

The Jesus Seminar, John Dominic Crossan and the Roots of Antisemitism

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The Jesus Seminar

“...those who increase knowledge increase sorrow.”¹⁾

Ecclesiastes 1:18

Phase One : “What Did Jesus Really Say?”

From 1985 to 1991, the Fellows²⁾ of the Jesus Seminar met twice a year to debate and then by secret ballot³⁾ vote on the authenticity of each of the “1,544 sayings of Jesus” that are recorded in the “five gospels.”⁴⁾ In 1993, after “careful review of the evidence,” the Jesus

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1) New Revised Standard Version (hereafter *NRSV*). The New International Version (hereafter *NIV*) translates the same verse, “... the more knowledge, the more grief.”

2) See Appendix A: “Participation, Religious Affiliation, and Population of the Jesus Seminar.”

3) See Appendix B: “The Balloting Method of the Jesus Seminar.”

4) I.e., the four canonical gospels plus the Gospel of Thomas. While the status of this “fifth gospel” vis-à-vis the other four has been debated intensely by New Testament scholars since its discovery at Nag Hammadi in 1947 (see John P. Meier, “Dividing Lines in Jesus Research Today,” *Interpretation*, pp. 356-357), “... [m]ost Fellows ... hold that [the Gospel of] Thomas is an independent witness to the Jesus tradition and is not dependent on the synoptic gospels” (Robert Funk, *The Gospel of Mark: Red Letter Edition*, p. 11). Below are four premises (22-25) adopted by the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar regarding the Gospel of Thomas: it has provided a new and important source for the Jesus tradition; it consists of 114 sayings without a narrative framework; it represents an earlier stage of the tradition than do the canonical gospels; and it represents an independent witness to the Jesus tradition.

Seminar published a new English translation and commentary of the gospels entitled, *The Scholars Version*,⁵⁾ where for the first time Jesus' sayings were color-coded, as follows:

- Red Jesus undoubtedly said this or something very like it.
- Pink Jesus probably said something like this.
- Gray Jesus did not say this, but the ideas contained in it are close to his own.
- Black Jesus did not say this; it represents the perspective or content of a later or different tradition.⁶⁾

An example: the Lord's Prayer⁷⁾ --

- ⁹ "This, then, is how you should pray:
'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
¹⁰ your kingdom come,
your will be done
on earth as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.

5) Hereafter *SV*. The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar dedicated their translation (the full title: *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus*) to "Galileo Galilei, who altered our view of the heavens forever, Thomas Jefferson, who took scissors and paste to the gospels, [and] David Friedrich Strauss, who pioneered the quest for the historical Jesus."

6) One of the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar suggested the following "unofficial but helpful interpretation of the colors" (*SV*, p. 37):

- Red That's Jesus!
- Pink Sure sounds like Jesus.
- Gray Well, maybe.
- Black There's been some mistake.

7) Matthew 6:9-13. The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar decided that the Lord's Prayer probably did not come from the lips of Jesus. Fellow Steven Patterson, a professor at Eden Theological Seminary, gave this reason for their decision: it is a fixed prayer, and Jesus often condemned religious rituals and rigid formulas (*Atlanta Constitution*, October 15, 1988, quoted in Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels*, p. 14).

¹² Forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from the evil one."⁸⁾

-- was color-coded in the SV, as follows:

Red ⁹ Our Father...
 Pink ⁹ hallowed be your name,
 ¹⁰ your kingdom come,
 ¹¹ Give us today our daily bread.
 ¹² Forgive us our debts,
 as we also have forgiven our debtors.
 Gray ¹³ And lead us not into temptation,
 Black ⁹ ... in heaven,
 ¹⁰ your will be done
 on earth as it is in heaven.
 ¹³ but deliver us from the evil one.

To help "dispel the pious fog that can obscure the historical truth,"⁹⁾ the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar employed an extensive array of scientific methods and research criteria¹⁰⁾ to reach the following "unprecedented" conclusions:¹¹⁾

8) *NIV*. Bible quotations are from this translation unless indicated otherwise.

9) Funk, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 26.

10) See Appendix C: "The Rules of Evidence," and "The 64 Premises," for samples.

11) Prof. Robert Miller, an active member of the Jesus Seminar since 1986, wrote: "it is no exaggeration to describe the Jesus Seminar as unprecedented in biblical scholarship, unprecedented in its goals, its procedures, its accomplishments and its impact" (Robert Miller, *The Jesus Seminar and the Search for the Words of Jesus*, p. 104). Yet on the very next page Prof. Miller wrote:

"The historical critical approach to the Bible is taught in all mainline seminaries and in all colleges and universities that teach about religion, except for schools controlled by fundamentalist or some evangelical churches. Scholars using the historical critical approach have known for over a century that the gospels are a blend of historical remembrance and Christian interpretation, which means that not every deed and word attributed to Jesus

in the gospels can actually be traced to him. Biblical scholars presuppose this in writings addressed to their peers. Yet almost no one, professors and clergy alike, tries to communicate this way of understanding Jesus to the public. The vast majority of Christians, including those in Catholic and mainline Protestant churches, are surprised, even stunned, when they hear a scholar or clergyperson assert that the gospels are part fact and part fiction. The Jesus Seminar aims to bridge the gap between scholars and the public by communicating the results of its historical study clearly, honestly, and in terms understandable to lay audience" (Miller, *The Jesus Seminar*, p. 105).

In a more recent article, Prof. Miller wrote that the conclusions reached by the Jesus Seminar are widely held by most critical scholars: There is a

"consensus among critical scholars. This is not new to scholars, but it is to the American public. A huge number of Americans believe that inerrancy is the only legitimate approach to the Bible, that to take the Bible seriously is to take it literally.

The seminar's critics are right to protest that many scholars disagree with the seminar's results, but they do a disservice if they perpetuate the mistaken impression that doubts about the historical accuracy of significant portions of the Gospels are confined to some splinter group of allegedly radical scholars...

The very fact that journalists who cover religion register such shock that scholars sometimes use words like 'nonhistorical' or, worse, 'fiction' to characterize some gospel passages shows what a good job our scholarly guild has done in keeping our secrets to ourselves. I wish that reporters who interview critics of the seminar would ask *them* which items in the Gospels *they* consider nonhistorical. If critics were to answer this question honestly, it would become clear that the seminar's views on the general nature of the Gospels are shared by virtually all critical scholars, even though many of them disagree with the seminar's specific results" (Robert Miller, *Why the Ugly Attacks?*, pp. 19-20; italics in the original).

Prof. Miller's point is well taken. The skepticism exhibited by the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar regarding the historical accuracy of the gospels is hardly unprecedented in contemporary New Testament scholarship (an "embellishment of Bultmannian form-criticism" would be, in my judgment, an apt description of their research method). Prof. Luke Timothy Johnson, in *The Real Jesus*, 1996, p. 4, wrote: "The approach of the Seminar is not unique or obviously shocking, either. Like a great deal of Gospel criticism, it began with the assumption that the Gospels are not accurate histories but are narratives constructed out of traditional materials with literary art and theological motives... The Seminar has drawn so much attention not because of its innovative science but because of its deliberately provocative style. The style of the Seminar's proceedings has been, from its inception, what most distinguishes it from other scholarship. At each meeting, participants voted with colored beads for the probability of a particular saying's authenticity. No more effective way to draw attention could be imagined. Scholars are voting on the contents of the gospel!" Yet even Prof. Johnson, though in his book he is highly critical of the "media-hungry, publicity-seeking" Jesus Seminar, wrote: "Fundamentalists *wrongly* stake all Christian faith on the literal historical accuracy of the Bible" (*Ibid.*, p. 26; italics added). I have little doubt that much of the criticism of the Jesus Seminar voiced by New Testament scholars is grounded not in any serious disagreement with the Fellows' skepticism toward the historicity of the gospels, but in jealousy, pure and simple. Name-recognition means a great deal in the Darwinian world of North American academia.

Thus, about the only thing "unprecedented" about the *SV* is its attention-grabbing color-coding system. Incidentally, "... the Seminar took its inspiration from the familiar red letter editions of the New Testament, in which the words of Jesus are printed in red. The idea was to produce an edition of the gospels in which only the words that Jesus 'really' said would be in red" (Miller, *The Jesus Seminar*, p. 106).

Regarding the gospels collectively, the Jesus Seminar concluded that 18% (278) of Jesus' sayings are "authentic" (i.e., *ipsissima verba / vox Jesu*), and 82% (1,266) "inauthentic" (i.e., "pious fictions" or "creations" of the early church).¹²

Regarding the gospels individually, the Jesus Seminar concluded that the least authentic was "John"¹³: with the exception of only nine words ("... a prophet has no honor in his own country."¹⁴), all of Jesus' sayings in John were color-coded "inauthentic" (i.e., the "creations" or "inventions" of the "storyteller").

Thus, all the gospel writers, and "John" especially,

"... creatively invented speech for Jesus. Storytellers in every age freely invent

12) The Jesus Seminar's final balloting for all Jesus' sayings in the five gospels: 31 red, 211 pink, 416 gray, and 886 black.

