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Memory and Invention
The Making of Jesus Christ

Christ is the Question
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Memory and Invention: The Making of Jesus Christ

The characters who encounter Jesus in the Gospel narratives are full of questions: “Who is this, that even the winds and waves obey him?” “Is this not Joseph’s son?” “Where did this man get all this? ...Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” “Who *is* this ‘Son of the Human’?” “Are you the One Who is Coming, or must we expect another?” “Are you the King of the Jews?” I suggested in my first lecture that such questions represent that process of interpersonal transactions by which identity is made. Here we see the intersection of narratives, the trying on of roles, the groping for understanding by which the social, dialogical self comes into being. The questions are embedded in stories shaped by both tradition and authoring, stories written to be declaimed, performed in communities for which they mattered supremely. The characters are entry ways into those stories for those engaged hearers of the gospel. The characters are the hearers’ surrogates for their own questioning. And those questioners, the ones in the stories and the ones listening to the stories, in asking who Jesus is are at the same time placing themselves in the intersecting narratives, and so implicitly asking who *they* are. By writing those stories down, the evangelists have put us as readers into that position, too. Asking after the identity of Jesus is a self-involving process, as the varied narratives about him intersect with our own complicated life narratives and the long, multiple narratives of our cultural history. All of that is, at its heart, an *interpretive* process. Today I want to sketch the bare outline of an anatomy of that process of interpretation, trying to learn as much as we can about its earliest stages.

Two Dialogues

Let us begin by looking at two very familiar dialogues in the Gospels. The first, from the Fourth Gospel, is not about Jesus directly but about John the Baptist.

And this is the testimony of John, when the Judeans, priests and Levites, sent a delegation from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ And he confessed; he did not deny but

confessed, 'I am not the Anointed One.' And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' And he said, 'I'm not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' Then they said to him, 'Who are you?—that we can give an answer to the ones who sent us; what do you say about yourself?' He said, 'I am a voice crying in the wilderness, "Make straight the path of the Lord," as Isaiah the prophet said.' (John 1:19-23)

The questioners are frustrated by John's negative answers, and so perhaps are we, if we are fresh listeners to this rather strange tale. Neither they nor we find out who John is, and their further challenge, "Well, why are you baptizing then, if you are not the Anointed One nor Elijah nor the Prophet?" also receives no straightforward answer. "I am baptizing with water," he says. "In the midst of you stands one whom you do not know, the one who comes after me, the very thing of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." The next day John will name that unknown one, but still with cryptic words: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." And the day after that, John will point him out to two of his own disciples, who promptly transfer their allegiance to Jesus.

So the story of John's interrogation by Pharisees from Jerusalem is not about John after all; it is about Jesus. The evangelist labels it "John's testimony." The attentive reader learned already in the previous chapter, in that prose note inserted into the wonderful poem that serves as the "Prologue in Heaven" to the Gospel, that John's whole existence was solely "in order to bear witness about the light." "He was not that light." In the intricate literary tapestry which the anonymous singers, reciters, and writers of the Johannine community have produced, John's identity is a kind of negative space. The role of his character is like the function of negative space in a painting: to draw the eye of the viewer into the structure of the composition, setting off the limits, and ultimately leading us to participate in the active discovery of the mysterious, emerging whole of line, color, and shape. In the Fourth Gospel, John is there to make space for Jesus: "He must increase," he says, "I must diminish" (3:30).

But the Jesus to whom John yields space by his negations in this Gospel remains himself mysterious. "Among you stands one whom *you do not know*." Notoriously, the characters who

meet Jesus in the Johannine story are repeatedly flummoxed by his answers to their queries, baffled by the questions, Where does he come from? and Where is he going? and Who is he? Again and again, when he answers with a double entendre, they grab the wrong end of the stick and are left looking foolish. In part this is delightful for the reader. We learn enough on the first pages to feel a bit superior to these foolish interlocutors. And yet...are we really sure we get the point? The disciples themselves, surely our stand-ins in the narrative, do not fare much better than the outsiders and enemies, and people who want to believe are likely as not to be pushed into the darkness of incomprehension by some particularly sharp or absurd saying of Jesus.

