

JESUS THE CENTRAL JEW

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JESUS THE CENTRAL JEW

HIS TIME AND HIS PEOPLE

*by*

André LaCocque

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As to the contents of the present work, many a New Testament scholar has been a wonderful source of inspiration. I had the privilege to discuss things with a number of them. Further, I have tried to do justice to the works of those I was able to quote, and I apologize to specialists who will not find their names mentioned. This represents no negative judgment. There is an “ocean” of monographs about the historical Jesus on the shelves of the library. No one on earth is capable of referring to all of them. Unavoidably, I had to select some of them, and I hope not to have missed anything that would have changed my judgment or approach.

Reference should be made to a number of modern Jewish critics whose work on Jesus demonstrates a welcome and penetrating understanding of our topic. Their mentorship is, I believe, evident in my book. There is thus a sort of continuity from the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, Mishnaic, and Palestinian Greek sources, on the one hand, to modern Jewish exegetical exploration into the labyrinth of the Gospels, on the other.

I also want to express gratitude to the staff of SBL Press. Their excellent work has brought this book’s composition closer to flawlessness.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### RABBINIC WORKS

|              |                          |
|--------------|--------------------------|
| 'Abod. Zar.  | 'Abodah Zarah            |
| ARN          | Abot de-Rabbi Natan      |
| B. Bat.      | Baba Batra               |
| B. Qam.      | Baba Qamma               |
| Ber.         | Berakot                  |
| Cant. Rab.   | Canticles Rabbah         |
| Deut. Rab.   | Deuteronomy Rabbah       |
| 'Ed.         | 'Eduyyot                 |
| 'Erub.       | 'Erubin                  |
| Exod. Rab.   | Exodus Rabbah            |
| Gen. Rab.    | Genesis Rabbah           |
| Giṭ.         | Giṭṭim                   |
| Hag.         | Hagigah                  |
| Ker.         | Keritot                  |
| Ketub.       | Ketubbot                 |
| Liv. Pro.    | Lives of the Prophets    |
| m.           | Mishnah tractate         |
| Mak.         | Makkot                   |
| Meg.         | Megillah                 |
| Mek.         | Mekilta de Rabbi Ishmael |
| Menah.       | Menahot                  |
| Miqw.        | Miqwa'ot                 |
| Mo'ed Qaṭ.   | Mo'ed Qaṭan              |
| Naz.         | Nazir                    |
| Ned.         | Nedarim                  |
| Nid.         | Niddah                   |
| 'Or.         | 'Orlah                   |
| Pirqe R. El. | Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer      |

|                 |                             |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Pesaḥ.          | Pesaḥim                     |
| Pesiq. Rab.     | Pesiqta Rabbati             |
| Pesiq. Rab Kah. | Pesiqta de Rab Kahana       |
| Qidd.           | Qiddušin                    |
| Qoh. Rab.       | Qohelet Rabbah              |
| S. 'Olam Rab.   | Seder 'Olam Rabbah          |
| Šabb.           | Šabbat                      |
| Sanh.           | Sanhedrin                   |
| Šeqal.          | Šeqalim                     |
| Sop.            | Soperim                     |
| t.              | Tosefta tractate            |
| Ta'an.          | Ta'anit                     |
| Teḥar.          | Teḥarot                     |
| Tg. Isa.        | Targum Isaiah               |
| Tg. Mal.        | Targum Malachi              |
| Tg. Neof.       | Targum Neofiti              |
| Tg. Obad.       | Targum Obadiah              |
| Tg. Onq.        | Targum Onqelos              |
| Tg. Ps.         | Targum Psalms               |
| Tg. Ps.-Jon.    | Targum Pseudo-Jonathan      |
| Tg. Zech.       | Targum Zechariah            |
| y.              | Jerusalem talmudic tractate |
| Yad.            | Yadayim                     |
| Yal.            | Yalqut                      |
| Yebam.          | Yebamot                     |
| Zebaḥ.          | Zebaḥim                     |

OLD TESTAMENT PSEUDEPIGREPHA

|           |                       |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| Liv. Pro. | Lives of the Prophets |
| T. Benj.  | Testament of Benjamin |
| T. Iss.   | Testament of Issachar |
| T. Jos.   | Testament of Joshua   |
| T. Levi   | Testament of Levi     |
| T. Mos.   | Testament of Moses    |
| T. Zeb.   | Testament of Zebulun  |