13) "John" -- "an anonymous author in the last decade of the first century" (*SV*, p. 20) -- wrote what is widely accepted by many Christians as their most profound gospel. D. A. Carson, professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, has written the following about the "esteem the Gospel of John has been held in the hearts of Christian believers throughout history":

"Perhaps more than any other, the Gospel of John has been used by Christians in every age, and for the greatest array of purposes. University students distribute free copies to their friends in the hope of introducing them to the Savior. Elderly Christians on their deathbed ask that parts of this Gospel be read to them. Academics write learned dissertations on the relationship between John and some ancient corpus of literature. Children memorize entire chapters, and sing choruses based on its truth. Countless courses of sermons have been based on this book or on some part of it. It stood near the center of Christological controversy in the fourth century, and for the last 150 years it has been at the heart of the debate about the relation between history and theology. Until recently, the best known verse in the Bible was John 3:16... : a toddler could recite it. In this Gospel the love of God is dramatically mediated through Jesus Christ -- so much so that Karl Barth is alleged to have commented that the most profound truth he had ever heard was 'Jesus loves me, this I know / For the Bible tells me so'" (D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, p. 21).

Yet according to the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar, the gospel is fiction, albeit profound fiction invented by a very creative mind (see Appendix D: "List of Conclusions Regarding the Authenticity of Jesus' Sayings in the Gospel of John").

14) John 4:44. This verse is an indirect quotation in most English translations: "(Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.)". Also, the verse is color-coded pink in the *SV*. Thus, not one saying of Jesus is color-coded red in John, though some are so colored in the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas!

words for characters in their stories. This is the storyteller's license. Ancient historians like Herodotus, Thucydides, and the author of Acts were adept at this practice. In inventing lines for Jesus to speak, the evangelists were only following common practice."¹⁵⁾

To substantiate the above assertion, the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar quote Thucydides, who in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, gave this explanation of his procedure:

"With regard to the speeches various persons made when they were about to launch a war or had already done so, it has been difficult to recall precisely the words they actually spoke. This is the case whether they were speeches I myself heard or whether they were words reported to me from other sources. As a consequence, the various speakers were made to say what was appropriate, as it seemed to me, to the subject,

15) *SV*, p. 29. In answer to the question, "Are you saying that we can't trust the gospel writers -- that they were just making up stories as they go along?", Prof. John Dominic Crossan, a prominent Fellow of the Jesus Seminar whose work will be discussed shortly, replied: "I'm not suggesting that they're writing fiction in a modern sense. They were engaged in a style of religious reflection that was common to Judaism in the first century" (Crossan, *Who is Jesus?*, pp. 134-35). This is a most perplexing answer. Because Prof. Crossan is on record for expressing admiration for the first Christians ("I have tremendous respect for those first Christians" – *Who is Jesus?*, p. 154), he cannot just come out and say they were a brood of habitual liars (although in a previous book he has claimed they made up stories to escape persecution [see below]). Prof. Crossan seems to be implying the gospels writers, being "engaged in a style of religious reflection that was common to Judaism in the first century," wrote stories that ancient readers and listeners recognized as "creative fictions." A serious problem arises, Prof. Crossan maintains, when modern readers and listeners take these stories to be literally true.

Elsewhere Prof. Crossan has claimed that the evangelists, all Christian Jews, deliberately lied to protect themselves from persecution; they did not compose their gospels merely to display their talents of literary creativity. The first Christians were "relatively powerless Jews," and the Jewish authorities were a threat to their survival. "As long as Christians were the marginalized and disenfranchised ones, such passion fiction about Jewish responsibility and Roman innocence did nobody much harm. But once the Roman Empire became Christian, that fiction turned lethal. In the light of later Christian anti-Judaism and eventually of genocidal antisemitism, it is no longer possible in retrospect to think of that passion fiction as relatively benign propaganda. However explicable its origins, defensible its invectives, and understandable its motives among Christians fighting for survival, its repetition has now become *the longest lie*, and for our own integrity, we Christians must at last name it as such" (Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 152). How can Prof. Crossan label the passion narratives "the longest lie" when he seems to imply that ancient readers and listeners were well aware that this "style of religious reflection" was "common to Judaism in the first century"? One can only wish Prof. Crossan will express himself more precisely on this matter in future publications.

although I attempted to stick as close as possible in every case to the general scope of the speech."¹⁶⁾

To take one example from a "creative"¹⁷⁾ gospel writer who used "the storyteller's license" to put his own words into the mouth of Jesus: during the Feast of Tabernacles, an impassioned exchange took place in Jerusalem between Jesus and "the Jews."¹⁸⁾ In John 8:44-47, widely cited by Jewish scholars as the *locus classicus* of New Testament antisemitism, Jesus accused "the Jews" of belonging to "your father, the devil."

⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to *the truth*, for there is *no*

16) 1.22.1, italics added. Two points should be kept in mind here: first, Thucydides said his desire was to "stick as close as possible in every case to the general scope of the speech." And second, he did not say he tried creatively to invent the speeches (see Jeffrey Gibbs, "The Search for the Idiosyncratic Jesus: A Critique of the Jesus Seminar's *The Five Gospels*," *Presbyterion*, 1994, p. 24). It is interesting to note that as far as I know the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar never quote Polybius. In *Histories* (Book 12), he wrote:

"I must speak of the principle on which [Timaeus] composes public speeches, harangues to soldiers, the discourses of ambassadors, and, in a word, all utterances of the kind.... Can anyone who reads these help noticing that Timaeus has untruthfully reported them in his work, and has done so of set purpose? For he has not set down the words spoken nor the sense of what was really said, but having made up his mind as to what ought to have been said, he recounts all these speeches and all else that follows upon events like a man in a school of rhetoric attempting to speak on a given subject, and shows off his oratorical power, but gives no report of what was actually spoken. The peculiar function of history is to discover, in the first place, the words actually spoken, whatever they were, and next to ascertain the reason why what was done or spoken led to failure or success.... But a writer who passes over in silence the speeches made and the causes of events and in their place introduces false rhetorical exercises and discursive speeches, destroys the peculiar virtue of history" (Loeb Classical Library translation, italics added).

17) Prof. Crossan rarely comments on John's "inventions" in his book *Who Killed Jesus?* without employing the words creative or creativity. A few examples: "John's alleged use of Mark is so profoundly creative" (p. 29); "John, who is, as usual, the most creative with his sources" (p. 130); "John, as always, presents the most creative solution to the..." (p. 145); "From John, as usual, one expects maximum creativity" (p. 186). See Appendix D: "List of Conclusions Regarding the Authenticity of Jesus Sayings in the Gospel of John."

18) Translated "the Judeans" in the *SV*. This is an appropriate translation because the phrase *hoi Ioudaioi* represents "those among the authorities of the Jews who constantly opposed Jesus" (Crossan, "Anti-Semitism and the Gospel," *Theological Studies*, 1965, p. 199), and not the Jewish people, per se. "All the evidence, then, points to the conclusion that the Jews of Jerusalem and Palestine were accepting the Church in large numbers despite the same rooted opposition of their authorities which had crucified Jesus" (*Ibid.*, p. 211).

truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is *a liar and the father of lies*.⁴⁵ Yet because *I tell the truth*, you do not believe me!⁴⁶ Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If *I am telling the truth*, why don't you believe me?⁴⁷ He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God.¹⁹⁾

According to the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar, all the words recorded above originated in the creative mind of "John"; they were never actually spoken by Jesus. "John" and the gospel writers were not historians or biographers "in the modern sense," they were ancient storytellers, and the creation of imaginary dialogues was part and parcel of the "storyteller's license." "John" was "only following common practice." Granted over the centuries Christians have taken the author at his word: viz., that he was a bona fide eyewitness to the events he recorded in his gospel:

²⁴ This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.²⁰⁾

Yet according to the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar, today only a fundamentalist, only someone who is "held captive" by a commitment to the verbal inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible,²¹⁾ could possibly still insist that Jesus actually said what "John" said he did, specifically in the verse mentioned above, that the devil "is a liar and the father of lies."

19) Italics added. If Prof. Crossan's assertion that "John" was a major contributor to the creation of Christianity's "longest lie" is to be given any credence, then the decision of the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar to publish a work authored by someone with such dubious ethical standards -- someone who has the audacity to create a "completely unhistorical" dialogue about telling lies and telling the truth -- is even more questionable.

20) John 21:24

21) *SV*, p. 5. I will confess here that I also take it for granted the Bible is inspired and inerrant, specifically that Jesus said what the gospels (excluding, of course, the "Gnostic" Gospel of Thomas) said He said, and did what they said He did. I realize that such a belief would be regarded by the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar, and by most contemporary New Testament scholars for that matter, as "embarrassingly unscientific" and "irrationally biased." So be it. The purpose of this short paper is thus not to attempt to marshal arguments in support of the veracity of the gospel accounts -- such arguments would be labeled by critical scholars of the Bible as unconvincing and unscholarly anyway. Instead my goal in this paper is very modest: to point out what appears to me a telling contradiction in the work of the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar, a matter I will turn to shortly.