What then are we to make of all those things John said he was not? Is Jesus everything John isn't—Anointed One, Prophet, Elijah? In a few minutes I want to come back to the question, where do all these characterizations come from? What meaning could it have had in first-century Roman Palestine to ask, "Are you the Prophet?" Who or what was "the Anointed One"? How could someone be Elijah, a prophet who disappeared from the scene nearly a millenium earlier? But first a note on the way these names, roles, or identities play out in the story of Jesus in John's Gospel. Of all of these possibilities of his role in the story, and several others besides, it has to be said, he is and he isn't that. He is the Messiah, the anointed one, but who the Messiah is, is defined by this story—not the other way round. He does what Elijah does, but he is not Elijah come back from wherever the whirlwind took him. He is the final prophet, but no other prophet ever spoke like this. He is the King of Israel, but he reigns not in war against the occupiers but in speaking the truth that the world cannot hear and therefore giving up his life for the dark world. It is this tension between deep engagement with the symbols, personages, and stories of the traditions and scriptures of Israel and the exuberant freedom to recast them all in the light of something radically new—this tension that is at the center of that *interpretive process* of which I spoke in my first lecture, the heart of the process by which Jesus' identity is discovered and invented by his early followers.

That same tension is apparent in the second passage I want us to look at together today, the famous story of the conversation between Jesus and his disciples as they walk toward Caesarea of

Philip, often regarded as the very center of the plot of Mark's Gospel:

And on the way [Jesus] asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that I am?' They said, 'John the Baptist, but others [say] Elijah, others, one of the prophets.' Then he asked them, 'And you—who do you say I am?' Peter up and said to him, 'You are the Anointed one.' But he warned them to tell no one about him.

And he began to teach them that it is necessary for the Son of the Human to suffer many things, and to be rejected by the elders and the high priests and the scribes, and to be killed, and after three days to arise. He spoke this word to them with all candor. Then Peter grabbed him and began to rebuke him. But he turned and looked at the disciples and rebuked Peter. He said, 'Get out of my way, you Satan. Your thinking is not God's, but all too human. (Mark 8:27-33)

In a way this little story is a positive countertype to the story about John the Baptist. In contrast to the indirection of that episode, in which all John's negations pointed away from him and toward Jesus, this is directly about Jesus' identity, and Jesus himself asks the questions. Yet this story, too, has a largely negative and unfinished result. Like the interrogation of the Baptist, here too there is a variety of possible identities that are being tried on for size, and none of them quite fits. We begin with outsiders' appraisals of Jesus, which the narrative implicitly rejects by Jesus' contrasting question to the disciples, "And you—who do you say I am?" Then the disciples are on the spot, and Peter, as so often, pipes up with what ought by the shape of the story to be the right answer. In Matthew's version of the same story, it quite clearly *is* the right answer, and earns Peter a special blessing. But not according to Mark! Instead of being congratulated and renamed the Rock, Peter a minute later gets called Satan, the Opponent, the Tempter. Yet *Christos*, Messiah, the Anointed One clearly *is* one of the names by which the community represented by this Gospel knows Jesus. Here again that interpretive tension surfaces, the tension that runs through the whole process by which Jesus gets named, and which these two Gospel writers have made central to their extraordinary narrative techniques.

Culturally Fashioned Roles

In every culture there are certain familiar roles played by characters in the standard life narratives of people in that culture: teacher, farmer, engineer, factory worker, builder, short-order cook, mother, husband, doctor, nurse. In the Gospel narratives we see Jesus in many of the roles that were typical of his time and place. Some of them are common throughout the Mediterranean world of antiquity; others are specific to Jewish culture. These roles reveal themselves not only in the things Jesus is called, but also in typical things he does. So he is a miracle worker, a healer, some would say, a magician. He is a sage who reveals his wisdom in pithy sayings; a prophet who speaks in a special genre of pithy saying in the name of God. People wonder if he is some figure of the past redivivus: Elijah come back from heaven or John the Baptizer risen from the dead. He is declared a king; his death looks like that of a martyr.

Where do such roles come from? Some spring from paradigmatic figures from a people's recited past: Socrates or Moses, Elijah or Diogenes or Jeremiah or Crates. For the Greeks Homer provides a catalogue of heroes and antiheroes that live on in popular rhetoric and biography. For the Jews, in a more intense and specific way, Torah and Prophets provide the grist for the mill of identity.

I have said that the whole interactive process by which Jesus becomes who he is for those who follow him is an interpretive process. The interpretation takes many forms, but one is absolutely central to the process: the interpretation of Jewish scripture. The more we learn about the variety of ways in which different groups of Jews in the first century discovered meaning for their life in their world by artful interpretation of their scriptures, the better we will understand how the identity of Jesus Christ was shaped in those early communities of his followers.

