unto him, as the holy Stephen did to the blessed James ... He, therefore, that will not yield obedience to such, must needs be utterly without God, an impious man who despises Christ, and depreciates His appointments. - Epistle to the Trallians *ANF*, Vol. 1, p. 69 (emphasis added)

[72]Actually, it predates the time of David. Abraham was referred to as a messiah (Psalm 105:15 - "Touch not mine anointed.")

We see this further delineated in the converse statement that whoever *denies* this Messianic doctrine is in fact an antichrist:

> *For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.*
>
> - 2 John 7

Most commentators have struggled to explain this awkward expression. Some have supposed that the author is contesting Docetism, a later Gnostic heresy which denied the true humanity of Christ. But Docetism did not emerge until well into the 2nd Century, long after both John and Lazarus – whoever might have been the author – were gone from the scene.

Nor is this expression adequately explained in the challenge which the Bethany Community was making to the Thomasian Community (i.e. Ebionites) which tried to spiritualize the resurrection of Jesus. For the doubting Thomas did not disbelieve the *physical* Jesus, it was the physical *resurrection* which he doubted. If the author was here responding to problems among the converts of Thomas, this expression should have said, "Jesus Christ *rose again* in the flesh," not "Jesus Christ *is come* in the flesh."

Notice, also, that Lazarus does not use the proper voice if such an interpretation is what he is suggesting. Looking back many years later at the Incarnation, he should have said, "Jesus Christ *has come* in the flesh." Instead, he uses the middle voice, as if the manifestation of the Incarnation in human history continues.[73] However, since Jesus is now the Ascended Lord, the Incarnation is manifested only in Heaven, not on Earth . . . unless, we can say that it is manifested in a different way.

When someone is deceased, we say, "he is survived" by his family, especially his children. Had Jesus Christ "left issue" in the world, we could truthfully say that His "flesh continues." Indeed, the propagation of physical descendants would represent the continuation of the Incarnation *via* the work of the Holy Spirit upon redeemed flesh – the Messianic offspring.[74]

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[73]English has two voices, the active ("I testify") and the passive ("It is testified"). Greek has three voices, the active ("I testify"), the passive ("It is testified") and the middle ("I am attesting"). In the middle voice the subject is affected by the action. Its voice varies greatly and is seldom given a satisfactory English equivalent. In this case it can be translated as "is come in the flesh" or "is coming in the flesh." If the former, it favors the notion of a completed Incarnation in the past. If the latter, it supports the above interpretation of an on-going manifestation of the Incarnation. In Catholic tradition, the Incarnation continues in the Eucharist. In Protestant doctrine, it continues in the printed Bible. In the Bethany Community, it continues in the Messianic office.

[74]The word "flesh" is sometimes used in the Bible as a euphemism for a man's penis and his

This is not a farfetched supposition. In numerous places, descendants are addressed as if they were their ancestor.[75] There is a unity of generation.[76]

But is this really what Lazarus had in mind when he used this expression? If we read back into the text our current theological biases, of course, it is difficult to see. However, if we look at the converse expression for a moment – as it is stated in 1 John – we might begin to understand:

> *And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.*
>
> - 1 John 4:3

Nowhere else in the Bible do we find the term "antichrist," except in these Epistles. Paul talks about "the son of perdition" and John the Revelator warns the faithful about "the Beast" and the "false prophet." Theologians tie these references together to create a unified personification of evil. Yet, is this what Lazarus had in mind when he wrote "antichrist"? Since he tells the readers that they have already been warned about this coming antichrist (and the plural "antichrists" – 2:18), we might be tempted to infer that association.

However, Lazarus adds other indicia by which he identifies these evil people. In 2:18-19, he tells us that these people were once a part of the Jesus movement, even of the Bethany Community itself. These people "went out" from them, yet still claimed to be prophets, true followers of righteousness (4:1), which is why he calls them "liars" (2:22). So subtle is this apostasy, even Martha finds it difficult to recognize it and is warned not to extend hospitality to its teachers or even to speak a blessing to them (2 John v. 10-11). This suggests a deception which has the ability to deceive "the very elect" and should caution biblical commentators. It might be an apostasy which has infected all of Christendom unawares for many centuries.

In coming from their own Community, these antichrists do not match the

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emission which produces offspring. In saying that Jesus Christ is "come in the flesh" we could truthfully say this is a direct reference to His sexuality and success in producing offspring. This question will be revisited later when we attempt to explain why the Eucharist is lacking in the Fourth Gospel.

[75] Israel, the various tribes of Israel, and other nations are named after their progenitors. The first Christians were first called "Jessians," and were so-named, according to Epiphanius, either because of an unexplained association with "Jesse" the father of David, or that "they stemmed from Jesus" as His disciples (*Panarion*, 29.5.4, *Ibid*.)

[76] There is a covenant unity between a progenitor and his offspring in biblical theology. See *Biblical Midwifery*, op. cit.

descriptions found in the other New Testament writings. Not even Christ's own predictions in Matthew 24 *et al* in reference to "false christs" will work here; for a "false christ" is a "pseudo" christ, not an "anti" christ. These "*anti*christs" are unique to the Johannine literature.

"Antichrist" simply means "anti-messianism" and suggests Jews who have rejected the Messianic claims of Jesus. But again, since unbelieving Jews cannot be said to have ever been a part of the Bethany Community, we must rather focus on the heretical *teaching* which receives the author's condemnation: that **anyone who denies the full meaning and manifestation of the Incarnation is an antichrist**. At this point, other than the Fourth Gospel's anti-Jewish polemics, what other group could have been guilty of "anti-messianism"?

We could consider the remaining, recalcitrant followers of the Baptist as a possibility. If Simon Magus is representative of what had become of John's disciples, "antichrist" would certainly be a fitting epithet if we used it, as is usual today, as a pejorative term. But Simon was a *false* christ, not an *anti*christ. He believed in the Messianic doctrine; he simply appropriated it to himself and not to Jesus.

Yet again, even though the Bethany Community consisted, at least in part, of former disciples of John - and some may have even been lured into this heresy and fallen away - it still would have been someone *outside* of the Community who would have been propagating the doctrine. **These people still claim to be the followers of Jesus Christ.**

Might it not be that Lazarus is speaking of those in the general Christian community who have *redefined* the Messianic office? At this point, the rift is only just now beginning to occur. As in the Fourth Gospel, the Jewish and Gentile Churches founded by the Apostles were still one Body, only lacking in some parts. Notably, what seems to be lacking and the Fourth Gospel purports to fill is the theological and historical support for a high Christological doctrine: that Jesus Christ was the Divine Logos, God of very God. Throughout the Fourth Gospel, a number of issues are clarified: the pre-existence of Christ, the mystical operation of the Holy Spirit upon the human soul (regeneration), the complete and total Incarnation, and the mighty miracles which were beyond the normal power of magicians. The Fourth Gospel exceeds the Synoptic Gospels in presenting a theological case which overturns the arguments of the Ebionites who held an Adoptionist Christology.[77] It

[77] In not naming James, it might be that James was keeping his true sentiments a secret in trying to hold the Ebionite faction from splitting the Christian movement.

seems ironic that the branch of Christianity which most embraced Christ's humanity – the Messianic harem – should also be that Community which most thoroughly and convincingly defended His deity. And to add to the irony, we find Ebionism in time manifesting itself in the high church ecclesiology of the Apostolic church, first as an extension of the Jewish synagogue and then later as a part of the Imperial bureaucracy. Hierarchical churches have constantly struggled with a latent Arianism. For as will be shown below, Arianism rejects the Father and the Son.[78]

In contrast to the Fourth Gospel, the Johannine Epistles reveal further erosion which has occurred. An apostasy is underway in the Jesus movement which has begun by an open rejection of what the Bethany Community has said in its Gospel to the larger community of believers. **The heresy has revealed itself, not in its rejection of the Trinity or the deity of Christ, but in a redefinition of the Messianic office. To the Messianic harem, what could have been a greater denial of the Messianic office than to deny the Messianic succession?** Could this not be what Lazarus meant when he said the Messianic doctrine embraces "the father and the son" (2 John 9; 1 John 2:33)? In other words, if Jesus was the very son of the heavenly Father (not an adopted one as argued by the Arians and Ebionites) is it not a denial of the heavenly sonship to deny the earthly sonship?

If we know anything about the succession of spiritual authority in the historic Church, it is its hostility to the idea that the episcopacy can be handed down from father to son. **And what is central to the Messianic doctrine is the opposite: kingship and priesthood operate according to family succession from father to son.** The absence of the apostolic doctrine in the Fourth Gospel and these Epistles is noteworthy. It is as if these books were written directly to oppose the burgeoning doctrine of apostolic succession in the larger Christian movement. *If Jesus ever had children, it would have been imperative that they assumed leadership of the Church.*

[78]St. Athanasius says of the Arians: *It was the eunuchs who instigated these proceedings against all* [the Nicene Christians]. *And the most remarkable circumstance in the matter is this; that the Arian heresy which denies the Son of God receives its support from eunuchs, who, as both their bodies are fruitless, and their souls barren of the seeds of virtue, cannot bear even to hear the name of son. . . The eunuchs of Constantius cannot endure the confession of Peter* [Matthew 16:16]*, nay, they turn away when the Father manifests the Son, and madly rage against those who say that the Son of God is His genuine Son, thus claiming as* ***a heresy of eunuchs*** *that there is no genuine and true offspring of the Father.* (Athanasius, "History of the Arians," 5.38, *Nicene & Post-Nicene Fathers* vol. 4, p. 283) (emphasis added).

Unlike the Fourth Gospel, these Epistles are not general or "catholic" epistles. They are addressed to the scattered members of the Bethany Community which by now ought to have numbered in the thousands. It might be at this stage that some of the children of the Messianic harem, now grown with children of their own, are feeling isolated and losing faith. They are tempted to merge with the apostolic Christian community which sees the mission of Jesus only as a spiritual message of eternal salvation and nothing more. They are tempted to follow the established Church which long ago dismissed the harem as irrelevant to the Christian mission. The Messianic office had been assumed by other Davidic heirs (James' successors?) and the Apostles which established, in the prevailing view, a more worthy episcopal succession.[79] Peter, Paul, and James were all dead at this point. The imminent return of Christ was increasingly elusive and problematic. Many of the women from the original harem may have been dead, also. What purpose then could the Messianic harem have served? Jerusalem was a destroyed city or at least in the hands of their adversaries. To what was there left to go back?

Consider that the first Epistle ends abruptly, as if in mid-thought. The complete text simply is not there and we are challenged with its final warning: "Keep yourselves from idols." It is out of place from anything that has been written. He introduces this new topic and does not explain how it relates to the challenges his readers might be facing. How is it possible that the Messianic harem – the Bethany Community - would be tempted with idolatry, unless somehow it demonstrated an insufficient monotheism? Certainly, Ebionism had problems with the emerging Trinitarian doctrine, of which the Bethany Community was its nursemaid - but what of orthodoxy? Later orthodoxy embraced the Son and the Father, but what of the Holy Spirit? Might have a belief in a co-equal, *feminine* person in the Trinity (the Holy Spirit/Sophia) been considered idolatrous by orthodox Christians, including Peter and Paul? Is it possible that some members of the Bethany Community were beginning to reject Judaic theology and to use this emerging Trinitarian formula to embrace the polytheistic view of the Gentiles? Gentile polytheism exalted the feminine principle into its pantheon of deities. Might Lazarus have been responding to this nascent conflict with Bethany teaching?[80]

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[79] The precedence for apostolic succession can be found in the 1 Epistle of Clement which is considered a legitimate apostolic writing from the later 1st Century era and not to be confused with the *pseudo*-Clementine Epistles used elsewhere in our discussion.