## OTHER ANCIENT LITERATURE

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <i>Abr.</i>          | Philo of Alexandria, <i>De Abrahamo</i>                 |
| <i>Ant.</i>          | Josephus, <i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>                |
| <i>Barn.</i>         | Barnabas  |
| <i>CD</i>            | Cairo Genizah copy of the Damascus Document             |
| <i>Cher.</i>         | Philo of Alexandria, <i>De cherubim</i>                 |
| <i>Clem. Recogn.</i> | <i>Clementis quae feruntur Recognitiones</i>            |
| <i>Did.</i>          | Didache   |
| <i>Gos. Eb.</i>      | Gospel of the Ebionites                                 |
| <i>Gos. Heb.</i>     | Gospel of the Hebrews                                   |
| <i>Gos. Mary</i>     | Gospel of Mary  |
| <i>Gos. Thom.</i>    | Gospel of Thomas  |
| <i>Hist.</i>         | Herodotus, <i>Historiae</i>                             |
| <i>Hist. eccl.</i>   | Eusebius of Caesarea, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>     |
| <i>J.W.</i>          | Josephus, <i>Jewish War</i>                             |
| <i>Jub.</i>          | Jubilees  |
| <i>LAB</i>           | Liber antiquitatum biblicarum (Pseudo-Philo)            |
| <i>Leg.</i>          | Philo of Alexandria, <i>Legum allegoriae</i>            |
| <i>Mos.</i>          | Philo of Alexandria, <i>De vita Mosis</i>               |
| <i>Post.</i>         | Philo of Alexandria, <i>De posteritate Caini</i>        |
| <i>Prob.</i>         | Philo of Alexandria, <i>Quod omnis probus liber sit</i> |
| <i>Prot. Jas.</i>    | Protevangelium of James                                 |
| <i>Sib. Or.</i>      | Sibylline Oracles                                       |
| <i>Spec.</i>         | Philo of Alexandria, <i>De specialibus legibus</i>      |
| <i>Virt.</i>         | Philo of Alexandria, <i>De virtutibus</i>               |

## JOURNALS, MAJOR REFERENCE WORKS, AND SERIES

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| <i>AB</i>    | Anchor Bible   |
| <i>ABRL</i>  | Anchor Bible Reference Library   |
| <i>ABD</i>   | <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992.                   |
| <i>AGJU</i>  | Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums   |
| <i>BSac</i>  | <i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>   |
| <i>DBSup</i> | <i>Dictionnaire de la Bible: Supplément</i> . Edited by Louis Pirot and André Robert. Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1928–. |
| <i>ETR</i>   | <i>Etudes théologiques et religieuses</i>  |

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <i>ExpTim</i> | <i>Expository Times</i>   |
| <i>IEJ</i>    | <i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>   |
| <i>HTR</i>    | <i>Harvard Theological Review</i>   |
| HUCM          | Monographs of the Hebrew Union College  |
| <i>IDB</i>    | <i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Edited by George A. Buttrick. 4 vols. New York: Abingdon, 1962.  |
| <i>JBL</i>    | <i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>   |
| <i>JJS</i>    | <i>Journal of Jewish Studies</i>  |
| <i>JQR</i>    | <i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>  |
| <i>JTS</i>    | <i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>   |
| LEC           | Library of Early Christianity   |
| NBS           | <i>Nouvelle Bible Segond</i> . Villers-le-Bel: Societe Biblique Francaise, 2002.  |
| NTS           | <i>New Testament Studies</i>  |
| <i>NovT</i>   | <i>Novum Testamentum</i>  |
| PL            | Patrologia Latina [= <i>Patrologiae Cursus Completus</i> : Series Latina]. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 217 vols. Paris: Migne, 1844–1864.   |
| RGG           | <i>Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> . Edited by Kurt Gall-<br>ing. 7 vols. 3rd ed. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1957–1965.   |
| SBLDS         | Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series  |
| SBLMS         | Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series   |
| SBT           | Studies in Biblical Theology  |
| SemeiaSup     | Semeia Supplements  |
| SPAW          | Sitzungsberichte der preussischen Akademie der Wissen-<br>schaften  |
| StPB          | Studia Post-biblica   |
| <i>SJT</i>    | <i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>   |
| <i>ST</i>     | <i>Studia Theologica</i>  |
| <i>TDNT</i>   | <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by<br>Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by<br>Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans,<br>1964–1976. |
| USFSHJ        | University of South Florida Studies in the History of<br>Judaism  |
| <i>USQR</i>   | <i>Union Seminary Quarterly Review</i>  |
| WUNT          | Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament  |
| VC            | Vigiliae Christianae  |
| ZTK           | Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche  |

## INTRODUCTION

“the most Jewish of all Jews ... I have found in Jesus my great brother. That Christianity has regarded and does regard him as God and Saviour has always appeared to me a fact of the highest importance which, for his sake and my own, I must endeavor to understand.”