Well, if the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar decided that very few of Jesus' sayings recorded in the gospels are authentic, that most of them are the creations of the gospel storytellers and do not originate with the "historical Jesus," what about all the miraculous deeds done by Jesus, who "went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him" -- Acts 10:38?

Phase Two : "What Did Jesus Really Do?"

With the completion of the first phase, i.e., voting on and color-coding every one of the 1,544 sayings of Jesus, the Jesus Seminar has entered the second phase of its controversial project: currently the Fellows are debating and casting colored beads to decide the authenticity / historicity of every one of Jesus' deeds recorded in the five gospels. Once the voting is completed, it stands to reason that the Jesus Seminar will publish a second edition of the *SV*, this time with both Jesus' sayings and deeds color-coded according to their "degree of authenticity."²²⁾ But the most prominent Fellow of the Jesus Seminar has already taken a stand regarding the authenticity / historicity of the deeds of Jesus, especially those recorded in the Passion Narratives.

John Dominic Crossan and the Roots of Antisemitism

"... salvation is from the Jews."

John 4:22

The Passion Narratives : "The Longest Lie"?

Prof. John Dominic Crossan, co-director of the Jesus Seminar,²³⁾ has recently

22) According to Prof. Miller, this material will be published in a forthcoming book "tentatively titled, *The Acts of Jesus*" (Miller, *Why the Ugly Attacks?*, p. 19).

23) Prof. Crossan is "... the premier Jesus scholar in the world today" (Marcus Borg, *Jesus at 2000*, p. 21); he

summarized his lifetime of Jesus research in several books: *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (1996), and *Who is Jesus? Answers to Your Questions about the Historical Jesus* (1996).²⁴⁾

According to Prof. Crossan, 20% of the passion accounts are authentic, 80% inauthentic.²⁵⁾ Expressed differently, 8 out of 10 events in the Passion Narratives are not "History Remembered but Prophecy Historicized." Prof. Crossan explains this expression by the following examples:²⁶⁾

There are five accounts of the crucifixion of Jesus in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Peter.²⁷⁾ The first four are canonical, the fifth, Peter, is not.²⁸⁾ Four of the

has joined the "... ranks of the truly great biblical scholars of the twentieth century" (Robert Funk, back cover of Crossan's *Who Killed Jesus?*; both Borg and Funk are Charter Fellows of the Jesus Seminar); he is "... [t]he best-selling author of many books" (back cover of *Who Killed Jesus?*); he is an "... [e]minent biblical scholar" (back cover of *Who is Jesus?*).

24) And in much more detail in *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant*, 1992. Significantly, there is no mention whatsoever in this (507-page) "most important scholarly book about Jesus in decades" (Marcus Borg, book backcover) of Prof. Crossan's thesis that the Passion Narratives are inherently antisemitic. And as far as I know, the only other time he discussed antisemitism in any detail was in 1965 in the article (mentioned above) "Anti-Semitism and the Gospel." There he argued that the traditional translation "the Jews" for the opponents of Jesus "might be a root of anti-Semitism in the Christian subconscious" (p. 199). But he insisted that the phrase referred to "the authorities of the Jews who constantly opposed Jesus" and not to the Jewish people collectively because "everyone involved was a Jew" (p. 194). No mention whatsoever was made in the article of any inherent antisemitism in the Passion Narratives. While it is beyond human ability to ascertain the true intentions of another person, one cannot help feeling somewhat suspicious that after the movie *Schindler's List* received enormous attention in the West, and awareness spread of the suffering endured by the Jewish people during the Holocaust, Prof. Crossan introduced a new weapon in his struggle against those who believe in the historicity of the gospel accounts -- namely, the Passion Narratives are not only fictions, they are lethal fictions; they result inevitably and inexorably in the deaths of innocent Jewish people.

25) Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 1.

26) *Ibid.*, pp. 1-6.

27) "I use those names to designate not authors but texts" (*Ibid.*, p. 1).

28) For various reasons too detailed to mention here, Prof. Crossan believes Peter "must be taken seriously" because "the canonical versions are dependent on a section" of it, i.e., the so-called "Cross Gospel" (*Ibid.*, p. 24). "My working hypothesis of canonical dependency on the Cross Gospel within Peter leaves me with a second major thesis for this work: there is only a single independent source for the passion narrative, so that prophecy historicized moved from the Cross Gospel through Mark, Matthew, and Luke into John" (*Ibid.*, p. 25). Incidentally,

gospels mention a 3-hour darkness from the sixth hour (12:00 noon) to the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) during the crucifixion of Jesus:

Mar And when the sixth hour had come,
 Mat Now from the sixth hour
 Luk It was now about the sixth hour,
 Pet Now it was *midday*

Mar there was *darkness* over the whole land
 Mat there was *darkness* over all the land
 Luk and there was *darkness* over the whole land
 Pet and a *darkness* covered all Judaea.

Mar until the ninth hour.
 Mat until the ninth hour.
 Luk until the ninth hour,

Pet And they became anxious and uneasy

lest the *sun* had already set....
 Luk while the *sun's* light failed;...
 Pet Then the *sun* shone (again),

Pet and it was found to be the ninth hour.²⁹⁾

All four sources agree darkness came over the whole land / all Judaea from the sixth hour (12:00 noon) to the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) while Jesus was being crucified. Prof. Crossan believes this incident, like most of those recorded in the Passion Narratives, is not "history

the Gospel of Peter was not included in *SV*!

29) Mark 15:33, Matthew 27:45, Luke 23:44-45, Peter 5:15, 6:22

remembered," i.e., it did not happen literally, but is "prophecy historicized," i.e., the first Christians, all Jews, "turned to their sacred writings, the Hebrew Scriptures" to find verses so they could "understand what had happened to Jesus and themselves."³⁰ In the book of Amos they found the following:

⁴ Hear this, you that trample on the needy,
and bring to ruin the poor of the land,
⁵ saying, "When will the new moon be over
so that we may sell grain;
and the sabbath,
so that we may offer wheat for sale?
We will make the ephah small
and the shekel great,
and practice deceit with false balances,
⁶ buying the poor for silver
and the needy for a pair of sandals,
and selling the sweepings of the wheat...
⁹ On that day, says the Lord GOD,
I will make the *sun* go down at noon,
and *darken* the earth in broad daylight.
¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning,
and all your songs into lamentation;
I will bring sackcloth on all loins,

30) Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 2. Please keep in mind Prof. Crossan's claim (mentioned in footnote 15, above) that the early Christians, all Jews, lied to protect themselves from persecution (apparently they weren't very persuasive liars because the early Christians suffered considerable persecution during the four centuries preceding the conversion of Constantine -- though the extent of the persecutions has been an issue hotly debated by scholars (see *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 5, D. S. Potter, "Persecution of the Early Church," pp. 231-235). Later, and up until recently, gullible Gentiles would swallow the evangelists' fictions hook, line and sinker. Incidentally, nowhere is it mentioned by the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar how the above literary fictions could contribute to the Christian Jews' efforts to avoid persecution.

and baldness on every head;
I will make it like the mourning for an *only son*,
and the end of it like a bitter day.³¹⁾

Prof. Crossan's "Working Hypothesis" regarding these verses is as follows:

"By 'prophecy historicized' I mean that no such *historical* three-hour midnight at noon accompanied the death of Jesus, but that learned Christians searching their Scriptures found this ancient description of future divine punishment, maybe facilitated by its mention of an 'only son' in the second-to-last line, and so created that *fictional* story about darkness at noon to assert that Jesus died in fulfillment of prophecy. That is, of course, only a single example, but it is the working hypothesis of this book that specific units such as that one, general sequences such as the abuse or mockery, and even the overall framework of passion and vindication were dictated and controlled by exactly similar processes. Hence the first thesis of this book: *the units, sequences, and frames of the passion narrative were derived not from history remembered but from prophecy historicized.*"³²⁾

Another example, from the Passion Narratives:³³⁾

²³ When the soldiers crucified Jesus, they took his clothes, dividing them into four shares, one for each of them, with the undergarment remaining. This garment was seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom.

²⁴ "Let's not tear it," they said to one another. "Let's decide by lot who will get it." This happened that the scripture might be fulfilled which said, "They *divided my garments* among them and cast lots for my clothing." So this is what the soldiers did.

31) Amos 8:4-6, 9-10 (NRSV). Italics added.

32) Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 4. Italics in the original.

33) John 19:23-30. Italics added.

²⁵ Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, "Dear woman, here is your son,"

²⁷ and to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

²⁸ Later, knowing that all was now completed, and so that the Scripture would be fulfilled, Jesus said, "I am thirsty."

²⁹ A jar of *wine vinegar* was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

Prof. Crossan believes the early Christians first found a passage from Psalms, 22:18 --

"They divide my garments among them
and cast lots for my clothing."

-- and then invented the story of soldiers casting lots for Jesus' garments. They stumbled across another passage from Psalms, 69:21 --

"They put gall in my food
and gave me vinegar for my thirst."