[80] *Dr. Raphael Patai, in his carefully documented works "Man and Temple" and "The Hebrew Goddess", shows that out of the 360 years that Solomon's temple-complex lasted at Jerusalem, the matriarchal Canaanite goddess Ashera, who represented the old farming population of Israel, had been worshipped there for 240 as Jehovah's bride and sister with her wooden image publicly*

At this point, we are simply reconstructing the scenario from an apparently uncompleted text. We haven't proven anything. But it is all said to prepare us for what Lazarus reminds his readers to be the remedy – the inoculant – to this anti-Messianic doctrine: **the fact that his readers, too, are messiahs:**

> *But ye have an unction* [anointing] *from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*
>
> - 1 John 2:20

> *These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.*
>
> - 2:26-27 (emphasis added)

Notice how Lazarus does not appeal to an ecclesiastical office or tradition to support his arguments. In fact, this might be a pre-emptive response to the threat from the general Christian community to "seduce" the descendants of Jesus Christ with the claims of apostolic succession. The people to whom he addresses this Epistle do not need to be taught (this is unheard of in any other Christian tradition) because they have been "anointed" - clearly a Messianic rite. "Anointing" conferred spiritual authority to priest, king and prophet in Old Testament times. Apparently, the Bethany Community felt compelled to recognize a significant portion of its membership as "the anointed ones": messiahs.[81] They practiced a ceremony by which their children were "sealed" to their Messianic destinies.[82]

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displayed. The tribe of Asher had originally been named in her honor. Dr. Patai points out that when Elijah slaughtered the 400 priests on Mount Carmel he left the priests of Ashera unmolested; Baal was then Jehovah's rival male deity and therefore like Molech, Milcom, Chemosh (1 Kings 11:7) and all other male gods, had to be suppressed. Clysta Kinstler: *The Moon Under Her Feet*, (HarperCollins, 1989) p. 308. Since Ebionism represents the earliest orthodoxy, the orthodoxy of the Jamesian tradition, it is probable that it was also hostile to the exaltation of a feminine figure into the Christian Trinity. Lazarus may have worried that a revival of pre-Exile Ashtoreth worship as the Holy Spirit might also lead to the worship of images.

[81]Remember that it was not until nearly the 2nd Century that Christians began to refer to themselves universally as "Christians."

[82]2 John 8, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." Lazarus was not referring to ordinary acts of Christian righteousness. "Full reward" means "getting full wages." People are paid for the work of their professions. What were Martha and her children's unique vocation? To what were they called? If a denial of the Messianic doctrine was its undoing, then aiding or extending hospitality to Christians who denied it was undermining their own position as Messianic viceroys.

Now, we have the smoking gun. Had this anointing referred simply to the baptism of the Holy Spirit (e.g. Acts 2), it certainly was not grounds for spiritual independence in any other Christian tradition at the time. But here, Lazarus tells his readers that this "anointing" – whatever it was – exempts them from the pretended authority of their "seducers." The rest of the New Testament will refer to the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the manifestation of various spiritual gifts bestowed upon all believers, but nowhere will you find this kind of *royal* indicia used to describe any Christian community: a status which supersedes the ecclesiastical order of elders and deacons and one which equals, at least, the authority of the apostles and prophets.[83] In the Bethany Community, there is no clear ecclesiastical structure, only love and truth and humility. We have old men and young men; we have little children and terms of endearment. We have no apostles, no bishops. In fact, Lazarus betrays his displeasure with a man in his Third Epistle who "loves the preeminence," "does not receive us" and "puts [people] out of the church." He is clearly upset with the idea of "church" government.

What we are witnessing in these Epistles is an attempt by Lazarus to make room for the descendants of Jesus in the larger Christian community – for which he, too, embraces as "sons of God" (John 1:12) - yet without losing their essential identity, an identity known only to them. He wants to convince the apostolic churches not to usurp the Messianic office.[84]

If Lazarus was really complaining that the descendants of Jesus had been rejected by the larger body of Christians – to those few who might have known of their existence – we might wonder why he didn't simply come out and say so. He defends their cause by numerous "We knows" and this clearly unsubstantiated claim: **"We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error"** (4:6).

This spectacular almost vain assertion comes with no apostolic or episcopal sanction, no miraculous validation, no historical precedent, no prophetic fulfillment, and no Scriptural reference for support. It is made with sheer and naked assurance that the readers know who they are already or they will figure

[83]The only other place that this expression "anointing" is used in terms of a spiritual experience is by Paul in 2 Corinthians 1:21-22, "Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." Paul, too, uses this "anointing" to validate his apostolic claims. Whatever it was, it was not the common rite of chrism which all baptized believers experienced.

[84]Epiphanius claimed that the order of non-Davidic bishops was a continuation of the Davidic throne. The Bethany Community disagreed with that claim, saying that only the descendants of Jesus – *those who come by blood* - can inherit the bishoprics.

it out through direct revelation.

This is further borne out by his strange formula in 5:8, **"And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one."**

What could this possibly mean? A common interpretation has been that,

> "The Spirit" refers to the Holy Spirit and the rebirth of the human spirit – the internal witness (John 3:5)
>
> "The water" refers to baptism and the embrace of the communion of saints – the ritual witness.[85]
>
> "The blood" refers to the Crucifixion.

But what if "the blood" really points to the covenant lineage of Jesus Christ – the family witness?

The Gospel of John 1:13 says, "Which were born, not of blood" to express the author's use of the term "blood" to mean bloodlines. It should not be considered a reference to His crucifixion. That this is a reference to lineage is further supported in the previous verse (5:7) where it says that Jesus *came* by "water and blood." He didn't *die* by "water and blood."

"These three agree in one" is the closest Lazarus ever comes to identifying for whom he is a spokesman.[86] He is telling the general Christian community that the true Desposyni (those who were "*of* the Lord" and not just "*with* the Lord") embrace all three of these elements. Because the larger Christian movement had given up on the witness of "the blood," it was in an apostate condition and had become "antichrist."

[85] Or, it may refer to the water of footwashing, which will be addressed later.

[86] To openly declare that Jesus had any children risked their lives at the hands of the Roman state or the Jewish authorities who had assassin squads throughout the Roman world at this time. They were known as the *Sicarii* (of whom was Judas Iscariot) who were commissioned to kill anyone teaching the Law of Moses to the uncircumcised (Eisenman: *James the Brother of Jesus*). "But when the same Domitian had issued his orders, that the descendants of David should be slain according to an ancient tradition . . . and as such, also, were related to Christ" Epiphanius, *The Panarion* 29.5.4 Ibid. (emphasis added).

2020 Addendum

In anticipation of a future study on the family of Jesus – as it is hidden in plain sight in the New Testament texts – it should be noted that the term Lazarus uses for "anointing" and "unction" in 1 John 2:20 & 27 is the Greek word *chrisma* which means "to rub in." *Chrisma* is unique to the Johannine Epistles and is a stronger term than the one used by Paul cited above in 1 Corinthians 1:21 which is *chrio*, "to rub." "To rub" or "pour" onto something is the normal understanding of anointing. But the notion of "rubbing *into*" suggests that this anointing has become something *inherent* to the recipient. It is not a positional or nominal consecration but rather something metaphysical pertaining to a change of nature.

Chapter Four

THE MESSIANIC SUCCESSION

The Common Rite

It should seem remarkable that the only sacramental rite of importance in the Fourth Gospel is that of footwashing. No account of the Lord's Supper is given. Baptism is not enjoined, either. Lazarus does not deny baptism and Communion; he simply ignores them. Whether it is because they were unimportant in the life of his worshipping community or whether they were an assumed "given" for which footwashing was set forth as their needed supplement cannot be determined with any certainty. Regardless, the importance of footwashing (John 13) for the Bethany Community cannot be doubted. **The Fourth Gospel is telling the general Christian movement that footwashing is what makes it different.** And while it will be conceded that the popularity of the Gospel later in the 2nd Century, after it was identified with the Apostle John, led to its practice in the catholic churches – especially in the monastic communities – clearly it was neglected in the earlier years and even unknown, except for those associated with the Bethany Family or whatever tradition it was that produced the Fourth Gospel.

We might wonder why the Synoptic Gospels do not mention footwashing as a ritual. If it was as important as presented in the Fourth Gospel, it seems puzzling that the others did not, at least, make a passing reference to it.

This anomaly is too glaring to be dismissed as an innocent oversight. Such a fundamental difference in liturgical practice simply cannot be ignored. It might be that the original texts did contain some allusion to it. Whether they did or not, we will never know. But what ought to be clear is that either the authors or else their later redactors did not want the Christian world to practice footwashing. They wanted baptism and Communion, but not footwashing.

If the references to footwashing were edited out of the Synoptics, it is possible that this censorship represented an on-going program to marginalize the Bethany Community and isolate it from the larger movement. But what is more likely is that baptism and Communion represented rituals which were more appealing to either the authors or their redactors because they supported the notion of apostolic succession. Presumably, only ecclesiastical leaders can administer these rites, otherwise, they are said to have no value.

Footwashing, on the other hand, expresses the democratic impulse of the Fourth Gospel which teaches the general effusion of the Holy Spirit and completely ignores the notion of apostleship. In the Fourth Gospel there is no spiritual hierarchy and no commission to baptize. There is only "feed my lambs" as proof of pious devotion. No one is made a bishop, an elder, a priest, or an apostle. There is only love and service, the shepherd and his flock, the father and his children.

Of course, after the Bethany Community as the Messianic harem had faded from memory, footwashing was rescued from oblivion in the name of John's Apostleship. By this time, the Messianic office had been safely integrated into the bishoprics of apostolic succession under the See of St. Peter. Because John was a subordinate apostle to Peter, the Messianic aspects could be conveniently ignored whenever they interfered with the wishes of Rome.

How this process worked in later times is most sadly (although somewhat humorously) shown in the debate at the Synod of Whitby (664 AD), which, as it turned out, decided the fate of the Celtic Church. The exchange comes down to us as follows:

> **Wilfred**: "The only people who are stupid enough to disagree with the whole world are these Scots and their obstinate adherents the Picts and Britons, who inhabit only a portion of these two islands in the remote ocean."
> **Colman**: "It is strange that you should call our customs stupid when they rest on the authority of so great an apostle, who was considered worthy to lean on our Lord's breast and whose great wisdom is acknowledged throughout the world."
> **Wilfred**: "Far be it from us to charge John with foolishness. And this is the custom of all the successors of blessed John in Asia since his death, and is also that of the world-wide church . . . It is quite apparent to us, Colman, that you follow neither the example of John, as you imagine, nor that of Peter, whose tradition you deliberately contradict. Your keeping of Easter agrees neither with the Law nor with the Gospel."
> **Colman**: "Are we to believe that our most reverend Father Columba and his successors, men so dear to God, thought or acted contrary to Holy Scriptures when they followed this custom? . . ."

Wilfred: "I feel certain that if any Catholic adviser had come to them, they would readily have observed his guidance, since we know that they readily observed such of God's ordinances as they already knew. But you and your colleagues are most certainly guilty of sin if you reject the decrees of the Apostolic See and the universal Church . . . [For Christ said] 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, and to thee I will give the keys of my kingdom of heaven."
King Oswy: "Is it true, Colman, that these words were spoken to Peter by our Lord?"
Colman: "It is true, Your Majesty."
King Oswy: "Can you show that a similar authority was given to your Columba?"
Colman: "No."
King Oswy: "Do you both agree that these words were indisputably addressed to Peter in the first place, and that our Lord gave him the keys of the kingdom of heaven."
Wilfred and Colman: "We do."
King Oswy: "Then, I tell you, Peter is guardian of the gates of heaven, and I shall not contradict him. I shall obey his commands in everything to the best of my knowledge and ability; otherwise, when I come to the gates of heaven, he who holds the key may not be willing to open them."[87]

While this decision was the final blow in the Quartodecimen Controversy and the dating of Easter which had lingered since the 2nd Century, it reveals the on-going love for the Fourth Gospel by medieval dissidents. Yet it also shows their continued confusion over its interpretation because of the prevailing assumption that St. John was its author. The Cathars required their catechumens to lay a copy of it on their heads during their initiation ceremony.[88] There is a litany of religious sects down to the Anabaptists of the Reformation which were partial to its elegant prose. And all the while, the religious establishment snickered at their childish veneration for it.

