

The  
***Nazarene***  
Religion

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## Part 1

### ***The “lost” prophet***

The thrust of Jesus mythicism is to establish that Jesus of Nazareth did not exist—he was an invented figure. Much ink is now being spilled demonstrating this and—even in the unlikely case that the question were settled by scholarship in the next decade or so—acceptance of Jesus mythicism by the general populace will probably require several more decades.

However, showing that Jesus of Nazareth did not exist as an historical figure is not the end of the road. There are some, myself included, who strongly suspect that a human prophet was ultimately behind various Christian, Mandaean, and Gnostic writings of late antiquity. I call this view **semi-mythicism**. Perhaps the prophet in question was John the Baptist. Perhaps he was the Teacher of Righteousness known from the Dead Sea Scriptures (DSS). Perhaps he was some combination of characters known and unknown to history. Robert Eisenman, an expert in the DSS as well as the Christian corpus, has probably done the most work in attempting to resolve the plethora of mis-identities in scripture. In any case, the prophet of whom I am writing certainly was *not* Jesus of Nazareth. In this post I’d like to begin an exploration into finding the “lost prophet” behind the Christian religion...

Before proceeding, a legitimate question must be confronted: What leads one to suspect that a human being inspired the religion we call “Christianity”? My answer rests on three criteria which I term internal coherence, dissimilarity, and impracticality.

## Three reasons for Semi-Mythicisism

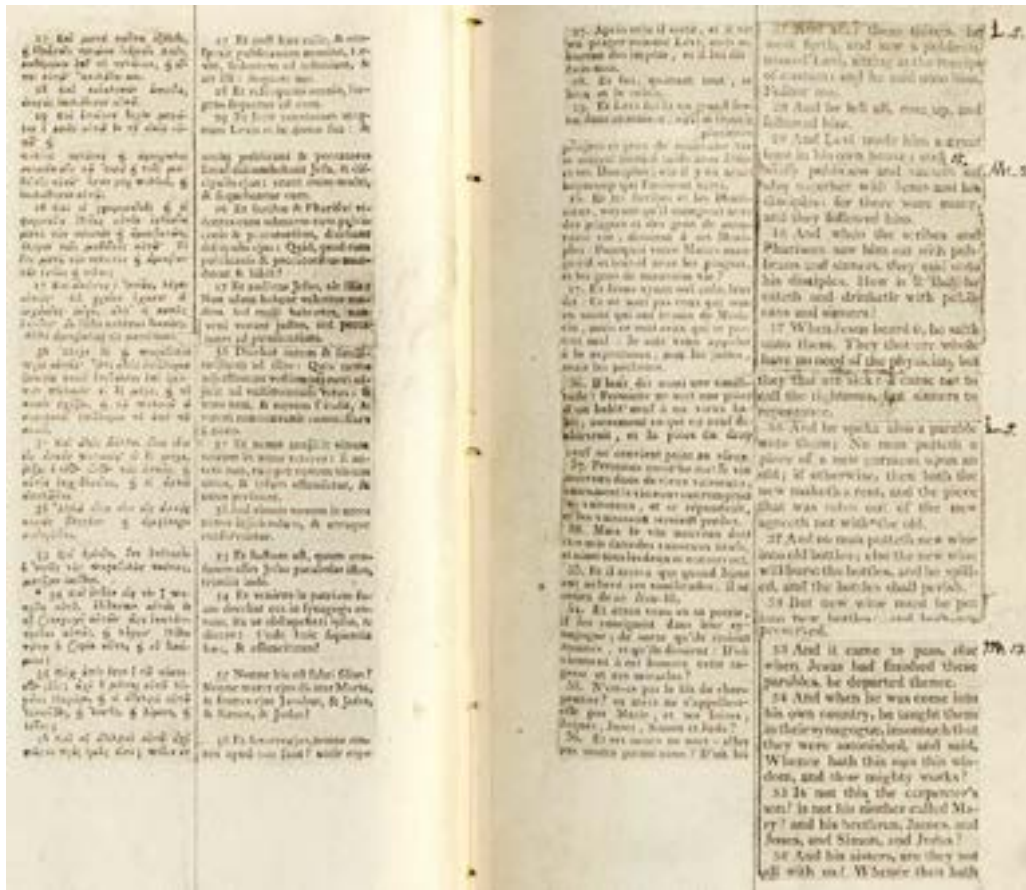
A fairly large number of sayings found in the canonical gospels (4G) comprise a coherent worldview. In coming posts I will discuss and list some of those sayings which, by my tally, total roughly 150 (this includes the Gospel of Thomas and a few ancillary works). I find it entirely unconvincing that someone (or even a group of people) sat down and invented one pithy saying after another—as well as some of the most interesting and beautiful parables known to religion—and at the same time somehow produced a challenging and coherent philosophy of life. I call this the criterion of internal coherence.