—Martin Buber, foreword to *Two Types of Faith*

“the Jew-of-Jews, the Jew proper”

—Harold Bloom<sup>1</sup>

A vast literature has been and is now dedicated to the rediscovery of the historical Jesus. It is beyond the scope of this present attempt to do justice to more than a fraction of that literature. I must, therefore, start with an apology to all those scholars whose work is not specifically mentioned in this book. That is not a sign of nonappreciation but of the limitations of the author.

The present book is not about Christianity as such. Nor is it a Christology. It purposely addresses restricted sources, namely, the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, written between 80–90 CE; Mark, written ca. 70; and Luke, written between 80–90), for its aim is to contribute to the modern understanding of the historical—as opposed to the mythical or the “real”—Jesus. On this score, the Gospel of John is already somewhat off-limits, as are the

---

1. Harold Bloom, *Jesus and Yahweh: The Names Divine* (New York: Riverhead, 2005). Bloom also ironically writes, “Jesus has been an American nondenominational Protestant for the last two centuries” (22). Joseph Klausner: “In all this, Jesus is the most Jewish of Jews ... more Jewish than Hillel.... From the standpoint of general humanity, he is, indeed, ‘a light to the Gentiles’” (*Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching* [New York: Macmillan, 1925], 363, 374, 413 (now New York: Bloch, 1997).

writings of the apostle Paul. However, none of these sources is taboo, and each of them will occasionally be consulted.<sup>2</sup>

If Daniel Boyarin is right in stating in his recent book that “Jesus and Christ were one from the very beginning of the Jesus movement,”<sup>3</sup> it remains that, from the beginning, the emphasis must fall on either the one or the other. Hence, this book is about the central Jew, not the central Christ, as it would be for students of John or Paul. Certainly no polemic is intended regarding John P. Meier’s oeuvre, *A Marginal Jew*.<sup>4</sup> Sociologically, pedagogically, and historically, Jesus may be said to be marginal (that is, marginalized; see the perfunctory treatment of Jesus by Josephus). Furthermore, as Jesus’s disciples’ fear shows, the last pilgrimage to Jerusalem dangerously exposed the Master. What could be taught more or less with impunity in Galilee—or, as the Qumran community demonstrates, in the far-flung desert—was not so easily tolerated around the temple of Jerusalem. In that sense again, Jesus is seen as “marginal,” as he represents a Judaism considered from Jerusalem as marginal. Spiritually and religiously, however, Jesus is the central Jew, and this study of mine into what can be retrieved of the historical Jesus can ignore neither the total Jewishness of the Nazarene nor his ultimate claim to be *verus Israel*. These paradoxical perceptions of Jesus’s persona—marginality and centrality—make compelling Meier’s distinction between “the real Jesus” forever irrecoverable and “the [recoverable] historical Jesus.”<sup>5</sup> For instance, in the Synoptics

---

2. John comes with a series of intriguing parables, and Paul, although disregarding “details” in the life of Jesus, alludes to his sayings and considers them as normative. He insists on the Davidic ascendance and on the fact that Jesus’s ministry originally addressed the Jews, not the gentiles (Rom 1:3; 15:8; cf. Matt 10:5–6). Let us note that the Synoptic textual parallels are “für die rabbinische Tradition charakteristisch,” Gerhard Kittel says (*Die Probleme des palästinischen Spätjudentums und das Urchristentum* [Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1926], 63–65). Morton Smith has especially emphasized this fact in *Tannaïtic Parallels to the Gospels*, SBLMS 6 (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1951).

3. Daniel Boyarin, *The Jewish Gospels: The Story of the Jewish Christ* (New York: New Press, 2012), 7.

4. John P. Meier, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person*, vol. 1 of *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1991).