The common rite of footwashing has been addressed in a previous study. We will not revisit the subject here except to note that the established, apostolic churches revived it, at least in the West, as a talisman against the sin of pride within the clergy. Quoting Gregory the Great on this point:

> *Hence the Lord did well to wash the feet of the holy Apostles after their preaching, doubtless with this view, that He might shew plainly, both that very frequently in doing good the dust of sin is*

[87]*The Quest of Three Abbots*, Brendan Lehane, (Viking Press, 1968), p. 205-208
[88]*The Medieval Manichee: A Study of Christian Dualist Heres*y – Steven Runciman, (Viking Press, 1961), p 156

> *contracted, and that the steps <u>of the speakers are often defiled by the same means whereby the hearts of the hearers are purified.</u> For it often happens that some in giving words of exhortation, however poorly, are inwardly lifted up, because they are the channel, by which the grace of purification comes down; and while by the word they wash away the deeds of other men, they as it were contract the dust of an ill thought from a good course. What then was it to wash the disciples' feet after their preaching, but after the gloriousness of the preaching to wipe off the dust of our thoughts, and to cleanse the heart's goings from inward pride.*[89] (emphasis added)

Stripped of its meaning, it is also stripped of its power. Footwashing within the context of Catholic and Orthodox traditions became little more than an indulgence, a spiritual therapy along with the multitude of other ascetic practices like self-flagellation, fasting, and prayer vigils. The Church Fathers would commend its practice in the monastic communities, and once a year at the season of Maundy Thursday. But its relevance to the original Messianic office would be lost.

We briefly glimpse the shadow of its glorious past in a catechism composed by Eucherius (d. 449), Bishop of Lyons of Gaul:

> *Question: What mystery is contained in that place where the Lord washes the feet of the disciples?*
> *Answer: In that place the curse of 'treading' is dissolved, [in] which the devil set fire our lives by attacking [our] paths (Gen. 3:15). First, the bite of that one [is removed] by removing the obstacle from [one's] path. Next, with the proclamation, 'Behold I give to you power to tread upon snakes and scorpions' (Lk. 10:19), that curse is abolished.*[90]

In this, we are reminded of footwashing's value in our dominion task. But again, all connection to the Messianic family has been lost.

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[89] John Christopher Thomas, *Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community*, (JSOT Press, 1991), p. 164-165
[90] *Ibid*., p. 171

The Magdalene Rite

While the Ordinance of Footwashing as described in John 13 was meant for the general Christian community, there was another rite. It cannot be forgotten that the only other instance of ritual footwashing in the Bible was that performed by Mary of Bethany. Augustine described it as "a sacramental symbol."[91] It was a rite performed by her upon our Lord in anticipation of His impending burial and one which He commanded His disciples to remember.[92] While it is recorded in all four Gospels, we give Lazarus' account here:

> *Then Jesus six days before the Passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.*

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[91]Ibid, p. 280

[92]There is one other incident of Footwashing in the Gospels: that of the sinful woman in Luke 7. This is a difficult passage in a few respects. First, it does not seem to fit the other Gospels synoptically. We normally expect the Fourth Gospel to be this way, not Luke.

Second, the other incident which is cited in the other Gospels has striking similarities to this incident: the anointing by Mary of Bethany. In both episodes, the host is named Simon, they both involve a woman with "an alabaster jar" and they both result in criticism of the woman. We are tempted to believe that Luke's account is about the same event. Except for . . .

Third, Luke's account occurs out of chronological sequence with the others. In the other Gospels, the anointing of Bethany occurs just after Lazarus' resurrection during Holy Week. In Luke it occurs early in Christ's ministry just before the introduction of Mary Magdalene and the other women who followed Jesus.

Fourth, the dissimilarities are significant: the woman anoints Christ's feet in Luke but not his head, yet in the other Gospels, she anoints His head and His feet. The dialogue is different, as well. In Luke Christ responds to Simon's criticism with a parable. In the other accounts, He responds to the criticism of the disciples (of Judas Iscariot in John who is identified as Simon's son) with the prophetic and liturgical significance of the act.

In Christ's rebuke of Simon the Leper in Luke 7, He mentions that Simon failed to show the courtesy of having a servant wash His feet. If this Simon is the same mentioned in John, we can explain why. Simon is identified as "a Pharisee" and the father of Judas Iscariot, who immediately following this episode, conspires to betray Jesus. Immediately prior to this story, the Pharisees are shown conspiring to destroy Jesus. We might naturally suppose that Simon's invitation to dinner was less than having to do with genuine interest in the Lord and more with gathering information on behalf of his party.

We might find an answer in the claim that Mary Magdalene was the Lord's deaconess who ministered unto Him. This relationship is alluded to in Luke 8:1. If Mary was His domestic - or "maidservant," to use the Old Testament term - it would have been her task to wash His feet. Perhaps, the account in Luke 7 marks the beginning of Mary's service and the occasion in Bethany marked the ending of it. Considering that the Mary of Bethany "sat at his feet" to hear His teaching, washing His feet was a handy excuse to be in His company. It is likely that our Lord's feet were kept quite clean.

Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment.

Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not his ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor? This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.

Then said Jesus, Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always you have with you; but me ye have not always.

- John 12:1-8

Jesus commanded His disciples to memorialize the Last Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me." Is it possible that He intended a Footwashing ritual in remembrance of Mary? By its very definition the command to "memorialize" an event requires a ceremony of some kind.[93]

However, the Footwashing which Mary performed upon Jesus was distinct from that which He performed upon His disciples. Her rite involved oil, not water. It was a foot anointing, not a footwashing. It is appropriate to consider that the anointing by Mary of Bethany was meant to have some correlating ceremony in the Church. But what is it?

We have already expounded on the association of this rite with that of marital union.[94] As Christ's concubine, Mary washed His feet regularly and anointed them for hygienic purposes. This was the wifely duty of all women.

However, in anticipation that this might be her final task, Mary brought forth a most expensive ointment – a very loving act. We are tempted to leave it at that. But there may have been more involved in this incident. An apocryphal account provides an important detail not mentioned here:

And the time of circumcision, that is, the eighth day, being at hand, the child was to be circumcised according to the law. Wherefore they circumcised Him in the cave. And the old Hebrew

[93] "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her" (Matthew 26:13). This command is not found in the Fourth Gospel which suggests that it was still a part of the on-going esoteric tradition of the Bethany Community.

[94] *Hierogamy & the Married Messiah*, Ibid., p. 100-102

> *woman took the piece of skin; but some say that she took the navel-string, and laid it past in a jar of old oil of nard. And she had a son, a dealer in unguents, and she gave it to him, saying: See that thou do not sell this jar of unguent of nard, even although three hundred denarii should be offered thee for it. And this is the jar which Mary the sinner bought and poured upon the head and feet of our Lord Jesus Christ, which thereafter she wiped with the hair of her head.*[95]

What might be the meaning of this practice? What significance could it have possibly been to anoint a man with an ointment which contained the foreskin from his circumcision? There is no precedent anywhere to be found in the Scriptures or in the Patristic writings. Is it possible that this really occurred?

The Hebrew woman here referred to was the midwife at Christ's birth, identified as Salome in other studies.[96] How Mary came into possession of it, of course, is not known. Perhaps, as a part of her midwife profession, it was her duty to present it to the bride as part of her dowry. In Israel, a woman lost her inheritance if she married an uncircumcised man. Such a container with the foreskin inside would be proof of circumcision, but only in a symbolic sense, as, for obvious reasons, circumcision could be verified by other means.[97]

In the Isis religion, footwashing was important to its priests.[98] The high priests of Isis, of course, were emasculated men as a symbolic re-enactment of the mutilation of Osiris. As the story goes, Isis loved the murdered and dismembered Osiris, and sought his various body parts to bring him back to life. There was one she failed to find, and that was the organ of generation – the male member. Miraculously, she conceives by him and bears a son Horus. Because of Abraham's close proximity to Egypt, it is thought by some that

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[95] "The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Saviour" *ANF* vol. 8 p. 405

[96] *Biblical Midwifery*, Stivers, Ibid.

[97] Except a widow could not produce the corpse of her circumcised husband to defend her estate.

[98] Tertullian was embarrassed by this fact but felt footwashing was so important that he was willing to explain why Jesus performed the rite as an Isian priest: "I must recognize Christ, both as He reclines on a couch, and when He presents a basin for the feet of His disciples, and when He pours water into it from a ewer, and when He is girt about with a linen towel – a garment specially sacred to Osiris. It is thus in general I reply upon the point admitting indeed that we use along with others these articles, but challenging that this be judged in the light of the distinction between things agreeable and things opposed to reason because the promiscuous employment of them is deceptive, concealing the corruption of the creature, by which it has been made subject to vanity." (A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 3, p. 98, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951). P. 129

circumcision was meant to replace the practice of eunuchism as a symbolic emasculation.

It could be that the phalluses of priests were preserved for some ritual purposes, perhaps in a container which preserved the flesh from deterioration. The custom cited above would have had some association with the Isis religion or could have been the Hebrew substitution for the Isian practice.

At first, we might be troubled that Jesus and Mary engaged in a custom with pagan overtones. But if we consider that the success of the Gospel depended upon the fact that His life message fulfilled the prophecies of natural revelation, as well as sacred revelation, we can understand the value in overlapping the story of Jesus with the various pagan stories of incarnate gods of the ancient world – this, not to endorse the mythologies of pagan ritual, but to meet mankind where they were on their spiritual journey and to lead them out into the clear light of day.

It must be remembered that Christianity began as an Egyptian religion. The idea of an "anointed one" originated in Egypt's royal and priestly traditions. In fact, the very word "Messiah" is not Hebrew in origin, but Egyptian.[99] Moses was learned in all the "wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts

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[99]The following from Michael Bradley's, *The Rise (and Fall?) of Esau's Empire A Brief Psychobiological History of the Western World from circa 80,000 BC until 9/11* as found on his website (4/8/07):

"Crocodiles were at the top of the freshwater food chain in Egypt and their favourite dish...was fish.

"But rather than abandon their Great Fish Goddess, the immigrant Danilo-Hvar folk in Egypt conceived of a typically human psychological rationalization that was to affect the Western world profoundly. They conceived of the Great Goddess's consort as a crocodile who loved her so much, as Her husband-son, that he craved to fill himself with Her divine essence. And, it must be admitted, all the crocodiles that they observed generally yearned to do just that.

"Indeed, these Danilo-Hvar folk rationalized, Her consort-to-be *could not* become Her husband (which would naturally lead to a son) unless he was filled with Her divine essence, which was seen as spiritual "light" or divinity.

"The human husband of an Isis-descendant (or "priestess") therefore had to *become* a crocodile by being anointed with crocodile oil before he could marry Her and assume both a human throne and a spiritual godhead. The Egyptian word for "crocodile" was *meseh*.

"When the Hebrews came into Egypt about 4500 years later, they picked up this belief in a *messiah* along with monotheism, seven of "The Ten Commandments" and the custom of circumcision.