-- and invented another story of Jesus being given gall or poison for food, and vinegar or sour wine for drink.

"In the same way, other details of the crucifixion story--for instance, the spitting on and mocking of Jesus, the crown of thorns, the two thieves crucified with him, darkness at noon--all were created out of Old Testament texts.

Traditionally, Christians have said, 'See how Christ's passion was foretold by the prophets.' Actually, it was the other way around. The Hebrew prophets did not predict the events of Jesus' last week; rather, many of those Christian stories were created to fit the ancient prophecies in order to show that Jesus, despite his execution, was still and always held in the hands of God.

My proposal is this: Jesus' first followers knew almost nothing whatsoever about the details of his crucifixion, death, or burial. We have those detailed accounts of his final days and hours because *Old Testament texts were turned into first-century events*. That is, the Hebrew scriptures were not predictions of what would happen to Jesus, but were used later to *create* the stories about what happened to him; they were sought out backwards, as it were, after that death had occurred. Prophecy, in other words, is known after the fact rather than before it.³⁴⁾

Prof. Crossan goes further and claims the gospel writers sometimes invented stories that didn't even have "predictions" in the Hebrew Scriptures. As an example, Prof. Crossan cites the Barabbas incident recorded in Mark 15:6-15:

⁶ Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ⁷ A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. ⁸ The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

⁹ "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, ¹⁰ knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

¹² "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them.

¹³ "Crucify him!" they shouted.

¹⁴ "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the

34) Crossan, *Who is Jesus?*, p. 136. Italics in the original.

louder, "Crucify him!"

¹⁵ Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Prof. Crossan judges this incident to be "absolutely unhistorical" for two reasons: first, the picture of a meek and accommodating Pilate giving in to the whims of a screaming mob is the exact opposite of the brutal portrait of Pilate presented by the historian Flavius Josephus. Pilate was an expert in the brutal suppression of unruly crowds. Second, the release of a prisoner during the Passover Festival goes "against any administrative wisdom."³⁵ Why did Mark invent such an implausible incident in the first place? Prof. Crossan believes Mark wanted to dramatize symbolically Jerusalem's destruction by the Romans in 70 AD.

Does Prof. Crossan believe there is anything authentic or historical in the gospels and specifically in the Passion Narratives? He is convinced only a mere handful of incidents should be accepted as historically certain: viz.,

1. Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan River.³⁶
2. A "Temple disturbance" during Passover.³⁷

35) Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 111.

36) "Nothing is more certain about Jesus than this: that he was baptized by John in the Jordan River. The reason for our certainty is that the Christian tradition shows increasing embarrassment about that baptism. Wherever we find the Church embarrassed by a tradition about Jesus, the odds are very strong that the tradition is rooted in actual history. And why was the Church embarrassed by the story of Jesus' baptism? Because it would seem to say that Jesus, like others, underwent baptism 'for the forgiveness of sins,' and because it seems to put John in a superior position as the one who baptized him" (Crossan, *Who is Jesus?*, p. 39).

37) [Jesus'] "... vision of open table and free healing clashed wildly with what he saw in the Temple, the seat and symbol of everything that was paternal, hierarchical, brokered, even oppressive on both the religious and political level. The Temple was in the hands of high priests who were not of legitimate lineage according to Jewish law, but were hired and fired like servants by the Romans and Herodians, who puppets they had become. Jesus' symbolic act of destruction reinforced what he had been teaching, what he had expressed through his healings, what he had effected in his practice of open eating and drinking. It was like going into a draft office during the Vietnam War and pouring blood over drawers of file cards, or like climbing a fence at a missile site and hammering on the nosecone of an ICBM. It was a symbolic negation of everything the institution stood for....

3. Jesus' crucifixion under Pontius Pilate.³⁸⁾

Well, what does Prof. Crossan believe actually happened to Jesus during "Passion Week"?

"My best historical reconstruction would be something like this. Jesus was arrested during the Passover festival, most likely in response to his action in the Temple. Those who were closest to him ran away for their own safety. I do not presume that there were any high-level confrontations between Caiaphas and Pilate and Herod Antipas either about Jesus or with Jesus. No doubt they would have agreed before the festival that fast action was to be taken against any disturbance and that a few examples by crucifixion might be especially useful at the outset. And I doubt very much if Jewish police or Roman soldiers needed to go too far up the chain of command in handling a Galilean peasant like Jesus. It is hard for us to imagine the casual brutality with which Jesus was probably taken and executed. All those 'last week' details in our gospels, as distinct from the brute facts just mentioned, are prophecy turned into history, rather than history remembered."³⁹⁾

What about the Empty Tomb? The Resurrection of Jesus is without question the essential Christian belief. Paul (1 Cor. 15:12-19) claimed:

Jesus was not 'cleansing' the Temple; nor was his action some Christianity versus Judaism scenario.... It was a symbolic destruction of the Temple as hopelessly and irrevocably contaminated and compromised. Was it the house of prayer and sacrifice or the seat of collaboration and oppression?" (Crossan, *Who is Jesus?*, p. 130).

38) "That Jesus 'was crucified under Pontius Pilate,' as the creed states, is as certain as anything historical can ever be" (Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 122). "... [I]t is very hard to imagine that Jesus' first followers would have invented such a story unless it had indeed happened. While the brute fact of Jesus' death by crucifixion is historically certain, however, those detailed narratives in our present gospels are much more problematic. They are far, far less historically certain" (Crossan, *ibid.*). ... [T]he fact of the crucifixion is historically certain, but the narratives are very problematic. And the reason is clear.... Christian imagination took the fact of Jesus' crucifixion and fleshed it out by searching the scriptures to provide not only a rationale for his fate, but specific narratives telling its story.... I'm not suggesting that they're writing fiction in a modern sense. They were engaged in a style of religious reflection that was common to Judaism in the first century" (Crossan, *ibid.*, pp. 134-35).

39) Crossan, *Who is Jesus?*, pp. 139-40.

¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.

What is Prof. Crossan's "best judgment -- based on [his] historical research -- of the most likely scenario" of the events following Jesus' crucifixion?⁴⁰ What does Prof. Crossan think really happened to Jesus' body?

"As I watch the development of the burial story, I find it impossible to avoid the conclusion that we have here an intense and understandable effort to avoid the stark horror of crucifixion's final act. The worst possible horror was no burial at all, Jesus left on the cross for the scavengers."⁴¹

Christians then should be "pitied more than all men" because Jesus did not rise from the dead, as Paul and the early Christians clearly testified.⁴² He could not do so for two reasons:

40) *Ibid.*, p. 143.

41) *Ibid.* "But what we often forget about crucifixion is the carrion crow and scavenger dog who respectively croak above and growl below the dead or dying body" (Crossan, *Revolutionary Biography*, "The Dogs Beneath the Cross," p. 127).

42) Prof. Crossan describes what happened in this way: "[T]he Emmaus story isn't a fact, but it is true. It's a symbolic picture of Christian faith deepening over time. Easter was much, much more than the events of a single day." To Prof. Crossan what the early Christians experienced was "what we would call vision or trance" (Crossan, *Who is Jesus?*, pp. 158-59). Paul, who "kept the Faith" and died a martyr at the hands of the Romans, had a "trance-experience" -- "a unique outworking of his own psychological conflict" (*Ibid.*, p. 160).

first, Jesus' body was devoured by "wild beasts" (croaking crows and growling dogs), and second, even if it was spared this ignominy, a dead body cannot return to life. The Resurrection of Jesus cannot be given credence because in science such an "experiment" cannot be replicated. These are the conclusions reached by the "premier Jesus scholar in the world today."⁴³⁾

The Goals of the Jesus Seminar and John Dominic Crossan

"... are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?"

Gal. 3:3

What are the stated goals of the Jesus Seminar and John Dominic Crossan behind their vigorous efforts to publicize what they claim is 1) the historical inauthenticity of most of the words and deeds of Jesus recorded in the gospels, and 2) the inherent antisemitism of the Passion Narratives?

The Jesus Seminar: Liberating the Masses from Biblical Literalism

According to Co-director Robert Funk, the goal is nothing less than the liberation of the public from their bondage to the literal interpretation of the gospels. In his words, "It is time for us to quit the library and speak up."⁴⁴⁾

"As I look around me, I am distressed by those who are enslaved by a Christ imposed on them by a narrow and rigid legacy. There are thousands, perhaps millions,

43) After being asked, "Do you personally believe in life after death for us?" Prof. Crossan replied, "No, but to be honest, I do not find it a particularly important question one way or the other" (*Ibid*, p. 166).