5. But what an impossible task, when, with Joel Carmichael, we realize that the nineteenth-century critical method produced some 60,000 biographies of Jesus (*The Death of Jesus* [New York: Dorsert, 1995], ch. 1).

we hear about the last three to four years of Jesus's life and almost nothing before! I shall return to this issue below.

Furthermore, it would be self-defeating for the historian to ignore the fact that the gospels<sup>6</sup> were written some three to four decades after the facts. We are dealing with a *tradition*, more precisely with an oral tradition, eventually put into written form in the four canonical *evangelia*. The feverish expectation of the parousia (return in glory) among the early disciples (including the apostle Paul, who believed that Christ in glory would come before he, Paul, died; see 1 Thess 4:15) was one cause of this delay in writing. But as their Lord tarried, the second generation realized that they needed *teachers* (already in the time of Paul, see Gal 6:6; cf. Did. 13.2), that is, guardians of and witnesses for this oral tradition. We the readers meet the historical Jesus through the medium of how he was seen by his disciples and the evangelists. The latter are three degrees removed from the historical Jesus (the second degree being the disciples' vision), and we are at best four degrees removed from the real Jesus.

Jan Vansina calls the early Christian teachers "walking reference librar[ies]."<sup>7</sup> Jesus himself was a *didaskalos*, and his followers are *mathētai* (in Hebrew, *thalmidim*), "students." They must *remember* (1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thess 2:5; elsewhere in the Pauline literature; see also John 14:26; 15:27). Their remembrances eventually became the written gospels, in a form that James D. G. Dunn calls a biography of Jesus, but with the proviso that it is a "biography" as the ancients understood the genre. That is, the characters remain stable and unchanged, so that these portraits rely on what they did and said. Sean Freyne adds that their structure comprises a beginning (*archē*), a middle (*akmē*, on the subject's public life), and an end (*telos*, on the subject's demise or vindication).<sup>8</sup>

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6. "Gospel," from "God-spel" = good news. In the OT the term *bsr* refers to bringing good news (of, e.g., a military victory). Here Second Isaiah is central: the prophet expects the good news. The *mebaser* proclaims it and thereby makes it a reality (as God speaks through the messenger; see Isa 51:16). The good news par excellence is the advent of the *makut shamayim* ("kingdom of God"). John the Baptist is its messenger (see Exod. Rab. 46 on Exod 34:1; also Pesiq. Rab. 35).

7. Jan Vansina, quoted by James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, vol. 1 of *Christianity in the Making* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 177 (see Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* [Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985]).

8. Sean Freyne, *Jesus, A Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus-Story* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 5.

At this point, it is not too early to raise the vexing problem of texts' so-called authenticity. First, the gospels are no biographies in the modern meaning of the term. Second, it was unavoidable that the gospel writers be influenced by contemporary problems in their particular churches. They intimated that Jesus had responded to these issues already during his ministry, so that the modern reader must wonder apropos each text whether it authentically belongs to Jesus's *ipsissima verba* or whether it represents a later opinion current in the early Christian communities. As we shall see all along this study, a large amount of New Testament scholarship is dedicated to solving this problem, and the word *authentic* or *inauthentic* will appear time and again in our development. Nevertheless, I believe that scholars' anxiety not to appear naive has played a large role in pushing them to an exaggerated skepticism or even cynicism. More damaging is the tendency to isolate the Nazarene from his people and their traditions. Some scholars, as we shall see, even proposed as a "criterion of authenticity" the nonconformity of a given saying of Jesus with the teaching of the Judaism(s) of the time!

David Flusser's stance is more to my liking.<sup>9</sup> Contrasting the Synoptics with the Gospel of John, Flusser expresses confidence in the authenticity of Matthew, Mark, and Luke regarding the sayings and doings of the historical Jesus. Originally, he thinks, there was in existence a Hebrew or Aramaic tradition written by Mark. To this must be added Q (*Quelle*, a reconstructed compendium of Jesus's sayings). The present Gospel of Mark depends on the Greek translation of its original in Aramaic, but entirely rewritten. Matthew and Luke used both the old original Mark as well as the new one; Luke preceded the latter and was used by the "present" Mark. As Flusser insists, the Jewishness of the gospels' testimony vouches for their representing the historical Jesus: "The Jesus portrayed in these three Gospels is, therefore the historical Jesus." Changes in the texts, however, occurred "as a result of ecclesiastical tendentiousness" (col. 10). Flusser's examples include Jesus's birth narratives, which could not have been produced by anyone but Jews.<sup>10</sup> The same is true of the conversation with the high priests in Luke 22:67–72 or with Pharisees and scribes elsewhere.