"The supposedly Hebrew word *messiah* derives directly from the Egyptian word *meseh* and means simply "the anointed king." The Greek word *christos* means precisely the same thing, a rightfully anointed king, our "Christ".

"Strictly speaking (or at least in theory), every pharaoh of Ancient Egypt married a supposed female descendant of Isis before he could ascend to the throne as both a worldly king and spiritual *messiah*. The word "pharaoh", rendered as *king* in the Bible and in some modern

7:22) and no doubt purged its pagan elements before restoring the true worship of God consistent with mankind's created design or with "reason" as Tertullian would later put it.

Nor should we forget the princely Joseph and his long influence on the Egyptians. Certainly in his time, the priests did not emasculate themselves, since he married Aesneth, a daughter of an Egyptian priest. It is probable that these later customs were corruptions of the ones taught by the patriarchs of the true God.

In any case, whether emasculation or circumcision, it is clear that footwashing has phallic connotations. "Feet" are sometimes used euphemistically in the Bible to mean the man's penis. Footwashing was the usual "foreplay" in lovemaking. In the biblical phallic religion, Jesus was the "unicorn of prophecy" and His reproductive powers were meant to be an aspect of His Messianic kingdom, as it was in ancient times with all the kings of Israel.[100] If a king was virile, his ruling subordinates would be his sons. This was certainly true of King David (2 Samuel 8:18; 1 Chronicles 18:17). **And as Psalm 45 shows, the ruling Messiah's kingdom was meant to overspread the earth through the success of the Messianic harem.**

The Grail Church has embraced Christ's command to memorialize Mary's deed of anointing the feet of the Messiah. It is called "the Magdalene Rite" and can be found in the textbook edition of *Hierogamy and the Married Messiah*.

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contexts, actually means *divine light* in the Egyptian language -- like the *pharos*, the famous lighthouse at Alexandria. Therefore, a *pharaoh* was literally considered to be the living divine light, the *messiah* or saviour on which Egypt's wellbeing depended.

"No one knows how old this belief system may be. The French anthropologists Marcel Griaule and Germaine Dieterlen put it, on good evidence, at about 6000 BC in the Nile Delta. It was certainly very well-developed in Ancient Egypt by about 1400 BC. Tutankhamun's tomb, for example, was decorated with objects and paintings reflecting the "Christian" motifs of baptism with the "water of life", the "Trinity" of Father, Son and a *Female* Divine Essence (i.e. *Santa* Sophia), the "Holy Family" of Osiris, Horus and Mother Isis. It gradually evolved and emerged by Ptolemaic times to become the "official" Egyptian perspective and practice up to 31 BC and the defeat of Antony and Cleopatra by Octavian's Roman forces at the Battle of Actium.

"This pre-Christian religion of "the Christ" was the Egyptian Christian belief in "Serapis", the Messiah, and in the triune "Holy Family" of Osiris, Isis and Horus. According to existing letters of Roman historians and politicians, priests of Serapis were often also priests of the then new-fangled "Jesus". Very naturally, modern Roman Catholic priests and even Protestant ministers do not inform their respective modern flocks very much on this particular point of pre-Christian "Christianity." (emphasis added)

[100]See my discussion on the Christian phallic religion in *Hierogamy & the Married Messiah* (textbook edition), p. 62-68

The Messianic Rite

As important as the Magdalene Rite is to establishing the Messianic harem, a topic described further in the Appendix, it is not the "anointing" rite which "sealed" the Messianic offspring in the Bethany Community. The kind of rite described in the First Epistle is one which confers spiritual equality with the ruling class. It is not associated with access to the harem but rather with royal authority. This anointing is not the same as a king's coronation, where he is anointed on the head. **Rather, it is an anointing of a *subordinate* to the king, a viceroy. It confers the right to rule upon the royal heir in the name of his father or near kinsman, the living king.**

A Messianic viceroy would not be anointed on the head. He would be anointed on the foot, for he would be the messenger of the king's justice:

> *How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!*
>
> - Isaiah 52:7

The only biblical reference to this anointing custom is found in Deuteronomy 33:24,

> *And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.* (Emphasis added)

Clearly in this text, we find all the conditions necessary to describe this Messianic ritual. To "dip his foot in oil" symbolizes dominion. It ritually confers fraternal equality with those entitled to that dominion. Fellow-rulers must now recognize the recipient as a peer. "Thy shoes shall be iron," suggests the right and ability to crush all his opponents, including, by allusion, the "head of the serpent." He will "be blessed with children," implies that his dominion and strength will be preserved and propagated.

It is significant that Moses pronounced this blessing on the tribe of Asher. Asher was the only son named after a pagan deity: Astarte, the Mesopotamian version of the goddess, Isis. Asher may have been an outcast because of these pagan connotations.[101] Moses is making it clear that even Asher is entitled to

[101] See George Lamsa, *Old Testament Light* under "Ashera" and earlier footnote # 71

territory and dominion. This word-meaning also links the Isian interest in footwashing as described above.

We might suppose that this symbolism was never formalized in a ritual which was adopted by the Bethany Community. But recent archeological discoveries have suggested otherwise.

One of the more enthusiastic and productive archeologists of our day is Shimon Gibson. His latest discovery has been reported in his book, *The Cave of John the Baptist* (Doubleday, 2004), where he has found a cave with a pool of water used for ritual bathing.[102] Not just any cave, the various artifacts discovered in the vicinity has led him to believe that John the Baptist might have actually baptized his disciples there.

Whether Gibson has actually found such a cave is immaterial to our discussion here, except that it is reasonable to suppose that some "Baptist" community made use of the place.

What is relevant to our discussion about his discovery is that he found something else in the floor that he could not explain – a depression in a stone that could perfectly accommodate a man's foot:

> *The existence of only one foot depression and specifically only the one to accommodate the right foot has to indicate that the stone was connected with cultic practices and not with daily ablutions.*
>
> - p. 162[103]

He cites Deuteronomy 33:24, quoted above, to support his belief that a covenant could be struck by "dipping the foot in oil" and then later explains:

> *Interestingly, as I discussed earlier, the footprint stone from the cave was probably used for anointing with oil, but, unlike the references in the Gospels to the anointing of* ***both*** *feet, our stone was used only for one foot. This fact must indicate that the ritual of anointing that was undertaken in the cave was purely symbolic, since there would have been no practical use for an installation for the anointing of just one foot and not the other.*
>
> - p. 166

[102] Even though Gibson appeared in a documentary of "The Jesus Tomb," it is important to note that he did not endorse the theory that the grave of Jesus had been found. Similar footprinted stones have been found in Wales. See forthcoming, *Merlin: High Priest of the Holy Grail.*
[103] Such an artifact has been discovered in England and America..

What could it have symbolized otherwise?

It might be further objected that there is no royal or Messianic association with this ritual, especially since the tribe of Asher was not a kingly tribe. However, at this time in Israelite history, there were no kings. In fact, the verses following from our text in Deuteronomy cited above refer to "Jeshuran." Yahweh was the king of Israel and the tribes of Israel were His viceroys in the earth. The Messianic office had been universally dispersed to all of the descendants of the Patriarchs at this point in history. This anointing certainly would have been an *appropriate* ceremony for their service to God their king.

As for the Bethany Community, its earlier affiliation with the Essenes and John the Baptist has already been duly noted. If this ritual existed among these people – and we can find no other explanation for this artifact – then it has been a carefully guarded secret, for there are no other literary allusions to it in any ancient writings in our possession, including the Dead Sea Scrolls. And for perhaps a very good reason – whoever would have been initiated with this rite would have been declared a member of the Messianic family of King David, if not of Jesus Himself. A public ceremony would have sealed their fate. It had to be secret, so secret that no one knew about it until an archeologist started digging around in the right place.

Review

At this point, it would be helpful to review where our discussion has taken us. This study began with the conclusions of two previous studies: first, that Jesus was married and had to be married to be the true Messiah (*Hierogamy & the Married Messiah*).

The second was that the fundamental sacrament associated with earthly dominion is that of footwashing (*The Ordinance of Footwashing: The Kingdom Come*).

This study has added a third very important element to our discussion: that the true author of the Fourth Gospel was the Bethany family.

The reader may not yet realize it, but these simple conclusions have created a domino effect in how we look at the Bible and Church history. If Lazarus was the primary author of the Fourth Gospel – and not St. John – then he was also the author of the three Johannine Epistles. If he authored those Epistles,

then the women mentioned in 2 John must have been his sisters. If these women had children, then they must have been the children of Jesus. The controversies mentioned in these Epistles reflect issues of direct concern to the Messianic family, and not to the general Christian community. In fact, the issues raised in these Epistles reflect a tension and schism which is occurring between the Bethany Community and those among the apostolic churches which do not share its vision and theology.

This chain of logic is not dependent upon naked inferences, as is the traditional view of Johannine authorship which is subject to reasonable doubt. Each step has been accompanied by fresh evidence. If we continue to follow this path, we will begin to see that a different vision for the Christian community existed at its inception, but that it was quickly superseded by other traditions which redefined the Church and its mission early in the 2nd Century.

Chapter Five

THE BETHANY FAMILY IN GAUL

It seems that from Roman times Gaul, especially southern Gaul, was a hotbed of resistance and heresy. During the time of the Caesars, it was populated by the Celts. The subjugation of Gaul was a long and difficult process because of the influence of the Druids, who resisted the Imperial expansion of Rome. After Gaul's pacification, some of the resistors fled to Britain. Others sought refuge among the pagans beyond the Rhine or to the remote enclaves of the Pyrenean Mountains which divide modern-day France and Spain.[104]

Southern Gaul was a place of banishment for misfits and malcontents. It was far enough away not to disturb the peace of Rome, yet close enough to the quick response of Roman legions.

According to Josephus, various Jewish communities were formed there from among the outcasts of Palestine. During the Middle Ages, it was a region where heresies flourished. As it was for the Celtic Church, the Gospel of John was the primary text for these heretics. Not until the genocidal wars against the Albigensians when the area was virtually depopulated did it cease its millennium-long traditions. Even then, after a few centuries, the period of the Reformation saw the rise of the Huguenots.

In this hotbed, we have the most visible presence of the Johannine Community. If, as I say, the Bethany family was responsible for that Community, we must have some historical collaboration that they or their followers were there. Indeed, we have such collaboration.

[104]Even then, the Celtic presence was felt in the fourth and fifth centuries in the Gallic Church, which was convening so many synods that the supremacy of the Roman bishopric was threatened.

The Writings of Rabanus

Other than the various local legends surrounding the "Black Madonna cult" of southern France, our earliest and best literary source comes from the esteemed Archbishop of Mayence, Rabanus Maurus (776-856 AD). His "Life of St. Mary Magdalene" is preserved in a 15th Century parchment housed in the Magdalene College Library at Oxford University. This is an early source and should be considered just as reliable as any other histories of antiquity, like Julius Caesar's Annals or the writings of Josephus.

I am quoting John W. Taylor's summary of the chapters of this work that are of interest to us here:

> [From chapter one of Martha] *Her mother, whose name was Eucharia, was descended from the royal family of the House of Israel. Her father, Theophilus, was a Syrian prince and governor of the maritime country.*
>
> *St. Martha had a sister of great beauty named Mary and a young brother called Lazarus. All these were noted for their fine character and intelligence, and for their knowledge of the language of the Hebrews, in which they had been well instructed.*
>
> *In the 2nd chapter we are further told that they possessed a rich patrimony of lands, of money, and of slaves, that a great part of the city of Jerusalem (beside the village of Bethany) belonged to them, and that they also had lands at Magdala (on the left side of the Lake of Galilee), and at another Bethany (Bethabara), the scene of the preaching of St. John the Baptist.*[105]

The wealth being described here is truly astonishing. Obviously, these are well-connected individuals in the Roman world. If this Theophilus was a Syrian prince and governor of the "maritime country," he should be known to history. But "Theophilus," meaning "friend or lover of God," was often an assumed name or nickname in the ancient world and may not have been his actual name.[106]

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[105] *The Coming of the Saints,* John W. Taylor, (Methuen & Co., 1906, reprint Covenant Publishing, 1969), p. 83

[106] Again, note the connection and the emphasis of "friends" in the Fourth Gospel mentioned earlier (Lazarus being called a "friend" by Jesus) and compare it with the title ascribed to Abraham as "the friend of God (James 2:23; Isaiah 41:8).