44) *SV*, p. 34. Prof. Crossan has certainly taken Funk's call to heart: "... in recent years I have done nearly a hundred radio talk shows and probably as many newspaper interviews..." (Crossan, *Who is Jesus?*, p. xvii).

of Americans who are the victims of a mythical Jesus conjured up by modern evangelists to whip their followers into a frenzy of guilt and remorse -- and cash contributions. I agonize over their slavery in contrast to my freedom. I have a residual hankering to free my fellow human beings from that bondage, which can be as abusive and any form of slavery known to humankind. I believe that such a hankering is inspired by Jesus himself, who seems to be untouched by religious bigotry and tyranny and unacquainted with the straitjacket of literalism and dogmatism. Liberation from fear and ignorance is always a worthy cause, with or without the endorsement of Jesus. In the last analysis, however, it is because I occasionally glimpse an unknown Jesus lurking in and behind Christian legend and piety that I persist in my efforts to find my way through the mythical and legendary debris of the Christian tradition. And it is the lure of this glimpse that I detect in other questers and that I share with them."⁴⁵⁾

John Dominic Crossan : Exposing the Gospels as Vehicles of Antisemitism

According to Jesus Seminar Co-director John Crossan, the goal is to convince the public that the gospel stories and the Passion Narratives in particular are not only fictions, they are lethal fictions; they are "stories that send people out to kill." In his words, "The passion narratives challenge both the honesty of Christian history and the integrity of Christian conscience."⁴⁶⁾

"Anti-Semitism means six million Jews on Hitler's list but only twelve hundred Jews

45) Robert Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, p. 19. Prof. Funk should be encouraged to re-read the section "General Rules of Evidence" (pp. 49-52) in *The Gospel of Mark* (specifically, "G7. Beware of a congenial Jesus"-- see footnote 53, below).

46) Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 36.

on Schindler's list. This book is about anti-Semitism, not, however, in its latest European obscenity, but in its earliest Christian latency. It is about the historicity of the Passion Narratives, those terribly well-known stories about Jesus' arrest and trial, abuse and crucifixion, burial and resurrection. It is about the accuracy and honesty of Christian scholarship in its best reconstruction of those ancient yet ever-present events."⁴⁷⁾

"Let me be very clear about what I am saying. For Christians the New Testament texts and the gospel accounts are inspired by God. But divine inspiration necessarily comes through a human heart and a mortal mind, through personal prejudice and communal interpretation, through fear, dislike, and hate as well as through faith, hope, and charity. It can also come as inspired propaganda, and inspiration does not make it any the less propaganda. In its origins and first moments that Christian propaganda was fairly innocent. Those first Christians were relatively powerless Jews, and compared to them the Jewish authorities represented serious and threatening power. As long as Christians were the marginalized and disenfranchised ones, such passion fiction about Jewish responsibility and Roman innocence did nobody much harm. But once the Roman Empire became Christian, that fiction turned lethal. In the light of later Christian anti-Judaism and eventually of genocidal anti-Semitism, it is no longer possible in retrospect to think of that passion fiction as relatively benign propaganda. However explicable its origins, defensible its invectives, and understandable its motives among Christians fighting for survival, its repetition has now become the longest lie, and, for our own integrity, we Christians must at last name it as such."⁴⁸⁾

"If some Christians take everything in the passion as actual, factual information, they must take both Matthew 27:25 and Luke 23:34 as historical data. But because Jesus' prayer for forgiveness in Luke happened after the people's acceptance of responsibility in Matthew, it must surely have annulled it. Unless, of course, God refused Jesus' prayer. For Christians, like myself, who think that Matthew and Luke each created those specific verses out of their own theological backgrounds, there is a slightly different conclusion. Inspired Christian texts contain both virulent bitterness and serene forgiveness. It is

47) *Ibid.*, p. ix.

48) *Ibid.*, p. 152.

necessary to now the difference and judge accordingly. And the decision to delete a verse, or which verse to delete, is an ethical one. As with Jewish responsibility and Roman innocence, it is necessary finally to call things by their proper names."⁴⁹⁾

"Think, now, of those passion-resurrection stories as heard in a predominantly Christian world. Did those stories of ours send certain people out to kill?"⁵⁰⁾

A Telling Contradiction?

"Avoid the profane chatter and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge;..."

1 Tim. 6:20-21

As I mentioned above, this paper is not an attempt to debate the research methods employed or conclusions reached by the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar, nor is it an attempt to defend the historical veracity of the gospel accounts.⁵¹⁾ It is also not an attempt to challenge Prof. Crossan's contention that the Passion Narratives are inherently antisemitic.⁵²⁾ Instead, the

49) *Ibid.*, p. 158.

50) *Ibid.*, p. 32. Perhaps Prof. Crossan should have written, "those stories of the Jews" instead of "those stories of ours." Prof. Crossan, who still speaks of himself as a Christian ("we Christians" and "Christians, like myself") wrote: "Christians were originally one Jewish group among many other Jewish groups in the first century" (*Who Is Jesus?*, p. 137). "The first Christians were all Jews" (*Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 2). Does Prof. Crossan believe that none of these Jews took the gospels to be literally true, that they were well aware they were all "creative fictions"?

51) The belief in which, up until recently, was taken for granted by Christians. "From the earliest days of the church until the late eighteenth century, belief in the historical reliability of the gospels usually followed as a corollary from belief in Scripture as inspired and infallible" (Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, p. 1).

52) It cannot be denied that many people who have called themselves Christians have in every age since Constantine's "conversion" treated the Jewish people in appallingly un-Christian ways (see especially Edward H. Flannery, *The Anguish of the Jews: Twenty-Three Centuries of Antisemitism*, Paulist Press, 1985, and William Nicholls, *Christian Antisemitism: A History of Hate*, Jason Aronson, Inc., 1995). Yet it is obviously a moral contradiction for a Christian to have mistreated another human being and at the same time claim to have heeded Jesus' exhortation: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" -- Luke 6:27-28.

goal of this paper is very modest: I would like simply to call attention to what appears to me a telling contradiction.⁵³⁾ viz., the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar published a new translation of the gospels, a translation designed to "produce in the American reader an experience comparable to that of the first readers -- or listeners -- of the original,..."⁵⁴⁾ while simultaneously Prof. John Dominic Crossan, one of the Seminar's co-directors and most prominent member of the Translation Panel, insisted that the Passion Narratives -- the indispensable framework of the gospels themselves -- fosters intense hatred of Jews in listeners.

If the gospel accounts and the Passion Narratives specifically are not only "fictions," the "creative inventions of the early Christians," but also "stories that send⁵⁵⁾ people out to kill," if they are "the longest lie," ones that automatically instill antisemitism in the hearts and minds of the listeners, it is difficult for me to understand why the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar participated in the translating, not to mention publishing, of such an inherently antisemitic book.⁵⁶⁾ Will color-coding certain sayings or deeds of Jesus gray or black or labeling them as the

53) Numerous other contradictions could be mentioned, but space permits the mentioning of one -- perhaps the most egregious. One of the "General Rules of Evidence" adopted by the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar is "G7. Beware of a congenial Jesus."

"In retrospect, scholars will want to ask: Did I get a Jesus I like, one who is congenial to me? If so, I was probably not looking very circumspectly. The business of critical scholars of the gospels is not to find a pleasant, or useful, or compatible Jesus; their business is to find a Jesus that is historically plausible in the context of first-century Galilee. That Jesus, in all probability, will undermine the picture we currently hold. He will be a Jesus with whom we may not be entirely comfortable. A Jesus we may not wish to acknowledge may turn out to be the historical Jesus, the real Jesus. In the quest for a specific Jesus, scholars must be on guard against their own theological biases." (Funk, *The Gospel of Mark*, p. 51).

It is hard to suppress the thought that the Jesus Prof. Crossan "found" is exactly the one he was searching for: viz., a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant Revolutionary / Itinerant Cynic Philosopher, who goes about Palestine preaching a gospel of "fundamental egalitarianism" (see *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 211, *Who is Jesus?*, pp. 51-75, 172-176). "But is not all that peasant stuff but a projection onto Jesus of my own Irish background. Did I not grow up trained to dislike British imperialism, and am I not just passing on that dislike to ancient Roman imperialism? Are my early influences, then, permanent prejudices?" (*Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 212). In my judgment, Prof. Crossan's portrait of Jesus tells us much more about an Irish-born scholar than the Jewish-born Savior of the World.

54) "It should be recalled that those who first encountered the gospels did so as listeners rather than as readers" (*SV*, p. xiii).

55) Note the present tense (Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 32).

"creations of the evangelists" nullify their "latent antisemitism" and thereby render them harmless to their listeners? Will color-coding black Prof. Crossan's "terrible scene" in Matthew 27 reduce its potential to inflame antisemitic passions in its listeners?:

²³ But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!"

²⁴ When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!"

²⁵ All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"

If a person was trying to convince people to believe the verses above were latently antisemitic and automatically stir up hostile feelings against Jews among the listeners, it is difficult for me to understand how such a person could in good conscience participate in the translation and publication of such "lethal" material to begin with. Would it make any sense for a person who was fighting against antisemitism to participate in the new translation and publishing of a color-coded edition of the "Bible of Antisemitism," the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.⁵⁷⁾ If one takes Prof. Crossan's argument to its logical conclusion, the Passion Narratives and the *Protocols* should be considered compatriots in evil.

56) A paradox if there ever was one because, with the possible exception of Luke, the New Testament was written entirely by Jews. Can the great prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures be accused of instilling antisemitism in readers and listeners for their virtually incessant condemnation of the idolatrous behavior of their fellow Israelites? "Ah, sinful nation, a people loaded with guilt, a brood of evildoers, children given to corruption!" -- Isaiah 1:4.