Clues from Qumran

Since the first "Dead Sea Scrolls" were discovered in 1947, we have known that these 2000-year-old manuscripts had the potential to transform the common understanding of both the Jewish forms of life in Roman Palestine and the emergence of the new sect that would come to be

called “Christians.” Some of the hypotheses about Christianity’s relation to the group that used or produced the scrolls have been wildly fanciful, and almost everything about the scrolls remains controversial. Nevertheless, there is a broad consensus, among those who know the manuscripts best, about their main features, and those features provide us with some informative parallels to the problem at hand.

The scrolls clear away one piece of misinformation that has distorted almost all modern attempts to explain the formation of Jesus’ identity. Too often we have assumed that Judaism in the first century had, in effect, a standard set of dogmas about the Messiah or, more generally, a standard scenario about things that were to happen at the end of time. The problem of Jesus, then, boiled down to the question whether he actually did and said the things that the Messiah, or the Final Prophet, or the Son of Man (if there was such a figure), was supposed to do. This pattern of thinking is really only a thinly disguised version of a Christian apologetic strategy that goes back to the first century. Its first clear appearance is in the Gospel according to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. In that two-volume work, the first sustained work of apologetic historiography by the early Christians, Jesus is proved to be the Messiah by a straightforward syllogism, repeated over and over: Scripture says that the Messiah must do x; Jesus did x; therefore Jesus is the Messiah. There were a number of reasons for doubting the historical validity of this schema long before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, but that discovery very directly introduces us to a much more complicated picture. Those long-hidden manuscripts show us a group whose organization and ideology quite blithely cross the boundaries between kinds of Judaism that modern scholars have defined as antithetical: apocalyptic and halakhic, mystical and pragmatic, traditional and innovative, even perhaps Palestinian and Hellenistic. Instead of a fixed dogmatic system, we see a range of ways of imagining the hoped-for transformation from the present evil age to the age of righteousness, a changeable variety of leading characters in that final scenario, and evolving strategies for locating the community’s own experiences within their imagined picture of the world. Perhaps most important, we see something of the internal process by which those scenarios were conceived and applied. I’ll mention three things we see happening

in the scrolls that are pretty obviously parallel to tasks that the early Jesus-movement had to accomplish. *First*, appropriate images had to be found to express the significance of charismatic figures. *Second*, certain “loaded” texts of scripture, construed as prophecies, had to be explained and applied to the group’s experience. *Third*, traumatic or scandalous events demanded explanation, by placing them within some convincing narrative of what God was doing in the world.

The Teacher of Righteousness

Several of the texts from Qumran tell us about a person who was apparently the key organizer of the movement in its early years. For example, in the document known as the Damascus Covenant, first found in two incomplete medieval copies in the storeroom of a Cairo synagogue and then in fragments at Qumran, we read a tantalizingly brief account of the sect’s beginnings:

At the moment of wrath, three hundred and ninety years after having delivered them up into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, he [sc. God] visited them and caused to sprout from Israel and from Aaron a shoot of the planting, in order to possess his land and to become fat with the good things of his soil. And they realised their sin and knew that they were guilty men, but they were like blind persons and like those who grope for the path over twenty years. And God appraised their deeds, because they sought him with a perfect heart, and raised up for them a Teacher of Righteousness, in order to direct them in the path of his heart. (CDC-A, 1.5-11, trans. Garcia Martinez)

The scrolls in fact tell us very few details about this *moreh ha-šedeq*, “Teacher of Righteousness” or perhaps “Righteous Teacher” or “Legitimate Teacher.” Despite his pivotal role in establishing the sect, he clearly did not occupy so unique or central a position in the movement’s ideology as Jesus did for his followers. We have from Qumran no biographical accounts, no Gospels; we do not even know the name of the Teacher of Righteousness. Nevertheless, the salient features of the Qumran documents’ spare descriptions of him do suggest

some ways of thinking about the emergence of Jesus' Christian identity.

First, the designations of the Teacher of Righteousness are mostly *functional*. That is, it is his actual role within the community that he organized that suggests the epithets applied to him, rather than some pre-conceived ideology. On the other hand, his functions are so conceived and named that they bring to mind determinative episodes in the traditions and scriptures of Israel. The renewal of the Sinai covenant is at the center of the sect's self-understanding, as we see most clearly in the ceremonies prescribed in the Rule of the Community. Not surprisingly, then, the Teacher of Righteousness bears many of the features of Moses; like Moses he is for the community prophet, priest, and definitive interpreter of Torah.