There are later traditions which call him "Syrus" or "Cyrus" the Syrian, a Persian association. He would not have been a Roman legate, but either a member of the regional aristocracy, or perhaps, a ruler of one of the border kingdoms between Rome and Parthia.

There is a Martha known to the Talmud as the daughter of a "Boethius," the fabulously wealthy priestly family which Herod imported to Jerusalem after purging the Maccabeans. In the list of Boethiusian high priests which Josephus recounts, there is a "Marthias, son of Theophilus" who lived until 23 AD. Bearing a masculine version of the name "Martha" and possibly a son-in-law in the Boethiusian line (e.g. Caiaphas).

But Boethius was from Egypt and had no known associations to a "maritime country" connected with Syria.

Another Martha is known to the Talmud, the daughter of Nakdimon (a name meaning "he causes it to shine"). He is another wealthy Jew who stored a twenty-one year supply of grain for the city of Jerusalem, by which it could have survived any Roman siege, had not the Zealots, who wanted an immediate confrontation with the Romans, destroyed the grain and immediately produced a famine. No one could have possibly stored this much grain secretly had he not been immensely wealthy and owned city estates large enough to hide it.

The Greek form of his name is "Nicodemus," and immediately, we are faced, perhaps, with the same man identified in the Fourth Gospel (chapter three) who is "a ruler of the Jews" and came to Jesus "secretly by night." Clearly, this man was a patriot who acted independently of the various rival factions among Jewry at this time.

Since we have established that the Bethany Family was behind the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, it makes perfect sense that this Nicodemus is the same Nakdimon who is described in the Talmud, and who is the father of both a Martha and a Miriam (Mary). She requires "an allowance of four hundred dinars daily just for her perfume basket," perhaps a contemptuous embellishment of our Mary the Anointer of Jesus.[107]

[107]The Talmud places these historical figures later in the first century and do not show them as contemporary with Jesus. But in the sometimes peculiar reasoning of Talmudists, we can find an explanation in their rules for banishment. Talmudists were not allowed to write or mention the names of the excommunicated until the second generation. It is entirely possible that these people are the same personages who experienced a literary resurrection among later Talmudic writers. These writers – among other things – sought to rehabilitate them or caricature them (whatever the case might have been) in order to serve the interests of later rabbinic Judaism.

In her association with the fishing village of Magdala (although a dubious one held by some), tradition places Mary Magdalene in Galilee. Nicodemus is also identified as a Galilean (John 7:22) and acquainted with the family of Jesus.[108] If a man of immense wealth, he could have had various estates in many provinces, perhaps even in foreign lands.

But does he have any associations with Syria?

The Fourth Gospel describes Nicodemus as "a ruler of the Jews" and a member of the Sanhedrin. In any case, he would not have been a "Roman" governor of an Imperial province, but rather a ruler in the Jewish ghetto in one of the provinces on the Mediterranean coast.[109] Since later tradition places him in Caesarea, a coastal city, and the Roman capital for Palestine, it seems likely that this was his point of origin.[110] Caesarea was close enough to Jerusalem for him to serve on the Sanhedrin. In fact, it would have been advantageous for the Sanhedrin to keep a presence at this strategic location. Accounts in Acts describing the trial of Paul in Caesarea show that the Jewish leadership was accustomed to making the journey between these two cities.

After Rabanus curiously references our widow controversy[111] of Acts 6 in chapter 34, Taylor continues his summary:

> *This and the succeeding chapters narrate how Lazarus, Martha, and Mary sold their properties in Jerusalem, Magdala and the Bethanies, the house at Bethany near Jerusalem alone being preserved, and brought the amount to St. Peter as chief of the Apostles.*
>
> *The Bethany house was "retained by the Apostles as a house of prayer, and was subsequently consecrated, Lazarus being appointed priest or bishop of the Church there. When, however, the persecution of the Jews arose Lazarus left Bethany for Cyprus, and there preached the Kingdom of God, becoming the first Christian bishop in Cyprus."*[112]

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[108] "The Gospel of Nicodemus" (*ANF*, vol. 8, p. 433), "I know the family of Jesus, noble-minded men, great servants of God, and receiving tithes from the people of the Jews."

[109] Although in the "Gospel of Nicodemus," he is described twice as a "Roman toparch," whatever that means (p. 426). It is noteworthy that Aeneas is mentioned as Nicodemus' amanuensis, while this same man is listed as a priestly companion of Lazarus in the Clementine Homilies. These kinds of connections abound and are too numerous to mention them all.

[110] "Recognitions of Clement" (*ANF*, vol. 8, p. 132).

[111] I say "curious" because the widow controversy has been dismissed as an insignificant parenthesis in church history, yet it keeps resurfacing in these early traditions. Why?

[112] Ibid, p. 87-88

This being the case, the only properties left to the family would have been those outside of Judea in whatever Syrian province it was that their father had been governor. Since tradition places them in Caesarea which is very close to Cyprus, it makes sense that these properties were retained for Christian refugees.

It is obvious from this reference that the Bethany family was the first benefactors of the Jesus movement. The sale of these estates would have provided vast sums of money to fund the Apostles, the Church and also the widows which were described here earlier as the Messianic harem.

In these same pages Rabanus explains how Mary Magdalene was "specially devoted to the service and care of the Blessed Virgin." This would be a strange relationship if John were the guardian of the Lord's mother as it is traditionally assumed. But it makes sense if her brother Lazarus were given the charge as the Beloved Disciple and if she, being the wife of Jesus, were her daughter-in-law (e.g. Ruth and Naomi).

Writing in the 8th Century, Rabanus tells the story as a devout Catholic. As we reconstruct these events and relationships, it must be remembered that these records were sanitized and embellished by later Catholic tradition. In some respects, we are "reading between the lines." But in favor of our position, we are arguing the simpler and more reasonable explanations.

According to Rabanus' timeline, St. James the Apostle was killed in 47 AD, about fourteen or fifteen years after the Ascension. It was at this time that the apostles finally abandoned Jerusalem, leaving the Church there exclusively under the control of the other James - the brother of Jesus.

The first general persecution of the Church occurred within two years after the Crucifixion at the martyrdom of Stephen which created the on-going "Christian" Diaspora. It is not known how extensive and permanent the first flights from the city were. But clearly, anyone visibly associated with Stephen would have been targeted. Since he was the chief deacon of the "order of widows," it is probable that the members of the Messianic harem – i.e. the Bethany family – were pursued. Acts records that Saul of Tarsus, the principal inquisitor, imprisoned both men and *women*. These women might have been them.

If the mother of Jesus was in the care of the Bethany family, she would have been taken to Caesarea and possibly Cyprus. Paul's own imprisonment and trials at Caesarea occurred about 58-60 AD. If she was still there, she would have been available for Luke, at that time, to help compose his Gospel, as many scholars believe. Although Luke's Theophilus (Nicodemus?), to whom the accounts of the Gospel and the Acts are dedicated, might have been still living, he is more likely to have been a son after his namesake or perhaps a pseudonym.[113]

By 60 AD, the Bethany family would have been old. New names and faces would have represented second generation Christians who would have borne, in the Jewish tradition, the names of their parents and mentors. It is at this point in his narrative that Rabanus introduces us to other disciples who become prominent in the Bethany Community:

> *"Of bishops for the West ordained and sent by Peter, "Maximinus was the first and foremost. He was one of the seventy disciples of our Lord and Saviour, illustrious both by his power of miracles and of teaching, and chief of the Christians next to the Apostles.*
>
> *"Mary Magdalene, who was united by the ties of love to the religion and holiness of this disciple, determined not to be separated from his company or conversation wherever it should please God to call him."*
>
> *Martha was committed to the care of St. Parmenas "as St. Mary had already committed herself to the care of St. Maximin."*[114]

In this description, we gather a hint of romantic interest between Maximinus and Mary, but with Catholic piety, Rabanus is careful to avoid that association. Why Jewish men would have Greek and Roman names is not immediately understood, unless they are translations from originally Jewish names or that these men were proselyte Jews.

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[113]Luke 1:1-4. The Nicodemus of the Fourth Gospel would have been quite old, if not deceased at this point in time. Unlike this Nicodemus, Luke addresses a person who was not an eye witness to the events he records. "Theophilus," being a family name, perhaps even a surname meaning "lover of God," would have been an appropriate one for the Bethany family. Undoubtedly, their children and grandchildren would have been so addressed. In Luke the Bethany women figure prominently, but not as prominently as in their own account in the Fourth Gospel. Luke, or his later redactor, was writing for Paul's Gentile churches.

[114] Ibid, p. 89

Since Maximin is identified as one of the Seventy, the second-ranking class of apostles in the Gospel tradition, then it is possible that Parmenas was, too. St. Parmenas is identified with one of the seven deacons of Acts 6:5 charged with the care of the widows. Others are identified as Philip, mentioned earlier in our discussions, Stephen who was martyred soon afterwards, Timon, Prochorus, and two others – Nicanor and Nicolas – whose names are variants of the name "Nicodemus."[115] So, now we have two "Nicodemus'" in care of the "widows" which have been identified with the Messianic harem and with the Bethany family.

One of these Nicodemus' is later claimed by some later Church Fathers to be the founder of a sex-cult condemned in Revelations as the Nicolaitanes.[116] Revelations is unclear as to why this cult was condemned, except that it was embraced by those who taught the "doctrine of Balaam. . . to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication" (2:14). As the story of Balaam goes, he counseled that the only way to defeat Israel was through miscegenation. It might be that the implementation of Psalm 45 by Jesus and the Messianic harem was later misunderstood by later Qumranian Christians (i.e. Judaizers) as miscegenation and idolatry. The Book of Revelation definitely has strong Qumranian content and style. And it was written long after the Messianic harem had lost any relevance to the Christian mission in the eyes of the Churches of Palestine and the Near East and long after the memory of its origin had been forgotten. Whatever remnants of the original harem which might have existed in Palestine and Asia Minor at this time, they would have lost all sense of themselves and devolved into an apostate condition if associated with these Nicolataines.

In attempting to identify Maximinus (Maximus and Maxmillian in other sources), one must remember that it was a name often used simply as a title of laudation in the ancient world. It means "most excellent" and in identifying him as the "chief of Christians next to the apostles" it leaves us confused as to who he might have been. In Acts, Stephen would have held this position, being the "first and foremost" among the seven deacons appointed by the Apostles.

But Stephen was martyred early in the Christian movement as noted above. Is it possible that a different deacon took his place?

Philip certainly does in the narrative found in Acts. He succeeds Stephen as an evangelist and seems to be a more capable spokesman of the faith than even the Apostles were.

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[115] All three mean "victorious" a slightly different meaning than Nakdimon.

[116] See the textbook edition of *Hierogamy & the Married Messiah*

However, there are other possibilities. Of the other seven, "Prochorus" means "he who presides over choirs" and suggests a Levite, since there were twelve Levitical choirs for the Temple service.[117] If "Maximinus" refers to a leader or someone of high rank, "Prochorus" certainly would have been such a person.

"Timon" was another of the seven. His name means "honorable or worthy," and suggests a man of rank and esteem.