57) A perennial bestseller throughout the Arab world (Larsson, *Fact or Fraud? The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, 1994, p. 44). The political platform of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas, "The Movement of Islamic Resistance," of 1988, incorporates ideas from the *Protocols* almost verbatim: "The Jews have taken over the world media and financial centers. By fomenting revolutions, wars and such movements as the Free Masons, Communism, Capitalism and Zionism, Rotary, Lions, B'nai B'rith, etc. -- they are subverting human society as a whole in order to bring about its destruction, propagate their own viciousness and corruption, and take over the world via such of the pet institutions as the League of Nations, the U.N. and the Security Council. Their schemes are detailed in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*" (*ibid.*, p. 45). The *Protocols* are finally mentioned by name in Article 32: "... The Zionist plan is limitless. After Palestine, the Zionists aspire to expand from the Nile to the Euphrates. When they will have digested the region they overtook, they will aspire to further expansion, and so on. Their plan is embodied in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* ("Brutukulat Hukama Sahyun" in the Arabic original), and their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying."

Hitler used the *Protocols* "as a manual in his war to exterminate the Jews."⁵⁸) Yet already in 1921, Philip Graves, an English correspondent of *The Times* in Constantinople, discovered the source of the book. First published in French in Belgium in 1864, it was a political satire written by a French lawyer, Maurice Joly.⁵⁹) It consisted of 25 fictitious dialogues in hell between Machiavelli and Montesquieu. In the satire, Machiavelli represented the Emperor Napoleon III (1808-1873), who Joly despised for his cruelty and Machiavellian methods. By writing a work of fiction, Joly hoped to escape French censorship. Graves discovered that about 60% of the French satire was copied almost literally into the *Protocols*.⁶⁰) Below is a comparison of the 12th dialogue and the 12th protocol:

12th Dialogue of the French Satire (Joly)12th Protocol of the Elders of Zion

<p>"Like the god Vishnu, my press will have a hundred arms, and these arms will give expression to all shades of opinion throughout the whole country. People will belong to my party without realizing it. Those who think they are talking their own language will be talking mine, those who think they are stirring up people on their side will be stirring up people on mine, those who think they are marching under their flag will be marching under mine."</p>	<p>"These newspapers, like the Indian god Vishnu, will be possessed of hundreds of hands, each of which will be feeling the pulse of varying public opinion ... If any chatterers are going to imagine that they are repeating the opinion of their party newspaper, they will in reality be repeating our own opinion, or the opinion which we desire. Thinking that they are following the organ of this party, they will in reality be following the flag which we will fly for them."</p>
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58) Nora Levin, *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry 1933-1945* (New York: Schocken Books, 1973).

Rabbi Joseph Teluskin wrote: "Thousands, perhaps even tens of thousands, of Jews have died because of this infamous forgery" (*Jewish Literacy*). Hermann Graml wrote: "Hitler, like all the Nazis, was strongly impressed and probably continued to believe in the truth of the Protocols, although they were exposed as early as 1921 as a clumsy forgery on the part of the Tsarist secret police" (*Antisemitism in the Third Reich*, p. 76). Apparently Hitler didn't find the Christian gospels sufficiently antisemitic, so he had to rely on an acknowledged forgery.

59) Antisemites later claimed Joly was a Jew. But it has been proven conclusively that he was a Christian (Larson, *Fact of Fiction? The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, p. 20).

60) The forger was probably a Russian antisemitic nationalist who attributed to Jews an irreconcilable mixture of Machiavelli's and Montesquieu's ideas. Thus, antisemites now can ascribe any opinion they dislike to Jews, from communism to capitalism (Larson, *Fact of Fiction? The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, pp. 20-21).

Would it make any sense for someone who is fighting against antisemitism to color-code black or gray the redactions of the plagiarist in the right column? Would it make any sense to produce an "accurate version" of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* "in readable English" to be carried by worshipers to church on Sunday?⁶¹⁾

What if someday, granted it would be a long shot, the *SV* is adopted by a mainline Protestant church as the translation of choice? Will the pastor during Bible readings warn listeners beforehand of the color of the upcoming verse? -- "Caution: the next verse I will be reading is color-coded black; it is unauthentic, unhistorical; it is the creative invention of an unknown author"? Will he warn his congregation just before Easter Sunday that the Passion Narratives are not only fictions but latently antisemitic fictions? -- "Warning: the next verse I will be reading has caused many people to go out and persecute Jews"⁶²⁾

If the Passion Narratives constitute the "longest lie," if they contain stories that "send people out to kill," would it not be less contradictory for the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar to have nothing to do with the translating, publishing, and selling of these stories to ensure they are kept out of the hands of listeners who might these stories to be literally true?⁶³⁾

61) *SV*, p. xiii. Nowhere in the lengthy Preface and Introduction is there any mention that the Passion Narratives themselves are inherently antisemitic. Also, it is clear from the *Preface* and *Introduction* to the *SV* that the translators exerted considerable efforts to produce a translation they hope will be able to compete with the multitude of "traditional" Bible translations currently available on the market.

62) Would it not be more consistent for the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar to simply expel from the Church the Christian Gospels entirely and replace them with less antisemitic literature, say, perhaps, selections from the ethical wisdom of Lao Tzu?

63) Perhaps someday -- to avoid the charge of "testament partiality" -- the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar will organize a Yahweh or Moses Seminar. Perhaps someday the Fellows will color-code all of Moses' sayings in the Pentateuch according to their degree of authenticity (the "Documentary Hypothesis" of Graf-Kuenen-Wellhausen would be one of their illustrious forerunners). The extreme skepticism regarding the authenticity of the gospels reflected in the writings of the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar would logically also apply to their attitude toward the historicity of the Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus could not walk on the waters of the Sea of Galilee, of course -- it's a scientific impossibility -- but then neither could Moses walk across the Red Sea with the Egyptians army in hot pursuit. Both incidents are obvious fictions, both are literary creations produced by the fertile minds of ancient Jewish storytellers.

One occasionally can sense contempt in the writings of the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar toward the God portrayed in the Bible. Prof. Crossan wrote: "My problem is this: language of blood sacrifice was appropriate to people used to the sacrifices that were part of ancient temple worship, but is totally alien to our world.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: "Participation, Religious Affiliations, and Population of the Jesus Seminar."

"Participation in the Seminar is open to any biblical scholar with a Ph.D. or its equivalent. There are no other academic, religious, or ideological tests for membership and no one with the appropriate credentials has ever been turned away. The scholar members are called 'Fellows' to distinguish them from non-voting 'Associate' members. All the Fellows to date are white and almost all are male, reflecting the racial and gender imbalance

In our society, if anyone tried blood sacrifice of even cows or sheep or goats, we would quickly make it illegal. Moreover, an atonement theology that says God sacrificed his own son in place of humans who needed to be punished for their sins might make some Christians love Jesus, but is an obscene picture of God. It is almost heavenly child abuse, and may infect our imagination at more earthly levels as well. I do not want to express my faith through a theology that pictures God demanding blood sacrifices in order to be reconciled to us" (Crossan, *Who Is Jesus?*, pp. 145-46). Intricate instructions regarding blood sacrifice take up a substantial portion of the Pentateuch (see especially Leviticus 3:1-7:38). Nowhere in the Bible is there any condemnation of the sacrificial system per se. And what is one to do with the Aqedah, the "binding of Isaac" -- where God commands Abraham to sacrifice his only son? "Then God said, "Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about" (Gen. 22:2). Co-director Funk wrote: "I don't like bullies, big or little, human or divine,..." (*Honest to Jesus*, p. 28). What will he do with this terrifying incident in Exodus: "At a lodging place on the way, the Lord met Moses and was about to kill him" (4:24)?

Perhaps someday -- to avoid the charge of inconsistency -- the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar will claim that certain Hebrew Scripture passages also send people out to kill. Many members of the ruling Likud Party in Israel justify Israel's occupation and settlement of the West Bank (referred to by Ariel Sharon and the late Prime Minister Menachem Begin as "Judea and Samaria") by saying that God has so ordered it (e.g., Gen. 15:18). The late Rabbi Meir Kahane and his Kach party advocated driving all Arabs out of Eretz Israel: was not Joshua instructed to deal with the Canaanites in similar fashion? Joshua "left no survivors. He totally destroyed all who breathed, just as the Lord, the God of Israel, had commanded" (Joshua 10:40).

Perhaps someday -- to avoid the charge of pusillanimity -- the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar will organize a Mohammed Seminar. If the Bible is a fiction, so is the Koran -- and much more so, because it is based on the Bible (more or less -- Mohammed is the "Last of the Prophets," and so on). Perhaps it would be too speculative to suggest that what will deter the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar from ever launching such a perilous adventure will be their recollection that the *fatwa* -- the death sentence -- declared by the Ayatollah Khomeini against Salman Rushdie (who is still under Scotland Yard protection) for disparaging Mohammed, the Koran, and Islam, is still in effect. By writing a book or organizing a seminar of scholars devoted to proclaiming the inauthenticity of Mohammed, the Koran, and Islam, perhaps certain people might be sent out -- namely, irate Muslims in search of the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar.

among scholars working on historical Jesus studies. Nearly all the Fellows live in North America. A few European scholars have attended some meetings by special invitation, but distance precludes their ongoing participation, although a few Fellows have recently been travelling all the way from South Africa for meetings.