Second, the role the Teacher has played in the community is described by allusions to *scripture* and by direct exegesis of some texts. The interpretation of scripture at Qumran is at the same time quite punctilious about selected details of the texts and quite free in lifting them out of both historical and literary contexts to apply to the group's own time and place.

Finally, the interpretation is *eschatological* in the sense that the very particular applications of biblical epithets, institutions, and prophecies to the sect and its own immediate historical context are authorized by the belief that they are living at "the end of days." The Rule of the Community, the Rule of the Damascus Covenant, and the various commentaries on particular scriptural books that are found among the scrolls all show us a sect that wants to recreate in its own life a reconstituted biblical Israel. But the Bible that provides them the prescriptions for this form of Israel's life is itself seen refracted through the group's own special experience. For example, a famous passage in their commentary on the biblical prophet Habakkuk tells us that:

God told Habakkuk to write what was going to happen to the last generation, but he did not let him know the end of the age. And as for what he says, "So that the one who reads it may run," its interpretation concerns the Teacher of Righteousness, to whom God has disclosed all the mysteries of the words of his servants, the prophets. (1QpHab 7.1-4, Garcia Martinez)

Problematic Texts

A second generative factor we see in the Qumran sect's developing ideology is texts that seemed pregnant with meaning, yet whose plain sense was contradicted by the facts of history. For example, the words of the prophet Nathan, reported in 2 Sam 7:11-14:

The Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring [lit., "seed"], who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me.

Presumably the prophecy was first taken to apply to Solomon, but Solomon's kingdom, far from lasting "forever," fell apart immediately on his death. For a nation that had suffered under the hegemony of the Seleucids and then the Romans, whose only kings in recent memory had been the Hasmonean priest-kings and the Roman puppet Herod, the unfulfilled prophecy could seem a cruel mockery. The solution, of course, was an eschatological fulfillment, as we hear in this fragmentary text from Qumran: "This (refers to the) 'branch of David,' who will arise with the Interpreter of the law who [will rise up] in Zi[on in] the last days, as it is written: 'I will raise up the hut of David which has fallen' . . ."

Another text that was intriguing and problematical was Deuteronomy 18:15-18, where the promise is given that the Lord will raise up a prophet *like Moses*. Perhaps because the same book ends with the flat statement, "Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut 34:10), this text, too, was ripe for eschatological interpretation. It became fundamental to the hopes of the Samaritan community, while to the Qumran sectaries it contributed the expectation of the coming, at the end of the present age, of "the prophet . . . and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel" (1QS 9.11). Both texts were important, too, to the early followers of Jesus.

Troublesome Events

A third factor that stimulated the Qumran group's interpretive activity was the brute

challenge of startling or unpleasant events. For example, the clash between the official priesthood in Jerusalem and the sect, with their rival calendar, led to a confrontation on the day when the sect, but not the Temple, celebrated Yom Kippur. The group found that outrage cryptically predicted in the Book of Habakkuk, in the words, “Woe to anyone making his companion drunk, spilling out his anger! He even makes him drunk to look at their festivals!” (Hab 2:15). This, they said, “concerns the Wicked Priest who pursued the Teacher of Righteousness to consume him with the ferocity of his anger in the place of his exile, in festival time, during the rest of the day of Atonement” (1QpHab 11:2-7, Garcia Martinez, modified). Similarly an inner schism, led by a rival to the Teacher of Righteousness, found its explanation in scriptural texts about the perversion of justice, while the alarming power of the rising Roman empire was predicted in texts that originally spoke of Babylonia.

Ritual, Poetry and Midrash: the Christological Process

We are now ready to turn back to our main question: what was the process by which the emerging movement of Jesus’ followers discovered an identity for him that turned themselves into “Christians” and him into the Christ, the Son of God, the Lord, the eternal Word? Of course I can only give a few illustrative examples of a very complex and lengthy process.