And then there was the other "Nicodemus" – Nicanor – of whom the biblical text has nothing to say.

Of these seven, all but Maximinus are listed in the records of Hippolytus of the Seventy.[118] Nicolaus is listed as the bishop of Samaria. Timon became the bishop of Bostra in Arabia (where Paul presumably went on sabbatical). Nicanor died when Stephen was martyred. Parmenus became the bishop of Soli in Cyprus. Prochorus became the bishop of Nicomedia in Asia Minor (Bithynia), "who also was the first that departed, believing together with his daughters."[119] Philip, of course, is left in Caesarea according to Acts.

Looking at the geography of the Near East, all of these locations are in the greater Syrian region. Cyprus, of course, has already been identified with Lazarus. Cyprus, as the home of Martha and Parmenus becomes consistent with all of the data we have looked at thusfar. But what about Mary and Maximinus?

Adding to the confusion even further is the fact that Hippolytus lists James the Lord's brother as the "first and foremost" in his list of the "Seventy Apostles," followed by Cleopas, Matthias, Thaddeus, Ananias and then Stephen – in that order.[120] None of these men can be connected historically with the Bethany family.

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[117] Eusebius claims that Prochorus was John's (Lazarus?) amanuensis and assisted him in writing his Gospel.

[118] *ANF*, vol. 5, p. 255

[119] It is curious the number of daughters associated with these deacons. Philip has four daughters who are prophetesses and here we have another deacon with daughters. Why no mention of their wives? Were these girls really their daughters or strategically scattered members of the Messianic harem?

[120]That James was one of the Seventy would have been impossible according to the scenario set forth in the Fourth Gospel. It tells us that the brethren of Jesus were not active in His following until after the Resurrection.

The list continues with the rest of the seven and then, number thirteen is "Barnabas." Since the book of Acts has Barnabas breaking company with Paul on their 2nd Missionary journey and evangelizing in Cyprus (the bishopric of Lazarus), he becomes a possibility that will be explored later.

Kinsmen or Eunuchs?

Accepting the assumption that the widows of Acts 6 were the members of the Messianic harem, we must remember ancient custom in the care of harems. Access to women's quarters could only occur when accompanied by escorts who were either eunuchs attached to the harems as residents or male relatives. Except in small villages where the movements of women could be easily seen in public, the women of harems were escorted during travel by such eunuchs or kinsmen. This was for their protection against injury and scandal.

In the case of the Messianic harem, the seven deacons of Acts 6 must have been qualified for their task because either they, too, were eunuchs or they were related to Jesus in some way.

Although it has been argued that perhaps some of these deacons were eunuchs – as in the case of Nicolaus – there are problems with this view.[121] Eunuchs could not enter the "congregation of the Lord." There is no hint that any of the Seventy were legally barred from full participation in the civic responsibilities of the Israelite nation. If the church can be considered at this early date as simply a continuation of the believing synagogues of Israel – those who believed Jesus was the Messiah – then none could have become bishops (rabbis) if they were eunuchs. Since Hippolytus claims that virtually all of the Seventy became bishops of churches, it is reasonable to assume that they were not eunuchs.

That being the case, we are left with only one alternative: the men given charge of the Messianic harem were physically related to Jesus in some way. They had to be related *to Jesus* and not just to some of the women because the women came from disparate backgrounds. The women shared a common tie with each other by their association with Jesus. The men who cared for them, who shared private space with them, had to be related to Jesus in such a way as to constitute a relationship with *all* of the women and a relationship which would not excite scandal. What might that relationship have been?

[121] As a proselyte he may have been the only one.

Usually, royal harems were inherited by a king's successor: his firstborn son. We see this, for example, in the case of Solomon's assumption of the Davidic harem and the execution of his rival brother, Adonijah, who requested a marriage to David's last concubine – Abishag. A king would share the royal harem with his loyal brethren and friends who distinguished themselves as being worthy in some way, but not with potential rivals.

If the son was too young to assume the duties of a royal successor, he was often placed under the supervision of a temporary head of state, perhaps a eunuch or an elderly relative who was no threat to a young king. In any case, the normal pattern was for the harem to follow the succession of the throne.

Having established with some certainty that Jesus had a harem and that He was recognized by His followers as Israel's Messiah and heir to the throne of David, it follows that Lazarus' role as guardian of the harem should have been temporary. If the children identified in 2 John were indeed the children of Jesus, then they must have, at some point, assumed leadership of the harem and of the Christian Church as the Israel of God.

If Jesus had fathered a child sometime after His appearance at the Temple at age twelve – say by age 16 – then His oldest child would have been 17 years old at the time of the Ascension and Pentecost, the time when the appointment of a successor was necessary. But civil majority in Israel occurred at 20 years and 30 was the age for leadership for both kings and priests. Any sons under thirty would have been assigned to a mentor and they would have served as deacons until they reached the appropriate age for rulership.

Now we must entertain a new proposition**: that the seven deacons who were appointed to oversee the care of the Messianic harem were qualified to do so because <u>they were the sons of Jesus.</u> Because of their youth, they would still have been under the tutelage of the Apostles. But according to normal standards of succession, they would have been destined to become the leaders of the Jesus movement.**

Or, the leading deacon may have been the son of Jesus, while the others were his eunuch assistants. To prove our point, we need only to show that the leader was of royal descent.

Of the Seven, the leader appears to have been Stephen. He works "signs and miracles" like Jesus and the Apostles. He becomes center stage in the Christian cause at this time, with all of the energy and zeal of youth. According to the ancient Church historians, Stephen was the deacon for James the Just, who as we know, was appointed as the bishop of the Jerusalem Church at Jesus' own request.[122]

This would have meant that Stephen was the heir to the episcopal throne occupied by James. The diaconate is the usual prerequisite to the episcopate. Joshua was a deacon to Moses, for example, and succeeded him as the leader of Israel. If anything, to be bishop of the Jerusalem Church would have meant the leadership of Christianity at this time in history. We certainly see this as the case in Acts 15, where even Peter looks to James for a ruling on the relevant controversy.

What is important to remember is why James was appointed as the leading bishop of the Church: he was a holy man, but he was also a descendant of King David.[123] Stephen would not have been chosen as his deacon and heir apparent of the episcopal throne, unless he, too, was of royal descent.

However justified such inferences might be, we need more corroborating evidence to support this proposition. We need some indicators as to his

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[122]*And what are the deacons but imitators of the angelic powers, fulfilling a pure and blameless ministry unto him, **as the holy Stephen did to the blessed James*** (Ignatius to the Trallians**).** See also *Recognitions of Clement*, *ANF* v. 8, p. 95-96 and *Ignatius to Hero*, *ANF* v.1 p. 113.

His [Joseph's] firstborn was James, surnamed "Oblias ", meaning "wall", and also surnamed "Just", who was a Nazarite, which means holy man. He was the first to receive the bishop's chair, the first to whom the Lord entrusted his throne upon earth. - Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis in *The Panarion* 78.6-8

[123]Epiphanius: *Now when the royal chair was changed, the royal dignity was in Christ transferred to the church from the house of Judah and Israel which is of the flesh, but the throne is established in God's holy church forever, the throne whose royal and high-priestly dignity rests on two bases - the royal dignity coming from Our Lord Jesus Christ in two ways, from the fact that he is of King David's seed according to the flesh and from the fact that he is, as is certainly true, a greater king from eternity in his divinity. . . James having been ordained at once the first bishop, he who is called the brother of the Lord and apostle... But we find as well that he is of David's stock through being Joseph's son and that he was a Nazarite. There is much to say about this.* - Epiphanius, Bishop of Salamis *Panarion* 29

intended role in the Jesus Messianic movement. Would an official title or name suffice as the necessary proof? "Stephen" is a name which means "crown." Is this sufficient to identify him as the "crown prince" of the Messianic harem?

Skeptics may argue that "Stephen" was a common name in the Greek world. It appears in another place in Paul's epistles in reference to another man. But was it a common name for Jewish boys?

Paul's Corinthian Stephen is named "Stephenas," a weaker variant of Stephen, meaning "a crowned one" and not "*the* crown." It is comparable to the difference in saying "Christ" and "Christian."

Church historians (e.g. Eusebius) ascribe significance to Stephen's name in an allegorical sense as the first to be "crowned with martyrdom." If Church historians are willing to see a symbolic significance in his name, does that preclude us from seeing significance in a *literal* way?

What might help us better is to see if there are any prophetic references which can be applied to Stephen. His martyrdom served as a startling turn of fortunes for the earliest Christians. Commentators have sometimes seen his martyrdom as pre-ordained. If true, then we should find Messianic prophecies which point to the purpose of that ordination.

Stephen: the Second Messiah

> *For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.*
>
> *And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*
>
> - Acts 6:14-15

There are a number of things which makes the martyrdom of Stephen different from any of the others, including those of the Apostles. First, the accusation against Stephen was unique. While the others suffered for their faith or for impugning the authorities for the murder of Jesus, Stephen is accused of the very same charge which was brought against Jesus: His alleged blasphemy against the Temple (e.g. Mark 14:58; John 2:19). Stephen is viewed as a threat against the religious and civil order.

Second, as also noted in the text above, "his face shown as an angel." Nothing like this was ever said of the Apostles or of any of the disciples.

This was no mere sentimental embellishment. To have the "face of an angel" meant to manifest the glory of God, something which had not occurred in the history of Israel except with Moses and with Jesus Christ at His Transfiguration. Angels are the messengers of Divine justice. Acts is here ranking Stephen *above* the Apostles and the prophets and is placing him in a category with the two greatest Divine spokesmen in Israelite history. The full weight of this must not be forgotten and requires further examination.

Third, in keeping with his status as an angelic being, Stephen brings a covenant lawsuit against the rulers of Israel in Chapter Seven.[124] He brings matters to a head in vss. 51-53, accusing them of resisting the Holy Ghost – much like Peter's previous maledictions – but in this case, goes beyond what the other Apostles have said:

> *Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man **standing** on the right hand of God.*
> - v. 56 (emphasis added)

Again, most commentators, moved by pious sympathy for Stephen's impending demise, overlook what this meant. As it says in Isaiah,

> *The LORD **standeth** up to plead, and **standeth** to judge the people. The LORD will enter into judgment with the ancients of his people, and the princes thereof. . .* 3:13-14 (emphasis added)

Stephen has now become the mediator of Divine justice and is invoking their doom in direct fulfillment of this Messianic prophecy.

Fourth, the reaction of the accused – in this case the people who thought they were putting Stephen on trial – also corresponds with Messianic prophecy:

> *When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.*
> - 7:54 (Psalm 35:16; 37:12)[125]

[124]The kinsman-redeemer was also known as the "avenger of blood." As Jesus' firstborn son, the task of avenging his father's death would have fallen to Stephen.

[125] Notice verse 2 of this same Psalm (35) which prays of God to "stand up for my help." And Psalm 37 identifies him as "the zadok" translated as "the just one," "the righteous one."

Compare this with the following:

But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears that they should not hear. Therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.

- Zechariah 7:11, 12

Stephen declares the judgment which will in the end bring the destruction of the Temple and the sacrificial system. None of the Apostles are known to have made such a pronouncement precisely because it would have been unseemly if not presumptuous to identify oneself with the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy.

In Zechariah 4:14 we have the witness of two messiahs:

Then said he, These are the two anointed ones [messiahs], *that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.*

While most commentators ascribe Zechariah's messiahs (anointed ones) to be referring to the priestly and kingly offices of Israel, it can be applied without violence to the meaning of the text to Stephen as the son of Jesus closing out His father's Messianic mission.[126]

Finally, Stephen prays the same prayer of forgiveness which Jesus prayed at his Crucifixion, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do." *Know not what they do?* Jesus said this prayer because He knew His persecutors were ignorant of who He was. Who was Stephen that had they known, they would have treated him differently? The author of Acts does not tell us.