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9. David Flusser, "Jesus," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Cecil Roth, 16 vols. (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 10:10–17.

10. See below, "The Birth Narratives," 183–91.



What I mean here by “historical Jesus” is the study of the insertion of the Galilean Jesus into the particular history of his environment, Jesus in the particular history of his time. The historical Jesus is thus to be distinguished from the “true” Jesus, which no one can ever retrieve. Were not the term loaded with dogmatic contents, we could speak of the “incarnate Jesus,” the Jewish Jesus sharing flesh and blood with his people.

This definition explains why the Synoptic Gospels are of prime importance, by contrast with the Pauline Letters, which display little interest in Jesus’s “biographical” events and sayings. They also contrast with the Gospel of John, which is a brilliant theological and mystical reflection on the transcendent meaning of Jesus Christ.

Not that the Jesus of the Synoptics should be literarily deprived of religious meaning, however. On the contrary, the Synoptics are written *ad probandum* (to prove something); but they never lose sight of Jesus’s actual deeds and sayings. Here, the biographical carries with it the transcendental. In reviewing the former, we must reckon with the latter. The term *historical* in “historical Jesus” is phenomenological, as in history of religion. The transcendent dimension cannot simply be evacuated from the historian’s scrutiny; however, what we can suspect of being the outcome of later Christian consideration retroverted into the *kerygma* (“message”) is to be put into parentheses.

In what follows, the reader will notice that I am rather conservative in dealing with the gospel texts. Where many of my predecessors in the field tend to use the scalpel, I sometimes do not find a compelling reason for concluding the inauthenticity of the text. I happen to have developed a great respect for the evangelists and their remarkable ability of discrimination regarding the “historical.” All apocryphal gospels negatively testify to this fact.<sup>11</sup>

This, of course, does not mean that the Synoptics present a leveled-off text, all on the same height of historicity. There are, in fact, diverse rhetorical categories, which include legal (halakic), parabolic, sapiential,

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11. Albert Einstein wrote in 1929, “No one can read the Gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus” (“What Life Means to Einstein: An Interview by George Sylvester Viereck,” *Saturday Evening Post*, October 26, 1929, ); and Joseph Klausner, “In [Jesus’s] ethical code there is a sublimity, distinctiveness and originality in form unparalleled in any other Hebrew ethical code” (*Jesus of Nazareth: His Life, Times, and Teaching* [New York: Macmillan, 1925], 412; see 414).

devotional, hymnic, as well as the all-important midrashic genre.<sup>12</sup> The historian must perspicaciously identify the categories and draw appropriate critical conclusions within the framework each of them offers.

\*

The gospel is *performed*, with audience interaction, so that, when we find series of Jesus's sayings or miracles, we can imagine early Christian assemblies asking for more from the witnesses/teachers: "Tell us more about Jesus's miracles!" or "Tell us more of Jesus's parables!" (e.g., Matt 13; Mark 4). This interaction explains why, in the Jesus tradition, the *impact* of Jesus's deeds and words outweighs what he actually did and said.<sup>13</sup> With Dunn I concur that

whereas the concept of literary *layers* [à la Bultmann] implies increasing remoteness from an "original," "pure," or "authentic" layer, the concept of *performance* allows a directness, even an immediacy of interaction, with a living theme or core even when variously embroidered in various retellings.... [A tradition] that takes us with surprising immediacy to the heart of the first memories of Jesus.<sup>14</sup>

In what environment did the story develop? Anthropologically, the Mediterranean world offers "a strong urban orientation; a corresponding disdain for the peasant way of life and for manual labor ... an honor-and-shame syndrome which defines both sexuality and personal reputation.... Religion plays an important role in both north and south, as do priests, saints, and holy men."<sup>15</sup> Sociologically, in Galilee, landowners lived in cities and exploited the peasants; the latter often became debt-ridden, and eventually paid with their lands, thus becoming day laborers (see Matt

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12. In this book, "midrash" is used in its modern elaborated meaning, that is, as a text displaying a subjective, creative exegesis of an ancient biblical tradition. As such, the "midrashic" is very much present in the gospel.