The Crucified Messiah

If the Qumran group’s interpretive strategies had to deal with events that challenged their belief in a God-ordered universe—opposition by the wicked priest, betrayal of the Teacher of Righteousness by some of his own followers, the unmerited success of the Roman forces—how much more the first followers of Jesus. The brute fact with which they had to cope was the public execution of their leader. The Roman prefect provided a sarcastic label for the crucified: “the king of the Jews.” A warning: this was what happened to native insurrectionists who dared challenge Rome’s hegemony. It was certainly what happened to all those royal and prophetic pretenders that Josephus catalogues for us in Book 2 of his *Jewish War*. You may remember that the Jewish historian describes a long series of uprisings that challenged Roman occupation from

the time the area was reorganized under the senatorial province Syria in 6 CE until the disastrous revolt of 66-73, in which Josephus himself was a participant. In each case the Roman prefect sends out troops to seize the ringleader, execute him conspicuously as an object lesson, and disperse the followers. In every case destroying the leader was sufficient to send the followers scurrying into oblivion. If some of the followers of Jesus chose rather to see Pilate's placard as unwittingly prophetic, if they formed the improbable conclusion that the crucified one was indeed the King of Israel, the truly anointed king of the end-time, then they faced a massive hermeneutical dilemma: interpret or despair.

The movement did not despair. For the earliest formative remnant of them the paradoxical notion that God's anointed vice regent was ignominiously killed became the generative center of their beliefs. How was this interpretive tour de force possible?

The fundamental interpretive move was sublimely simple: God had overruled Pilate's action by raising the crucified messiah from the dead. Within a scarce twenty years of the event, the story was rehearsed in a lapidary formula of neatly balanced lines: "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures and was buried; he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures and appeared." Then follows an extendible list of witnesses: "to Cephas, then to the Twelve, then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at once, of whom most remain till the present, though some have died; then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles." And Paul, who is quoting the formula as a tradition he received and handed on to the Corinthian converts, adds "and last of all . . . he appeared to me" (1 Cor 15:3ff).

Several things are evident from the formula. First, the identity of Jesus as God's anointed, as Messiah, is inextricably connected with his death. It is not that Jesus has fulfilled a role assigned by tradition to the Messiah and is therefore named such—as we see from Qumran, tradition did not even agree on a single Messiah. The futile scholarly searches for evidence in Jewish lore of a suffering Messiah are quite beside the point: it is because in Pilate's sarcasm and in the paradoxical belief of those first visionaries Jesus died as King of the Jews that he is named Messiah. Therefore the notion of the Messiah itself is transformed.

Second, the process of assigning meaning to the scandalous event is a self-involving process. The formula states that Jesus “died for our sins.” The absurdity of a crucified messiah becomes intelligible as a vicarious death, for others. The community taking shape around this belief identifies its own fate with that death and that envisioned resurrection. Out of the dramatic ceremony of eschatological cleansing that John the Baptist had introduced, they create a ritual of initiation: they are baptized “into Christ.” And they construe that transformation as dying and being buried with Christ so that they, too, may rise with Christ. The vicarious death is made ritually also an inclusive death.

Third, meaning is inferred “according to the scriptures.” The very earliest forms of the story of the crucifixion itself incorporate the language of scripture. The graphic details that lend such verisimilitude to the passion narratives are drawn from the Psalms of Complaint: “Those who passed by wagged their heads at him,” “they gave him vinegar to drink,” “they divided his garments among them and for his clothing they cast lots,” and even the “Last words” of Jesus according to Mark, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

The Heavenly Human Figure

It was not the case that the early Christians simply took over texts of scripture that were already taken to refer to the Messiah and applied them to Jesus. As we have seen, there was no standard ideology of messiahship. To be sure, the believers in Messiah Jesus made use of existing interpretive traditions of all kinds, when they were useful. For example, the prophecy that David’s seed would be king forever and that he would be called God’s son, which we found at Qumran to be forced into the future hope of an anointed king, was extremely convenient for the early Christians. Paul assumes the tradition in identifying Jesus with the seed of Abraham to whom the ultimate blessing of the gentiles was promised, and the author of Hebrews uses it to show the superiority of Jesus even to angels.

The scripture text that the New Testament writers quote more often than any other is the first verse of Psalm 110 (LXX 109), which says, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I place your enemies as a footstool beneath your feet.’” It sounded ready-made for the early

interpreters of the shameful crucifixion of Jesus. The defeat of the Messiah is only a temporary illusion; in the reality knowable only to believers, God has exalted him to share God's own rule in heaven until all his enemies are defeated.