Secondly, the “core” sayings are radically at odds with the tenets of both Judaism and Hellenism. They do not fit into existing models in the ancient world unless we venture as far east as India. Scholarship has noted parallels between Christianity and Greek cynicism, but the Greeks never endorsed the radical repudiation of the world evidenced in a body of Christian sayings. Judaism, too, has a rich wisdom tradition, but it never endorsed bridging the chasm between man and divine perfection. Thus, if anyone wishes to claim that these core Christian sayings were “invented,” s/he must consider that whoever invented them deliberately produced a philosophy out of step with his general environment. Furthermore, it was a most *unpopular* philosophy. The sayings I am referring to endorse humility, enkratism (continence), non-violence/love of enemies, rejection of the “world,” and the gnostic quest. They propose an enormously demanding and uncompromising path which is odious to the common person, for they enjoin him or her to leave family, spouse, and the pleasures of the world. Such a philosophy corresponds neither to the Greek ideal nor to Jewish law and is hardly calculated to conquer the world! Who in the West could have, or would have, made this up? And why?

I do not accept the glib pronouncement that “Everything in the New Testament was said before,” particularly as regards what I consider the 22 core parables. Had these pithy stories existed before, their precedents could easily be traced. Parables like the fishnet (Th 8), the good Samaritan (Lk 10:30 f.), the entrusted money (Mt 25:14 f.), and the rich farmer (Th 3) are striking and unique. Most significantly, they reflect *values* not otherwise known to the West. They are quite new. This I call the criterion of dissimilarity.

Thirdly, I can’t imagine anyone “making up” these sayings for they have no practical value. Their purpose is internal and purely spiritual. There would be no advantage for anyone to invent sayings which enjoin humility, the search for gnosis, the need of forgiveness, and the like. This I call the criterion of impracticality.

I have thus come to the conclusion that there is a core within early Christian scripture, a fairly slight body of teaching which is coherent, dissimilar, and impractical. It is also profound. The existence of that core requires explanation: it did not drop fully formed from the sky. Nor, for the three reasons given above, was it invented. By elimination, then, that “core” required a human teacher. This is why I consider myself a “semi-mythicist”: one who does not believe Jesus of Nazareth ever existed, yet who also believes that some prophet taught a body of teaching embedded in Christian scripture.



Making the Jefferson Bible.

## Finding the "genuine" material

For a long time investigators have been trying to separate the authentic parts of Christian scripture from the inauthentic, perhaps ever since Thomas Jefferson took out his razor and excised most of the canonical gospels, salvaging selected passages in 1820 to produce **The Jefferson Bible**. New Testament scholars have done much the same thing, beginning most obviously with the recognition that the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke cannot both be correct (nor either independently, for that matter), that no slaughter of babies in Bethlehem *really* occurred, that the Romans never mandated a most impractical census by which all had to return to their home villages, etc., etc.