13. See James D. G. Dunn, "The Tradition," in *Jesus Remembered*, 241.

14. *Ibid.*, 249, 254. See the section "Jesus and the Pharisees" in ch. 7 ("Jesus and Israel") below.

15. David D. Gilmore, "Anthropology of the Mediterranean Area," *Annual Reviews of Anthropology* 11 (1982): 175–205, cited by John Dominic Crossan in *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper-San Francisco, 1991), 7.

20:1–16; Mark 12:1–9). Poverty filled the ranks of highwaymen and prostitutes. Clearly this created a mutual hostility between city and countryside. The ruling classes were seen by the *chora* (rural region) as parasites. Those that the gospel calls “the poor” are mainly oppressed peasants, living from hand to mouth and often reduced to begging. They are what the anthropologist Gerhard Lenski calls “the expendables.”<sup>16</sup>

Pride and shame were central to all. Pride is based on the fact that “an individual ... sees himself always through the eyes of others.... Respectability ... is the characteristic of a person who needs other people in order to grasp his own identity.... He who has lost his honor no longer exists.”<sup>17</sup> In such an environment, we can imagine the perfect scandal of Jesus associating with marginalized people, with lepers,<sup>18</sup> crippled, prostitutes, toll collectors, “sinners,” in short, the poorest people.<sup>19</sup> By attitude and by words, Jesus condemned social inequality. Text after text insists on this “program” of his: see Luke 6:20–21, 36–38, “blessed are you who are poor” and “the measure you give will be the measure you get back”; 12:16–21 on the rich man’s foolish dreams; 12:33–34 (// Matt 6:19–21), “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”; 16:13 (// Matt 6:24), on God and mammon; and 16:19–31, on “poor Lazarus.” Jesus claimed that “the reign of God was coming wherever good things happen to the poor,” as José A. Pagola says.<sup>20</sup>

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16. See Gerhard Lenski, *Power and Privilege: A Theory of Social Stratification* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984 [1966]). We must remember that, to the extent that Palestine was Hellenized—an incontrovertible fact—the Greek influence went toward despising the *chora*. Now, Jesus was a “Galilean peasant,” as Crossan says. On the other hand, one has to reckon with a deep prophetic influence on the pious Jews, so that they almost equated “poor” with “righteous.”

17. Pierre Bourdieu, “The Sentiment of Honour in Kabyle Society,” in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, ed. John G. Peristiany (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966), 211–12.

18. The lepers included people afflicted with psoriasis, eczema, and all skin diseases. Jesus neutralizes the principle sick = cursed, that is, sickness as a deserved fate; see Luke 13:4–5.

19. Jesus’s companionship with such people (see Luke 14:21) is in clear opposition to the Essene rule that excludes from the sect “anyone impaired in one’s flesh, with paralyzed feet or hands, limping or blind or deaf or mute or hit in one’s flesh of an imperfection that the eye can see” (1QSa 2:5–7, a rule based on Lev 21:17–23 regarding the priests).

20. José A. Pagola, *Jesus: An Historical Approximation*, trans. Margaret Wilde (Miami: Convivium, 2009), 99.

Along the line of pride and shame, I would say anticipatively that crucifixion systematically involved a total loss of honor of the victim. After a merciless flogging, the victim was stripped and nailed naked to the cross. The death was slow, after which the corpse was left hanging for vultures and wild dogs to eat its flesh. The remains were buried in a common grave, so as to deprive the dead of all identity. Hence Trypho's horrified reaction to the Christian glorification of the crucified Jesus.<sup>21</sup> David Daube reports a saying by Rabbi Ishmael (ca. 130 CE) when facing martyrdom: "Do I weep because we are to be slain? No, but because we are to be slain like murderers and desecrators of the Sabbath."<sup>22</sup> It is in the context of shame that we read about the eagerness of the gospel to "protect" the integrity of Jesus's body on the cross (John 19:31–42; cf. Ps 34:21). Similarly, rather than allowing that Jesus's corpse be buried unanointed, like a criminal, Mark says that he was anointed in advance (14:3–29), and John says that he was so by Joseph and Nicodemus (19:39–40).