Many people are curious about the **religious affiliations** of the Fellows, but no solid information is available on this because the Seminar does not ask this question of its members. Based on my own impressions of those who participate regularly, my hunch is that most belong to mainline Protestant churches. A significant minority of the Fellows are Catholic. A good number are ordained. Some have no church affiliation. A few Jews have participated. A few consider themselves non-religious....

The **population** of the Seminar fluctuates. A number of members have dropped out because of theological misgivings or because key votes did not go their way. Some left simply because they lost interest or had more pressing priorities. There are new members at every meeting. I would estimate that for the past five or six years 30-40 members have usually attended each meeting. More want to come but are prevented by their schedules or travel costs. If you count everyone who participated at least once, there are about 200 Fellows" (Miller, *The Jesus Seminar*, pp. 111-113).

Appendix B: "The Balloting Method of the Jesus Seminar."

"The Seminar employed colored beads dropped into voting boxes in order to permit all members to vote in secret" (*The Five Gospels*, p. 36). "Colored beads and ballot boxes were intended, no doubt, to catch the media's attention, since one of the Seminar's purposes was popular education about the problems and difficulties, results and conclusions of contemporary historical Jesus research" (Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, p. 425).

In response to considerable criticism and ridicule regarding the color-coding method, Crossan argued:

"But actual objections, from laity and scholars alike, often spoke against the whole idea of voting on Jesus or against the legitimacy, validity, or usefulness of any reconstructed historical Jesus. It was as if a final vote by a scholarly committee was somehow inappropriate in relation to Jesus. It was scorned as presumptuous or dismissed as blasphemous to grade the Jesus tradition on a fourfold scale. Yet scholars know, even if the laity does not, that the very Greek text of the New Testament on which any modern translation must be based is itself a reconstruction and the result, however executed, of a scholarly vote in a committee of experts. And that too is based on a fourfold scale. The United Bible Societies' third edition of *The Greek New Testament* grades disputed readings as A, B, C, or D in the critical apparatus at the bottom of each page. 'By means of the letters A, B, C, and D,' explains the introduction, the Committee has sought to indicate the relative degree of certainty, arrived at on the basis of internal considerations as well as the external evidence, for the reading adopted as the text. The

letter A signifies that the text is virtually certain, while B indicates that there is some degree of doubt. The letter C means that there is a considerable degree of doubt whether the text or the apparatus contains the superior reading, while D shows that there is a very high degree of doubt concerning the reading selected for the text' (Aland et al. xii-xiii). Thus, for example, the account of the Last Supper in Luke 22:17-20 is graded a C, and Bruce Metzger, in his commentary for the committee, speaks of majority and minority opinions (173-177). Grading by color or grading by letter makes no substantial difference to the process. Beads or ballots, hands raised or heads nodded does not change the ultimate fact of scholarly reconstruction. Furthermore, to make the matter worse, that scholarly reconstruction is made by collating manuscripts, all of which date, with one tiny and textually insignificant exception, from around 200 C.E. or after. Hence this warning from Helmut Koester: 'The problems for the reconstruction of the textual history of the canonical Gospels in the first century of transmission are immense. The assumption that the reconstruction of the best archetype for the manuscript tradition is more or less identical with the assumed autograph is precarious. The oldest known archetypes are separated from the autographs by more than a century. Textual critics of classical texts know that the first century of their transmission is the period in which the most serious corruptions occur. Textual critics of the New Testament writings have been surprisingly naive in this respect' (1989b:19)" (Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, Epilogue, pp. 425-426).

Appendix C: "The Rules of Evidence."⁶⁴

"Fellows of the Jesus Seminar employ rules of evidence in determining what Jesus actually said. The rules formulated ... were gleaned from the essays and debate of the Seminar over a six-year period. As a result, they are not hypothetical rules; they represent actual practice.

Kinds of Evidence:

3. Rules of Written Evidence (W)

- W1. The evangelists frequently group sayings and parables in clusters and complexes that did not originate with Jesus.
- W2. The evangelists frequently relocate sayings and parables or invent new narrative contexts for them.
- W3. The evangelists often expand sayings or parables, or provide them with an interpretive overlay or comment, which may take the form of allegory.
- W4. The evangelists frequently compose or revise and edit both sayings and narrative contexts to make them conform to their own individual language, style, or viewpoint, or to make saying and context conform to each other.

⁶⁴) From *The Gospel of Mark*, pp. 29-52; 1-26.

- W5. A criticism of, or attack on, Jesus often becomes a criticism of, or attack on, Jesus' disciples in the later tradition.
- W6. Variations in difficult sayings often betray the struggle of the early Christian community to interpret or adapt sayings to its own situation.
- W7. The evangelists frequently attribute their own statements to Jesus.
- W8.
- A. Sayings and parables expressed in "Christian" language are the creation of the evangelists or the oral tradition before them.
- B. Sayings or parables that contrast with the language or viewpoint of the gospel in which they are embedded reflect older tradition (but not necessarily tradition that originated with Jesus).
- W9.
- A. Sayings and narrative that reflect the social practice of the emerging Christian community were formulated or edited by the evangelists or the oral tradition before them.
- B. Sayings and parables that contrast with the social context and interests of the emerging Christian community reflect older tradition.
- W10. Sayings and narratives that reflect knowledge or events that took place after Jesus' death are the creation of the evangelists or the oral tradition before them.
- W11. Neither the evangelists nor the oral tradition before them would have invented statements that cast aspersions on Jesus' character or contradicted their own viewpoint.

6. General Rules of Evidence (G)

- G1.
- A. The convergence of two or more rules on a single piece of evidence greatly strengthens the case for or against that piece of evidence.
- B. A major conclusion cannot rest on a single piece of evidence.
- G2. A plausible reading or interpretation for a historical context in Jesus' public life is required for sayings and parables that are to be correctly attributed to Jesus.
- G3.
- A. The saying or parable which is the more difficult--which least suits the tendencies of the unfolding tradition--is likely to be the earlier.
- B. The saying or parable that best accounts for any confusion or variation that arose in the development of the tradition is probably the more original.
- G4. Canonical boundaries are irrelevant in critical assessments of the various sources of information about Jesus.
- G5. The emerging body of primary data (items voted red or pink) should be reasonably coherent.
- G6. Beware of the profile of Jesus that accounts for all the data.

G7. Beware of a congenial Jesus.

"The 64 Premises."

PREMISE 1: The historical Jesus is to be distinguished from the gospel portraits of him.

PREMISE 2: Jesus taught his disciples orally; Jesus wrote nothing.

PREMISE 3: Traditions about Jesus were circulated by word of mouth for many years after Jesus' death.

PREMISE 4: Oral tradition is fluid. PREMISE 5: The oral mentality remembers, not the precise words, but the core of what was said.

PREMISE 6: Jesus' mother tongue was Aramaic; the gospels were written in Greek.

PREMISE 7: Jesus possibly spoke Greek as a second language.

PREMISE 8: Jesus was itinerant: he moved around and adapted his sayings and parables to the occasion.

PREMISE 9: Jesus' disciples were oral and itinerant: they moved around and revised his sayings and parables as the situation demanded.

PREMISE 10: The oral tradition exhibits little interest in biographical data about Jesus.

...

PREMISE 55: The same methods of study should be applied to the Bible that are used in the study of other ancient texts.

PREMISE 56: The Bible should be studied without being bound to theological claims made by the church.

PREMISE 57: Copies of books of the Bible suffered from textual corruption, loss of leaves, devastation by insects and moisture.

PREMISE 58: Jesus should be studied like other historical persons.

PREMISE 59: Jesus was not a Christian; he was a Jew.

PREMISE 60: Historians can approach but never achieve certainty in historical judgments on the probability principle.

PREMISE 61: Historians measure the unknown by the known on the principle of analogy.

PREMISE 62: Historians assume that biblical events occur within a continuum of historical happenings but that each event or person is historically unique.

PREMISE 63: Modern critical scholarship is based on cooperation among specialists.

PREMISE 64: The study of the Bible in the twentieth century has been transformed by the discovery of new sources and materials.

Appendix D. "List of Conclusions Regarding the Authenticity of Jesus' Sayings in the Gospel of John."