**Gerd Lüdemann** claimed that 95% of the NT was made up. For me, that figure is about right. One must wonder: if only about 5% of the gospels are authentic, is that small residue worth retrieving? For those who value quality over quantity, the answer must be a resounding “yes”! It should be noted that the putative 5% is not *necessarily* all there is—it’s just the part that survives in the New Testament. In other words, it is the tip of the iceberg. Once we have identified that 5%, we can look to heterodox scriptures for compatibilities which, heretofore, were overlooked or put to one side—or burned, yet whose echoes survive in secondary writings. In fact, there may be much more “authentic” material out there. It’s simply not where we’re used to (and trained to) look...



Constantine and council of Nicaea burning Arian books  
drawing on vellum, ca. 825, Biblioteca Cappitolare, Vercelli, Northern Italy

Thus, the search for authenticity at once narrows within the 4G themselves and at the same time widens outside the NT to encompass

many lesser-known works. Already, the last century has witnessed the discovery of the Gospel of Thomas and other Gnostic Christian scriptures (to the discomfiture of the Tradition). But the net of Christian scholarship still has not extended to include the Mandaean writings, nor to deal seriously with the plethora of unpublished scriptures residing in virtually inaccessible archives around the world (including those in the Vatican, Oxford, Chicago, and Israel). In the last several years I myself have identified a revolutionary **Acts of Mark** which portrays Mark as a disciple of *John the Baptist*. It remains mostly untranslated into any modern language though it's been known for a half century. I've also come across a provocative **Book of Gad the Seer** and will be uploading available chapters to this website in future. Meanwhile, access to many private collections in libraries around the world (many owned by religious institutions) becomes more restrictive with the passage of time, as the paranoia of the Tradition escalates... Nevertheless, all these represent only a fraction of what's out there to be "discovered." Even after the enormously successful Christian book burnings in antiquity, enough material probably survives to more than make a strong case for an alternate (and very unorthodox) account of Christian origins.

### **Getting out the scalpel**

To return to the gospels and the "5%"... The first great swath of material to go must be historical—the biography of Jesus, his miracles, and in general his "doings"—from the virgin birth to walking on water, raising up Lazarus, multiplying loaves for a crowd of 5,000, crucifixion under Pilate, bodily resurrection from the dead... This is the first step in recovering an authentic "core."

Once we remove the grand biography of the god-man Jesus from the gospels, what remains are essentially the *logia*—the parables and sayings attributed to him. Here the **Jesus Seminar** (JS) wielded its

collective scalpel a generation ago, bringing us a second step closer to an 'authentic' prophet (whom I will continue to call "Jesus" simply for convenience). The result? The JS identified a grand total of 91 "sayings" that it considered certainly ("red") or probably ("pink") went back to Jesus. This information is from *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?* (pp. 549-53).

91 sayings is not a great deal when we consider five gospels (4G + Thomas). J.D. Crossan has presented a total of 427 (non-repeating) sayings in his *Sayings Parallels: A Workbook for the Jesus Tradition* (Fortress, 1986). Thus, the JS concluded "authenticity" in about one-fifth of all the surviving sayings material.

My own analysis largely tallies with the JS. Of the 22 parables which I think "probably" or "certainly" go back to the prophet, the JS agreed 17 times—roughly 75%. That is only for the parables. We also have three other categories: "Aphorisms" (Crossan identifies 290 in all), "Dialogues" (81), and "Stories" (97). My review of these categories has yielded 150 sayings which I believe probably or certainly go back to "the prophet"—a little higher than the JS's 91—that is, 35% vs. 21%.

In my opinion, it is these 150 core sayings which give enduring value to the Nazarene religion, later hijacked to form what we know of as Christianity. The core sayings are internally coherent, dissimilar to ancient schools of thought, and thoroughly impractical from a worldly standpoint. The last element, particularly, ensured that Nazoreanism would not be popular. The teachings communicated in the core sayings would simply have led proselytes into the desert and would have ensured one thing for the religion: a quick death. In fact there are signs that this was the case, for "Paul" brought a substantial collection of money for the "poor"—that is, for spiritual "saints" who just weren't making it in the world.