[126] Literally referring to "the sons of oil" derived from "the olive trees" which "empty from themselves" to provide the anointing, we are faced with a different perspective: that the prophet was referring to two messianic dynasties which supply a lineage which serves "the Lord" – the *adonay* (not LORD as translated). If Jesus is the Lord here, then He established two messianic dynasties which forever supply the Golden Lampstand: Stephen's and another's. cf. Psalm 52:8. Or, "empty from themselves" is "aliyah" (5944) which is a feminine noun and could refer to the New Covenant Rachel and Leah who "built up" the house of Jacob (Jesus): Mary and Martha. Olive trees in reference to lineage see Psalm 128:3.

The Sons of Mary Magdalene

Prior to the appointment of these deacons, the Apostles were in charge of the harem - so we may surmise anyway. It is more probable that Lazarus was, given his custodial responsibilities for the mother of Jesus. Yet, Lazarus was just one man, although a man with a vast number of servants, if the record of Rabanus can be believed. The Apostles were Jesus' servants – His deacons – who were kept ignorant of inside information until after His resurrection.

After the Resurrection, the Apostles were concerned with evangelism and the message of salvation. Their contest with rival religions figures prominently in their efforts to authenticate their claims that Jesus was alive.

James and Lazarus, on the other hand, were concerned with other issues. James was responsible for the continuation of the House of Israel within the new Jesus movement, while Lazarus was responsible for the Davidic harem and the future rulers of Israel. The division of these roles naturally led to confusion over who was truly the leader of Christianity. For Luke in Acts, the first leader is Peter who is succeeded eventually by Paul. The appearance of James occurs to validate Paul's mission and apostleship. Of his activities, otherwise, Acts tells us nothing.

It might be that Acts 6 is an indication of the first rift within the Christian community. The Apostles - who have up to this point been servants (deacons) of Lazarus in serving the widows (the harem) - may have been attempting to gain some independence and a different role in the new movement. They now want the sons of Jesus to assume a more direct involvement in assisting Lazarus in the care of the harem, while they go out to change the world.

Whatever role Lazarus played in caring for the "widows" as Luke calls them, it has become marginalized in the "Acts of the Apostles" to make room for the larger vision of world evangelism. Only to the extent that Lazarus would fit into such a scenario could he be considered as an early Christian leader. Any appearance in the "Acts" by Lazarus would be within that context.

Theoretically, the guardian of the harem would have been the true leader. But James thought differently, as did the Apostles.

All of this suggests that there was conflict over succession. This conflict was glossed-over by the redactors of the Gospels and of Acts.

If the seven deacons of Acts 6 were the sons of Jesus, then one or more of them would have been the son of Mary Magdalene. Considering her preeminence, Stephen, as the crown prince, could have been her son. But who among the Seventy would have taken his place as this "Maximus"?

The Son of Consolation

It must be remembered that in Luke's Gospel and in his Acts of the Apostles, Lazarus does not exist.[127] That is very odd, unless he was known by another name.

Everything said above must prepare us for a startling assertion, that Lazarus does appear in the Acts of the Apostles as a beloved benefactor and leader, but not a leadership which exceeds that of James or of the Apostles. That person is Barnabas, and it is good to take careful note of his introduction in Acts 4:36,

> *And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, the son of consolation), a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

If we consider the elements of this character profile, they all match with Lazarus. We learned earlier that Lazarus was a Levite. He had land and sold it to support the Christian mission. He was of the country of Cyprus, where Lazarus is later appointed its first bishop. It should be added that some traditions believe Lazarus' father was named "Cyrus" which can simply be a corruption of "Cyprus." His father was from Cyprus and if Nicodemus, he would have owned lands in Cyprus, Caesarea, and Jerusalem, which explains how he was able operate in all of these locations.

Named "Joses" in Acts, his full name would have been *Yoseph Eleazar Barnakdimon*. He befriended Paul and introduced him to the Apostles (Acts 9) and accompanied him on his first missionary journey, which included Cyprus and the coastal regions of Asia Minor closest to Cyprus.[128]

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[127]He does not appear in Matthew or in Mark, either. This suggests that both of these Gospels represent a late redaction, perhaps as late as the 2nd Century. The Fourth Gospel would have been the earliest one and Luke the second. Both Luke and the Thomas Gospel would have relied upon a source Gospel (perhaps the original Gospel of the Hebrews) which would have existed in the 1st Century as the official record preserved by the Jerusalem Church.

[128]"Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only" (Acts 11:19). It should be considered that Barnabas (Lazarus) was Paul's mentor, and that the inclusive non-Judaic theology of the Messianic harem (e.g. Psalm 45 and the Gentiles) was taught

In making Lazarus (a.k.a Barnabas) as chief of the Seventy, next to the Twelve, we would have expected him to appear in the selection of the replacement of Judas' position. And curiously, we do have someone with a strikingly similar name:

> *Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, Beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. And they appointed two, Joseph called* ***Barsabas****, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.*
>
> - Acts 1

While most commentators do not associate this "Barsabas" of Acts 1 with the "Barnabas" of Acts 4, one wonders who this mysterious person might have been to be so highly esteemed by all as to be considered for apostolic position. Changing an "s" into an "n" gives us the name Barnabas. If this prominent Christian leader was not the same man, we might justly question the wisdom in the nomination of this "Barsabas," of whom we know nothing.

However, both Barsabas and Barnabas share the first name, "Joses." Barnabas means "son of consolation,"[129] but "Barsabas" means essentially the same thing: "son of pleasure." It might be that one name is a transliteration and another is its translation or that one is a copyist's error.[130]

Barsabas was also surnamed "the Just." This indicates that he was affiliated with the Zadokite clan – either literally as a descendant of this Levitical branch or figuratively in association with the Zadokite movement within the Essene community. Jesus was known as a *zadok*, as was His putative father, Joseph, and his brother James. Since Lazarus was a Levite and of the royal house of David – at least, according to Rabanus – he would have shared that title, as well. [131]

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to him by the Bethany family. The Syriac "Book of the Bee" says Luke was Lazarus' "disciple."

[129]Literally, it means "son of a prophet." "Son of consolation" is a linguistic clue that they are the same man. See Strongs's word keys #6634 (Hebrew) and #3874 with #3870 (Greek).

[130]The Greek letter Nu (υ) can be easily mistaken for the letter Sigma (σ) when written in script form. Also, *Barna*kdimon (son of Nakdimon, i.e. Nicodemus) also has a synonymous meaning of "prophesy, consolation, victory, success, pleasure, wellbeing and so forth." See Appendix C.

[131] 2020 insert: see Merlin book for discussion of the term *zadok* as a reference to the kings of Jerusalem: Melchi-***zedek*** - "Thou art a priest (king) forever after the order of Melchisedek."

The Seventy Sons of Jesus[132]

We have mentioned several times the seventy disciples that were sent out by Jesus for missionary work as He sent the twelve apostles (Luke 10). Although these men are scarcely mentioned in the biblical text, they were obviously close enough to Jesus to engage in the same spiritual ministry as the apostles. Early leaders of Christianity tell us more about them as individuals. From their group, the Apostle was chosen to take the place of Judas. They were witnesses of the ministry of Jesus from the very start. The seven deacons of Acts 6 were from their company.

At this point, we might lose interest in their identities. Hippolytus, quoted earlier, identifies them each by name and tells us the regions they settled and that they became the first bishops of the expanding Church.[133] That they became bishops may not at first seem relevant to our discussion, but once again, we must learn to ask the right questions.

These men were obviously different from the followers of Jesus who fell under the general title of "disciple," even though Luke calls them such. In John 6 we learn that all but the Twelve quit following Jesus after His "cannibalism" speech that offended just about everyone. This poses a problem. If Jesus lost all of His disciples except for the Twelve, how could anyone other than the Twelve have fulfilled the criteria established by Peter in Acts 1 for Judas' replacement? The Fourth Gospel tells us that all of these disciples were now gone, yet suddenly, seventy appear in Luke's Gospel to duplicate the work of the Apostles and just as suddenly there are men competent to take Judas' place in Acts 1. Where did these men come from?[134]

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[132]This proposition of Lazarus/Barnabas as a member of the Seventy seems complicated by the existence of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, one of the earliest patristic writings. Most scholars are settled in the opinion that someone else by that name authored the Epistle.

[133]That the Seventy are not mentioned as a class in the Fourth Gospel may be explained by the fact that the Apostles – as apostles - are not mentioned, either. The ordination stories found in Luke are lacking here. Instead, there is a general commission in 20:21 to His "disciples," an indeterminate number which involved more than the eleven apostles present.

[134]The text does say that "many" of Jesus' disciples left Him, not "all." But the context suggests that *of all of His disciples*, ***only the Twelve remained***, and that was why they were promoted to apostleship. In my book on Hierogamy, I argued the point that the Seventy may not have been present in Acts 1 for Pentecost. This was all a part of the effort to determine the number of widows in the Messianic harem. However, if they were a part of the harem as sons or attendants, their presence would have been likely, even necessary. The Gospel writers customarily did not number women and children with the men. So the 120 in the "upper room" may have been the number of males only. If not, then the Seventy (mostly unmarried youths) in addition to the 11

These seventy men were in a class all of their own and probably fit within the definition of Luke's "acquaintance" which followed Jesus from Galilee with "the *many* women."[135] They were members of the Messianic harem in some way.

If Epiphanius is correct that the bishop's chair was a continuation of the throne of David and that James was appointed bishop because he was of the lineage of David, then we will want to ask "Was Davidic lineage a requirement for this position in the New Testament Church?" We know it wasn't at a later period, say after 50 AD when Paul began to ordain elders for his Gentile churches. But in the twenty years preceding the emergence of the Gentile congregations, the Seventy were dispersed abroad and founded churches/synagogues in each locality.[136] They were under the leadership of James[137] and it seems probable that the office of the bishop - one which was distinct from that of apostle - required just such a lineage. It hardly seems possible that anyone at that time period would have assumed an office which was supposed to be a representation of the Throne of David and yet not be in fact an actual descendant of David.

In Acts 15, James identified the raising up of "the tabernacle of David" as the prime directive of the Church. The "tabernacle of David" refers to the house and lineage of David being restored to its former dominion task. So it is interpreted, at least, in the prophet Amos, from which James drew this reference.[138]

Apostles would have numbered 81, leaving about 40 females present. This would have been a number large enough to justify the appointment of seven deacons.

[135] See *Hierogamy & the Married Messiah* (textbook edition), p. 102-107, cf. Luke 23:49

[136] According to Hippolytus, many of the bishoprics filled by the Seventy coincide with the regions evangelized by Paul and Barnabas (Lazarus) in their first missionary journey. It might be that Paul and Barnabas separated on the second journey, not simply over the fitness of John Mark as an assistant, but on a matter more substantive unmentioned in the text: either because Paul no longer wanted to use the Desposyni to fill the bishoprics of the Gentile churches – viewing them as unreliable youths - or their number had been used up during the first mission.

[137] He is called "the chief of bishops" in the Clementine literature, and sometimes as "lord James" (e.g. *ANF*, vol. 8, p. 95, 218).

[138] If the Seventy were appointed bishops by Lazarus (Barnabas) on his first missionary journey with Paul, it would have been consistent with his role as the kinsman-redeemer of the Messianic harem. Acts 14:12 relates that the common folk mistook Paul and Barnabas for the pagan deities: Mercury and Jupiter. Paul was called Mercury because he was the chief speaker. But in the pagan pantheon, Mercury is Jupiter's emissary, making Barnabas the true leader of the missionary team.