- 1:35-42 "The words attributed to Jesus in this story are incidental dialogue created for Jesus by the storyteller" (p. 403).
- 1:43-51 "As in 1:35-42, the words of Jesus in this story were created by the storyteller as appropriate dialogue for Jesus on this occasion" (p. 404).
- 2:1-10 "... [T]he remark about 'best wine' first cannot plausibly be attributed to Jesus. The Fellows concluded that the words ascribed to Jesus in this narrative were the creation of the storyteller or were derived from common lore" (p. 405).
- 3:9-13 "Here Jesus is made to give a speak on behalf of the Christian community.... The sentences ascribed to Jesus are all formulations of the evangelist and embody his version of Christianity" (p. 408).
- 3:16 "These remarks are the creation of the evangelist. There is no suggestion that they should be attributed to Jesus" (p. 409).
- 4:5-42 "Into speech created for Jesus the evangelist has occasionally inserted proverbial or aphoristic sayings that are separable from their narrative contexts....
Again, the images and style belong to the author of the Gospel of John, not to the Jesus of the synoptic gospels....
John as done no more than collect common wisdom and invent compatible sayings that he has then ascribed to Jesus" (p. 411-12).
- 4:46-54 "The statement ascribed to Jesus in v. 48 is a piece of Johannine criticism of those who refuse to believe unless they observe 'portents and miracles'; they are therefore a creation of the author" (p. 413).
- 5:1-18 "All the words attributed to Jesus in 5:1-9 and in the following dialogue (5:10-15) are the invention of the evangelist.... The dialogue is what the storyteller thought Jesus might have said on such occasions" (p. 414).
- 5:19-29 "The language attributed to Jesus is completely removed from the style of the aphorisms and parables reported as words of Jesus in the synoptic gospels. In addition, the speech John creates for Jesus has been thoroughly Christianized" (p. 415).
- 5:23 "In this form, the saying is the creation of the fourth evangelist" (p. 416).
- 5:30-47 "Rather than authentic words of Jesus, the author of the Fourth Gospel is presenting his own meditations on the theological significance of Jesus" (p. 417).
- 6:1-21 "... the lines Jesus speaks were designed for him by the storyteller. Nothing about them suggests they were remembered as actual words of Jesus. Rather, they have the character of incidental dialogue of no import apart from the story in which they appear" (p. 418).
- 6:26-70 "The dialogue in which Jesus gives a lecture on bread is the work of the evangelist" (p. 421).
- 6:51-58 "Many scholars are of the opinion that this section of Jesus' speech was added at a late stage in the gospels composition" (p. 421).

Prologue to

7:1-52;

8:12-59 "For the most part, words in these two sections are a pure reflection of the evangelist's theology. As a consequence, the Fellows concluded that no genuine sayings are to be found here" (p. 422).

7:37-39 "The Fellows were unanimous in their judgment that sayings of this type did not originate with Jesus" (p. 425).

7:53-8:11 "The three brief speeches of Jesus in this story were all designed by the storyteller to go with the context."

8:21 "None of these sayings is likely to have originated with Jesus" (p. 428).

8:51-52 "Neither use is likely to have originated with Jesus" (p. 430).

9:1-41 "The words ascribed to Jesus in these extended dialogues are what the narrator imagines Jesus to have said on such occasions.... [T]he actual words in this exchange are the words of the evangelist and not those of Jesus" (p. 432-33).

9:39 "This saying clearly expresses John's estimate of Jesus; it does not echo something Jesus may have said" (p. 433).

10:22-20 "... [T]here is no echo here of the authentic voice of Jesus;..." (p. 435).

11:1-44 "The speeches of Jesus in this narrative are all the creative work of the evangelist" (p. 439).

12:7-8 "The words ascribed to Jesus in vv. 7-8 are either the invention of the narrator or they are derived from the scriptures:... [They] cannot be traced back to Jesus" (p. 440).

12:25 "... the language is that of John" (p. 442).

12:28b-33 "The key phrases in the lines assigned to Jesus are all of Johannine inspiration..." (p. 442).

12:35-36 "All three sayings reflect the theology of this gospel, rather than the teachings of Jesus" (p. 443).

12:47-48 "This is the language of the fourth evangelist, not the language of Jesus aphorisms and parables" (p. 444).

13:1-11 "... the words attributed to Jesus are the creation of the evangelist" (p. 445).

13:21-30 "All the words attributed to Jesus in this scene ... are to be attributed to the storyteller's craft" (p. 448).

Preface to

3:31-17:26 "Because of [the] difficulties of continuity and order, scholars generally agree that these discourses were assembled over a period of time, and bear only a faint affinity with the message of Jesus himself" (p. 449).

13:31-35 "As in the majority of other cases in this gospel, the evangelist has freely created lines for Jesus to speak that reflect his own point of view or that of the community" (p. 450).

13:36-38 "Clearly, all these sayings are in the language of the fourth evangelist and do not derive from Jesus" (p. 450).

15:1-17 "While the sentiment may have been congenial to the historical Jesus, the language is that of the

- fourth evangelist" (p. 454).
- 15:18 "None of these predictions can be traced back to Jesus" (p. 455).
- 16:1-33 [Here are] "themes that are characteristic of the thought and language of the fourth evangelist, rather than of Jesus. The Fellows were virtually unanimous in their judgments that none of these words could be traced back to Jesus" (p. 456-57).
- 17:1-26 "All of this reflects the special interests of the fourth evangelist. Nothing in it can be traced back to the aphorisms, parables, or sage retorts of Jesus remembered and recorded in the other gospels. All the key phrases, words, and formulations are characteristic of the Gospel of John" (p. 459).
- 18:1-11 "The words ascribed to Jesus in the Johannine account [of the arrest] are the free creation of the storyteller,.." (p. 460).
- 18:19-24 "The words put on the lips of Jesus in vv. 20-21, 23 are again the creation of the narrator under the storyteller's license" (p. 461).
- 18:33-37 "The words ascribed to Jesus in vv. 36 and 37 are Johannine expansions.... They are composed in language characteristic of the fourth evangelist and so are his invention" (p. 462).
- 19:11 "As in other instances in the passion narrative, the evangelists exercise their liberty as storytellers to formulate words for Jesus to speak in accordance with the requirements of the situation" (p. 463).
- 19:28-30 "The great variety in these attributions illustrates once again how freely the individual evangelists put words of scripture on Jesus lips" (p. 465).
- 20:1-18 "The words ascribed to Jesus in his encounter with Mary at the empty tomb (vv. 15, 16, 17) are to be credited to the storyteller" (p. 466).
- 20:23 "These commissions [counterparts in Matthew 28:18-20 and Luke 24:47-48] † are to be understood as creations of the individual evangelists" (p. 467).
- 21:1-8 "The dialogue assigned to Jesus in this account is the result of the storyteller's imagination. Jesus is made to say what the narrator thinks he might have said on such an occasion. A simple comparison of Luke's version of the same event is sufficient to demonstrate that the evangelists each adapted this incident to their own purposes and created suitable language for Jesus to match the context" (p. 468).
- 21 "John 21 is believed, by most scholars, to have been added to the Fourth Gospel by a different author" (p. 469).
- 21:15-23 "Like the words ascribed to Jesus in the other appearance stories, this one, too, reflects an early editor's idea of what Jesus might have said on this occasion, and it presupposes a legend about Peter that arose subsequent to the first edition of the Gospel of John" (p. 469).

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국문초록

Thom Jernstad

“The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar”는 1985년부터 1991년까지 일년에 2회 정기모임을 갖고 예수님의 1,544개 말씀에 대한 토론을 거친후 그 진위성 여부를 묻는 비밀투표를 실시했다. 1993년에 기록된 예수님의 말씀에 대한 증거여부를 면밀히 심사하여 복음서에 주석을 첨부하여 “The Scholars Version”이란 제하로 새 영어 번역판 성경을 출간했다. 그 성경에는 최초로 진위성 정도에 따라 예수님의 말씀을 색을 달리하여 인쇄했다. 현재까지도 “The Fellows of Jesus Seminar”는 복음서에 기록된 예수님의 말씀을 놓고 그 진위성 여부를 토론하고 있으며 채색 염주알을 던져 예수님의 행적 하나 하나에대한 투표를 계속하고 있다. 이 투표가 끝나면 그들은 “The Scholars Version” 제2판을 출간할 예정이다. 예수님의 말씀과 행적에 진위성과 역사성에 차등을 두어 채색을 달리할 것이다.

이 Jesus Seminar의 가장 저명한 위원은 Passion Narratives에 기록된 예수님의 행적에 관하여 역사성과 그 진위성에 확실한 입장을 견지하고 있다. 그러나 John Dominic Crossan 교수는 Passion Narrative에 기록된 대부분의 행적이 진위성과 역사성이 결여되었다고 반박하고 있으면 반유대주의를 종하고 있다고 주장한다. 그는 이 곳에 기록된 것이 픽션이며 사람들을 죽음에 내어주는 허구라고 반박한다.

이 논문은 이 모순점을 지적하고 있다. 즉 “The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar”는 복음서의 새 번역판을 출간하며 최초로 원본이 말씀을 듣거나 혹은 읽어본 자들과 유사한 경험을 하도록 의도하고 있다. 반면에 이 Seminar의 공동의장 중 한명인 John Dmonic Crossan 교수는 복음서의 핵심이며 필수 근간이 되는 Passion Narratives를 유대인에 대한 강도높은 증오를 조장한다고 주장하고 있다.