This text also illustrates another factor that we saw in Qumran exegesis, and which often appears in other forms of Jewish interpretation of scripture: a text that has some problematic or paradoxical feature tends to generate interpretive ingenuity. Here the problem appears in the Greek translation of the Psalm, in which (at least in some versions) both יהוה and אדני are translated by κύριος, "lord." So how can there be two "lords" in heaven? The hyperbole of the royal poet thus becomes a problem for monotheistic theology and a wonderful opportunity for the early Christians. This is only one of a variety of texts that gave trouble to the rabbis and other Jewish interpreters who worried about the heretical notion that there could be "two powers in heaven." Alan Segal has given us a very nice account of some of the intricacies of the traditions and polemics that resulted. A few of those texts were particularly important to the Christians, and I will close our discussion by mentioning only a few samples.

In a sense the classic case is in the first chapter of the Bible. In the priestly story of creation, "God said, 'Let us make a human being in our image and after our likeness.'" The "us" was bothersome, but one could after all understand something like a royal plural. Still, what was this human image that belonged to Elohim and that was the archetype of humanity? The puzzle grows more complicated when the close listener to the Bible's stories observes a certain contradiction. On the one hand, we are told that "No human shall see [God] and live" (Exod 34:20). Yet earlier in the same book we hear that "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel," that they "ate and drank" in God's presence, all apparently without harm (Exod 24:9-11). And what was one to make of Isaiah's flat assertion, "I saw YHWH" (Isa 6:1)—and a similar report by Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:19), not to mention the elaborate visions of Ezekiel (1; 10) and Daniel (7:9-14)?

Jewish exegetes found various solutions to the dilemma of these texts. Those solutions are intriguing and often delightful, but I must leave you to pursue them another time. Now I only

want to point out the exuberance with which the early followers of Jesus made use of them in their quest to understand just who he was and who, if they were to believe in him, they were to be. When Paul was converted to this sect of the crucified messiah, the sect he had fiercely opposed, he was initiated by a ritual of baptism into Christ. Already, or at least by the time he wrote to the Galatian converts a couple of decades later, that ritual represented Christ as the very image of God who had been the pattern of Adam's creation, and to clothe oneself with Christ, as one rose from the burial-waters of baptism, was to put on again that image, the garment of light that Adam and Eve had lost through their disobedience, replacing that "garment of skin," the body God had given to fallen humanity, the "old anthropos" that died with Christ in baptism. Jesus, the poetry said, was that heavenly anthropos, that second lord, that self-expression of the one God.

The Continuing Interpretive Process

I've given you only a couple of samples of the multiple roles and images which became parts of the identity of Jesus among the adherents to his cult in the first century. I have asked you to focus not on the ingredients and antecedents of those roles and images, but on the process of identity-formation. It was a ragged and sometimes self-contradictory process that does not lend itself to simple explanations. The interpretation of the scriptures of Israel was central to the process, but it was also a process by which the followers of Jesus were trying to interpret their world, their experience, their own identity.

It is also a process that has no end as long as church and world continue. What counts as scripture grows and changes and gets redefined and, eventually, regularized into a canon that will include not only the scriptures with which the first followers of Jesus began, but also some of the things they wrote—products themselves of that process of interpretation and reinterpretation. Struggling to find some order and some limits in the proliferation of interpretive possibilities—and of possible ways of living in the world whose history had a new pivotal chapter—leaders of the emerging churches tried to construct some guidelines. The Rule of Faith and the Rule of Truth provided limits and rallying points—but also points of contention. Different ways of reading the

scriptures were identified: the literal reading stood over against the spiritual, and the spiritual could take several forms for several purposes. In the fifth century John Cassian delineated three of them as the tropological (or moral), the anagogical (which might have either a mystical or an eschatological drift), and the allegorical. Many voices would contend in these developments, and every age produced new points of tension and new ways of re-reading what previous interpreters had done. The discipline of philosophy with its changing fashions and the prudential dogmatics of mainstream church authorities would struggle with many forms of popular religion and faith, and always politics of both church and empire would throw its weight around. The struggle between clarity and confusion, between the necessity to make sense in a continually changing world and the passion to be faithful to foundations once laid was and is unending.

In many ways those struggles can be glimpsed *in nuce* already in that master interpreter of the first generation, the apostle Paul. In tomorrow's lecture we'll examine the way in which Paul transformed the story of Jesus' death into the master metaphor for Christian life and thought, a story to think with.