In any case, it seems clear that the government of the early Church was in the hands of "the elders" (i.e. bishops) who were of Davidic descent.

We know that certain ones of the Seventy are individually identified as of Davidic lineage in other sources. We have mentioned Lazarus and James, Cleopas and Jude - kinsmen of Jesus. But there were likely others.

If some of the Seventy can be identified specifically as of Davidic descent and we add the indicia of Davidic lineage to qualify for the bishop's throne in the New Testament Church, then it seems reasonable that *all* of the Seventy were. At least, we may surmise that if they were not of royal blood, then they were the eunuch assistants to those who were. Considering that the identity of the royal house of David had to operate underground during this time period, it is entirely possible, if not probable, that the Seventy were largely the front men or spokesmen for the Desposyni.

If we accept this premise, it is but a small step to accept the next proposition: the Seventy were the sons of the Messianic harem, and if not the actual sons of Jesus, were the deacons on behalf of the sons of Jesus who had not yet reached the ruling age of thirty. If James was just such a mentor for Stephen, we may reasonably suspect that such a relationship existed for many of the remaining members of that illustrious group. **In saying this, we have taken our arguments to a logical conclusion: the Desposynic government of the 1st Century Church was in the hands of the very sons of Jesus Christ and membership in the Church constituted joining the *family* of Jesus, first as menservants and maidservants, and then later, through the laws of adoption and marriage, becoming blood heirs of the dominion covenant.**

Finally, Bible commentators sometimes associate the Seventy as Jesus' replacement of the Jewish Sanhedrin[139] which constituted the elders who represented the Tribes of Israel and which also numbered a nominal membership of seventy men.[140] They note that "Seventy" is the number of nations listed in Genesis 10 and 11 as the sum descended from Noah. There are seventy nations; Jesus had seventy sons – one ruler for each nation. If that is

[139]Notice in the Resurrection account in John that Mary refers to Jesus as *Rabboni*, which in the Aramaic is the stronger "my great Master." The Hebrew equivalent for husband is *ba'al*: which also means "master." *Rabboni* was the title reserved for the president of the Sanhedrin, the chief magistrate of the Jewish people (see *Vine's Expository Dictionary*, p. 504).

[140]In two key references, Acts mentions the "elders" of the church (Acts 15 and Acts 21). Who were these men? How were they appointed? Where did they come from? These questions are pertinent to what became of the Bethany Community, a topic which must await a future study.

the case, then Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies of Psalm 45 which required that the true Messiah would establish an enduring dynasty to the Gentiles. If He did not, then He was not the true Messiah; for we are told that the true Messiah would fulfill *all* that the Law and the Prophets have said concerning Him.[141]

How all of this was lost will require another volume altogether.

Who was Maximus?

Working from Hippolytus' list of the Seventy, we note that Lazarus is missing and so is Maximus. But Barnabas is listed twice. In saying that Lazarus is Barnabas, are we justified in saying that Lazarus is also Maximus? If we view "Maximus" as a title of honor, as is the name "Barnabas," we can certainly say that Lazarus *deserved* those titles. If Maximus was Lazarus, his connection with his sister would fit with what Rabanus says about him and also with what we find in the text of 2 John, where Lazarus writes to Martha and sends her greeting from her sister – meaning that Lazarus and Mary were together. It would also tie together the association that Mary, the sister of Martha, had with the Mother of Jesus, and with Lazarus as the beloved disciple, to whom was given the charge of her care.

Although Lazarus is treated as a separate identity in Rabanus' account, it might very well be that Maximus was Mary's son, who was named after her brother – and that is what has caused the confusion in later historical accounts. An inscription from the sixth century found on a Palestinian church reads:

> *O Christ, God, Saviour of the world, have mercy upon the Christ loving Lady Mary and her son Maximus.*[142]

According to Rabanas' narrative, the Bethany family finds its final destination in Gaul near Marseilles. Maximinus and Mary go to Aix and Martha to Avignon.[143]

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[141]David Koresh and the Branch Davidians were killed because they claimed that Jesus had failed to fulfill this prophecy and that he, Koresh, as the second messiah, would complete the Christ. The heresy of Churchianity has begotten many illegitimate offspring!

[142]*Who Was a Christian in the Holy Land? Encyclopedia*, compiled by A. Mertens, Franciscan Father (Internet source).

[143]Chapter 37 "Then, happily turning their course to the right, they came near to the city of Marseilles, in the Viennoise province of the Gauls, where the River Rhone is received by the sea." Maximinus and Mary go to Aix and Martha to Avignon. P. 90, Taylor, op cit.

The Marked Trail

In my opinion, the best way to identify and track the Bethany Community should be to follow the sects which practiced the various rites of Footwashing as a religious ceremony. In the Fourth Gospel, Footwashing takes precedence over the Eucharist. This ritual is a distinguishing feature of the Bethany Community which sets it apart from the other branches of early Christianity. As a ceremony, Footwashing is not found either in the other Gospels or in the Epistles. It is even lacking in the extra-biblical Gospels. Not until the 2nd Century do we find the practice adopted by the general Christian community, but that is only because the Fourth Gospel had then become a part of the canon based upon its association with the Apostle John. To find the Bethany Community, we must find the footwashers *before* the 2nd Century.

The practice of Footwashing as a religious ceremony has been for the most part a Western tradition, rather than an Eastern tradition. By this, of course, I do not mean to suggest that its origins are not Eastern, but rather that it is a custom which has been followed by branches of the Western Church and not the Eastern Church. We find it in the Celtic liturgy of Britain which can be traced through the Gallican liturgy of northern Spain which in turn was received from southern France. And how did it get to southern France? Historians believe that it came from Asia Minor because the Celtic and Gallic traditions are Johannine, and historians believe that the Johannine Community originated in Asia Minor.

Certainly, if the first bishops of the Church were members of the Bethany Community – the original harem – we find them settling in southern and western Asia Minor following Paul's first missionary journey. In this, we would find initial support for such a belief. But if, as we suggested above, the core of the Community, the Bethany family, migrated west, then what has come to be known as "the Johannine Community" is really a Western branch of the Jerusalem Church. If it was an early tradition, say the middle of the 1st Century, then it could have been taken to southern France and had time to spread to Asia Minor and back again through Irenaeus, who was a bishop to the Celts in Gaul during the latter half of the 2nd Century. Curiously, however, while Irenaeus claims the Johannine tradition as his own, there is no mention anywhere in his known writings about Footwashing. Nor is there a general commentary on the Fourth Gospel.

The practice of Footwashing is so rare even in the Western tradition that we are compelled to emphasize its uniqueness among the Celtic churches. Its propagation later throughout Europe can be ascribed to the travels of Celtic missionaries and the monasteries which they founded. Columbanus is the Celtic

Church's most distinguished representative, whose successors traveled as far as Kiev and who, among his many works, founded the monastery which would later nurture the great Francis of Assisi. He was a greater figure in his day than was the Pope.

In the later contest between the Celtic Church and the Latin Church – as discussed earlier - Rome prevailed at the decisive Synod of Whitby (664) by appealing to Peter and the Gospel accounts which identify him as the guardian of the "keys of the kingdom of heaven." Colman, the Celtic spokesman, could only muster Columbanus as his authority and, in turn, his reliance upon the witness of John's Gospel. Rome claimed that the apostolic tradition from St. Peter was greater than St. John's and on that account carried the day.

I do not wish to delve into the particulars of those past controversies; they seem petty to modern eyes (the dating of Easter, tonsure, and so on). My purpose is to identify the Celtic Church as a part, perhaps at the time the only surviving part, of the "Johannine Community." The Celtic Church openly acknowledged its dependence on John's Gospel and confirmed its roots in that community by its practices, including Footwashing.

But it still was a receptive tradition, not an originative one. While the Bethany Community may have found refuge in the Celtic Church, we cannot say that the Celtic Church was itself the Bethany Community. It is very possible that the Bethany Community continued under an identity that is not immediately recognizable as “Christian.” The question of what became of that Community after its arrival in Europe must be saved for a future volume.

One final question on the matter of apostolic succession must be addressed. According to the synoptic Gospels, Jesus promises the Twelve that they will sit on “twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” It would seem that these texts undo all of the claims previously made about the Messianic harem and the sons of Jesus.

There are a number of ways to tackle this problem. We might question their veracity. It could be that these texts were later interpolations into the Gospel records after the Early Church had decided against the idea of perpetuating the Messianic harem and instead had substituted it with the apostolic succession. After all, we have no clear record that this promise was ever fulfilled. The first leader of the Jerusalem Church was James, the brother of Jesus, not Peter. If this judgeship was truly representative of Christ’s will, then James was a rogue bishop. Tradition does not recognize him as one of the Twelve Apostles.

There are some commentators who sense this problem and use a dispensational argument to explain it. They believe that this promise was meant to be fulfilled during a future Millennium after the Second Coming of Christ.

Ultimately, this does not help their cause or the cause of apostolic succession. If judgeship for the apostles has been deferred to a future Millennial kingdom, then so has it for their successors. In fact, with this argument, there is no apostolic succession, for there is no office to succeed. It still does not explain why Davidic bishops were the first rulers of the Church and why the Church ultimately departed from that episcopacy. Nor does it explain why the apostles had any authority at all in the New Testament period. This conceptual void has led to a sort of anarchy in church government, especially in some Protestant sects.

On the other hand, the Apostles did exercise true authority in the New Testament Church. They were given this authority by Christ and by His appointed successor, James. We might be tempted to say that this proves the Apostles were connected to a Davidic lineage. But there is no hint in the New Testament record to suggest that they were of Davidic descent. Lacking that covenantal lineage, we would have to say that the Apostles served as *vicegerents* and not as *viceroys*. Vicegerency is not a succession. Servants cannot appoint their own replacements. Only their master can appoint new replacements. Since Jesus has been an absent Messiah, we can truthfully say that apostolic succession would have ended with the Apostles.

Such is not the case, however, with viceroys. Viceroys are usually blood relatives of the king, or are so connected by marriage to royalty as to constitute members of his family. In the absence of the king, viceroys may perpetuate royal succession *pending his return.* Thus, for there to have been any legitimate government at all in the successive generations of Christians, there had to be a Desposyni. Otherwise, there is no government, there is no Church, and there is no Christianity.

Ultimately, however, the authority conferred by Christ did not and could not have proscribed that of His own sons because the Messianic harem were given rulership over the Gentile nations, while the Apostles were given a vicegerency over "the twelve tribes of Israel," wherever they might have been. This promise was fulfilled in the 1st Century and in no way contradicts our claims concerning the Desposyni.

CONCLUSION

Have all the shadows been dispelled for you? Probably not. It is psychologically difficult to revise our understanding of Christian origins without more obvious evidence. We have been conditioned by the many centuries of bias manifested in translations and commentaries. The anomalies have simply been ignored or dismissed as unimportant peculiarities.

In my opinion, the forgoing study has dispelled more shadows than the traditional view. There are fewer uncertainties. But the story isn't finished.

The pressing question will be whether the Bethany Community ever lost its sense of identity through the centuries to be eventually absorbed by other traditions, or whether there was, at least, a core or vanguard which always knew its origins and history. Or was there something in between? There could have been scattered groups which knew various pieces of the puzzle but not enough to maintain unit integrity. If the latter is the case, then our purpose becomes more clearly defined. The historical reconstruction offered here may provide a catalyst in bringing these groups together into a coherent tradition.

The Grail Church, then, finds its mission in being that catalyst to produce a more authentic Christian body. You have been privileged to share in that calling. I hope you will find your place in it.

Appendices have been deleted from the web edition of this book. If you desire to read this material, consider becoming a catechumen in the Cambrian Desposynic Episcopal Church
Contact the Overseer at
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