How, then, did Christianity *conquer* the world? I answer in this way: the profound and authentic core body of teaching was subsequently

yoked to two invented, yet powerful (and perfidious) elements: the god-man Jesus of Nazareth, and the doctrine of salvation known to scholarship as the Pauline *kerygma*. The “Jesus” of the gospels gave mankind a superhuman god-man calculated to awe and subdue. The Pauline *kerygma* (Gk. “proclamation”) basically gave mankind the right to take it easy and *enjoy*—because “Jesus” has already done the hard work for us. He’s redeemed us from our sins. So, presumably, as long as we believe in the *kerygma*, we can pretty much sin as much as we darn well please. If we believe, God will forgive. In sum, the combination of these three strains gave the Christian religion formidable “legs.”

Understanding the genesis of Christianity is, in my opinion, a question of understanding the elements briefly touched upon in the preceding paragraph: the existence of a core body of “Nazarene” teaching; the invention of “Jesus of Nazareth”; and the invention of the Pauline *kerygma*. The amalgamation of these three powerful elements produced the new, universal religion known as “Christianity.”

## Part 2

### ***A human prophet***

In [the first post of this series](#) I surmised that if three criteria are applied to the sayings in Christian scripture, then the contours of a revolutionary teaching emerge. The three criteria are dissimilarity, coherence, and impracticality. For various reasons as discussed below, these criteria show that the teaching could not have been invented. They derived from a historical figure.

It was also noted that most of the material in the canonical gospels is, in fact, invented. How then, can we know which sayings attributed to “Jesus” are authentic? Precisely on the basis of the three above-mentioned criteria. Let me explain...



When it comes to the Jesus tradition, there are numerous “sayings” (parables and aphorisms) which scholars have long perceived conform neither to Jewish nor to Hellenistic religious and cultural norms. This is the criterion of dissimilarity, a criterion which allows us

to delimit a number of sayings in Christian scripture with neither precedent nor ready parallel. I've identified about 150 such sayings from Crossan's *Sayings Parallels* (Fortress, 1986).

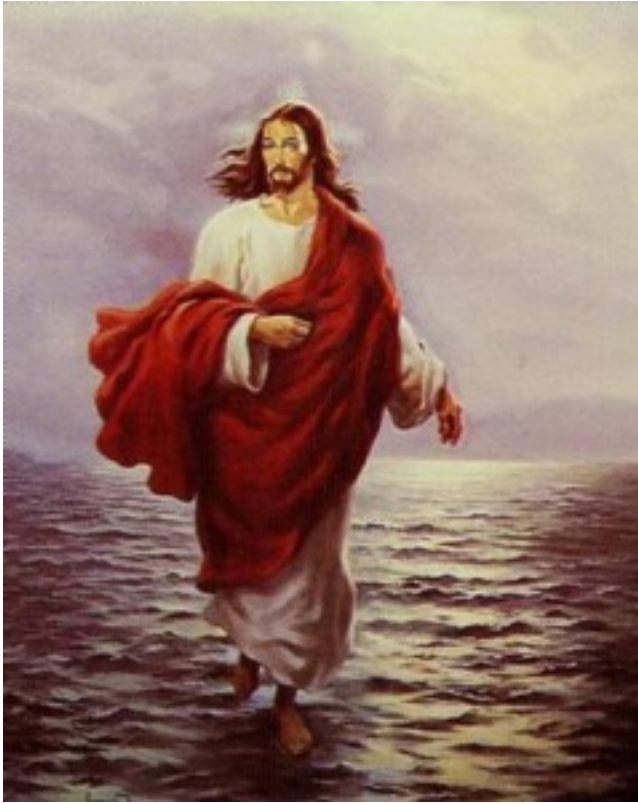
When we look at these "dissimilar" sayings, we note that they are internally coherent. Though they relate well neither to Judaism nor to Hellenism, they do relate well to one other, and they do so in a number of ways (to be discussed in a subsequent post). This is the criterion of coherence. Thus, we can now speak not merely of original sayings, but of an original "body" of teaching. This is a considerable step forward.