#### A FOREWORD

In what follows I intend to demonstrate that Jesus was totally and unquestionably a Jew. He lived as a Jew, thought as a Jew, debated as a Jew, acted as a Jew, and died as a Jew. He was not a Jew marginally, but centrally. He had no intention of creating a new religion; rather, he was a reformer of the Judaism of his day.<sup>23</sup> True, his critique went far beyond intellectual subversion. In fact, Jesus progressively thought of himself as the "Son of Man," inaugurating the advent of the kingdom of God on earth. So, although he was not the founder of a new religion, he proposed and incarnated a transfigured Judaism, such as into itself eternity changed it, to paraphrase Stéphane Mallarmé.

Step by step, I hope to go ever deeper into the soul of the historical Jesus. Among the formidable obstacles he had to face were Israel's various conceptions of messiahship. Was he himself the expected messiah (see ch. 2 below, "Jesus the Messiah," 15–42)? What do other "messianic" titles like "Son of God" and "Son of Man" imply and signify (see ch. 3, "Jesus Son of Man/Son of God," 43–52)? In what way did his recorded healings,

21. See Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 90.1.

22. David Daube, "Three Questions of Form in Matthew V," *JTS* 45 (1944): 21–31.

23. Paul's preference in terms of labeling those faithful to Jesus is to call them a Jewish sect known as "the Way" (Acts 9:2; 22:4; 24:14, 22).

for instance, contribute to his extraordinary claim to centrality—and even his own emerging self-consciousness (see ch. 4, “Jesus as Healer”)? His dealings with the sick, the crippled, the poor, and other victims of fate or society raised the problem of the forgiveness of sin (if only because of the then-prevalent notion of the close association of sickness and sinfulness; see ).<sup>24</sup> An all-important issue is thus how Jesus read and understood Torah (see ch. 5, “Jesus and Torah,” 71–130). In what way did he flesh out his own statement that he came to fulfill the law? Was he a new Moses, even more than the historical Moses (see ch. 6, “Jesus and Moses”)? Jesus’s way of thinking, teaching, and behaving stirred a perpetual controversy. True, he had disciples, but the number of his followers seems to have varied according to circumstances. His clashes with the so-called Pharisees were Homeric.<sup>25</sup> His relationship with the Jerusalem temple was ambiguous.<sup>26</sup> So it behooves us to explore his sense of belonging to his people (see ch. 7, “Jesus and Israel,” 141–68).<sup>27</sup> Much of Jesus’s impact is through his speaking in parables, most of which focus on the inconspicuous but powerful advent of the “kingdom of God,” a central notion in Jesus’s self-consciousness (see ch. 8, “Jesus and the Parables,” 169–82; and ch. 11, “Jesus’s Self-Consciousness” 197–209).

The final chapter in Jesus’s life is highly dramatic. A disciple, pejoratively (?) called Judas, betrays him (see ch. 12, “Jesus Is Betrayed,” 211–16); he is tried by religious and political authorities (see ch. 13, “The Trial of Jesus and His Passion,” 217–38); and he is killed by the Romans on a cross (see ch. 15, “The Great Cry of Jesus on the Cross,” 247–62). His death does not end the Jesus story, however, since his disciples subsequently proclaim his resurrection (see ch. 16, “Jesus and the Resurrection,” 263–71). Beyond this point, Jesus becomes “Christ” for the early church, which is the ulti-

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24. See Ps 41:4; Isa 33:24.

25. Clashes between rabbis were not unusual; see m. Hag. 2:2; m. Yebam. 16:7; t. ‘Abod. Zar. 4:9. The apex of the diatribe against Pharisees comes when Jesus and the disciples go up for the last time to Jerusalem (see Mark 10:32, the disciples are afraid because they sense danger).

26. Jesus revered the temple (“my Father’s house,” John 2:16), but he was offended by some excesses in the cult, and by the laxity of some priests. See below the section “Jesus and the Temple” in the ch. 7, “Jesus and Israel.”

27. James H. Charlesworth writes, “On the one hand, Jesus was a product of his time and spoke in the language of his country. On the other hand, as with all geniuses, Jesus transcended his time and was amazingly creative” (*The Historical Jesus: An Essential Guide*, Essential Guides [Nashville: Abingdon, 2008], 103).

mate limit for this research of ours. As a matter of fact, the thesis of the present book is to show Jesus assuming his vocation of “appointed human centre” of the kingdom of God.<sup>28</sup>

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28. Martin Buber, *Two Types of Faith: A Study of the Interpenetration of Judaism and Christianity*, trans. Norman P. Goldhawk (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 104. See Matt 11:5: “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them” (// Luke 7:22; cf. Isa 42:7; 61:2).