Once we are certain that an original body of teaching is embedded in Christian scripture, one which is internally coherent, then we must suspect that a human prophet lay at the source of that teaching, a prophet who—for whatever reason—shared neither the Jewish nor the Hellenistic mores of his age. The alternative is the unlikely scenario that a number of creative authors in ancient times not only produced the distinctive body of teaching referred to above (including the pithy parables and aphorisms) but also ensured that those sayings were internally coherent. That's a pretty tall order. In any case, it can now be ruled out by the third criterion: impracticality. As noted in the preceding post, the sayings which make up the "core" teaching "have no practical value. Their purpose is internal and purely spiritual. There would be no advantage for anyone to invent sayings which enjoin humility, the search for gnosis, the need of forgiveness, and the like."

Thus, when we combine the three criteria of dissimilarity, coherence, and impracticality, we can be quite certain that a remarkable human prophet lay at the root of the Christian religion. That prophet was not at all interested in 'the things of the world.' By analyzing the sayings in question, we will get a pretty good "spiritual profile" of the prophet, even though he has thus far been lost to history.

## **Not 'Jesus of Nazareth'**

Liberal scholars have long doubted Jesus of Nazareth's divine attributes, from his virgin birth to his bodily resurrection. They have similarly doubted the figure's miraculous capabilities during life. Finally, they have successively proven the minutiae of that life to be ahistorical in numerous cases—the birth in Bethlehem, the slaughter of the innocents, the youth in Nazareth, etc. etc. For a number of reasons, we can now be certain that "Jesus of Nazareth" did not exist. At the beginning of this third millennium, a scholarly consensus is developing which views the Jesus story as a retrojection of the second century CE back into pre-70 CE Palestine. The presence of Pharisees in the Galilee, the existence of synagogues, even the existence of Nazareth itself—these and other anachronisms argue that the Jesus figure was created sometime after 70 CE. The ancients dovetailed their hyperinflated figure of Jesus to long-simmering apocalyptic and eschatological hopes, hopes that were reignited by the crushing Roman defeat of the Jews in 70 CE.



Our generation is also witnessing a thorough re-evaluation of the Pauline writings. The merciless gaze of science reveals that Paul, too, is a far more complex—and possibly later—entity than at first meets the eye. A generation ago H. Koester isolated seven authentic Pauline letters, some cobbled together. This has been prevailing liberal opinion for some time. Now, however, the subfield of “Pauline mythicism” is gaining strength, as scholars such as Hermann Detering and Robert Price continue on the path blazed by the Dutch Radical School. These cutting-edge scholars have concluded that *none* of the Pauline epistles are authentic.

Judaism, too, is experiencing increasing stress from scholarship which shows that David, Solomon, and their vaunted kingdom are as mythical as King Arthur, Sir Galahad, and Camelot. Without David, it is reasonable to question whether the existence of Judaism is possible. Without Jesus, the same can be doubted for Christianity. In religious

studies, then, the arc of history is bending towards mythicism on multiple fronts.

### **If not “Jesus,” then who?**

Though mythicism shows that Jesus and other iconic figures did not exist, it does not completely satisfy our quest if, as argued above, there was indeed a seminal prophet underlying the Christian religion. Mythicism is preliminary in that it removes the baggage of Christian faith—faith in Jesus of Nazareth, Lord and Savior. In so doing, mythicism allows science to proceed. But mythicism does not replace science, nor does it replace religion.

It should be stated at the outset that the invention of Jesus of Nazareth in late antiquity was unethical. Some try to evade the “moral duplicity” accusation by arguing that the ancients did not have modern standards of history. But that argument is inapplicable, for the authors of the canonical gospels were obviously not interested in writing history. They were interested in what scholars call the Pauline kerygma: that Jesus Christ was the Son of God whose death on the cross saves all who believe in Him. The gospels are primarily vehicles of that message. Their implicit purposes are to kindle faith and to thereby establish a religion. In other words, their religion was founded on a lie—the “Jesus” lie. This radical conclusion is inevitable and inescapable. Mythicism is based on firm proof that Christianity has been duplicitous from the beginning.

It is evident that the morally compromised people who fashioned the Christian religion would also not have shied away from erasing every possible trace of a competing prophet who, in fact, had more right to the teachings of Jesus than did “Jesus” himself. This helps to explain the inordinate difficulty modern researchers have in sorting out Christian origins, for the traces of that lost prophet were deliberately obliterated or—where obliteration was not possible—they were

mangled and confused from the start. This is the only possible explanation for the farrago that is Christian origins.

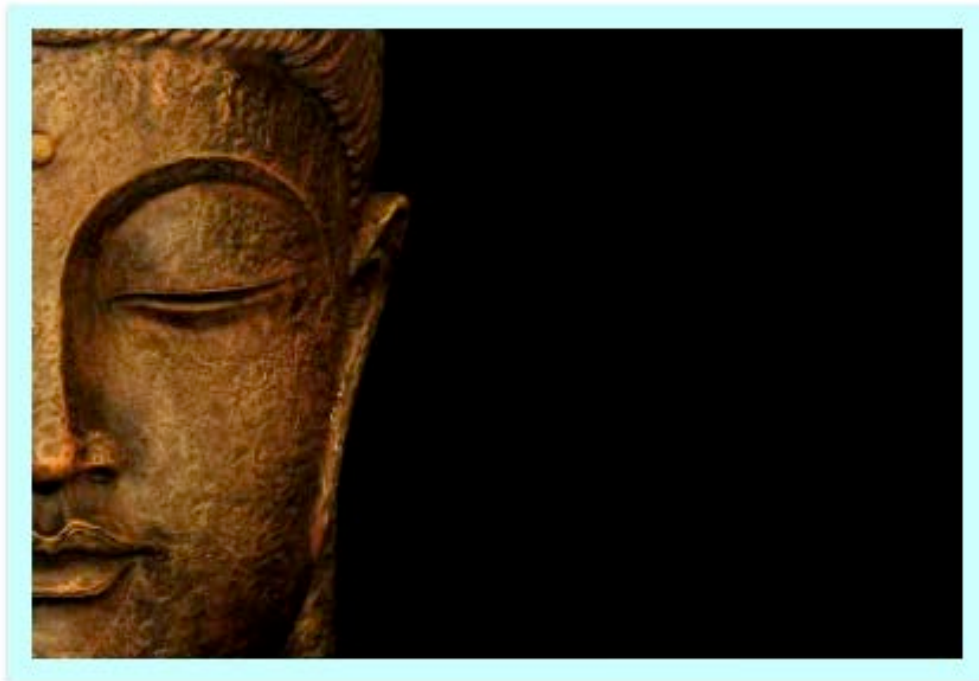
Researchers have long known that John the Baptist was intimately linked with Christian origins. Bultmann and others argued that John was, in fact, the greater figure on the contemporary scene when compared to Jesus. We also have indications that “Jesus” was originally a spiritual entity, not at all fleshly. At one time, John, James, and others may have “possessed” the spirit of Jesus. This long lost view would satisfy the mythicist thesis that Jesus of Nazareth never existed. It would also satisfy the view that another prophet—perhaps “John the Baptist”—was the historical figure who stands behind the core sayings found in the New Testament. In any case, whatever we think we know about John the Baptist from the Christian writings must be deemed untrustworthy. Fortunately, Mandaean writings preserve traditions about the Baptist which have evaded the ruthless Christian scalpel.

The Dead Sea Scriptures revere a Teacher of Righteousness (TR), a figure in many ways as enigmatic as “Jesus.” Many attempts have been made to locate the TR in history, and numerous possible identifications have been made. Robert Eisenman has conflated the TR with early Christianity. Barbara Thiering has also conflated the Dead Sea Scriptures with Christian origins (though she posits that Jesus was the “Wicked Priest”).

Thus, at least two candidates for an “alternate Jesus” exist in the record: John the Baptist, and the Teacher of Righteousness. It may be that these two figures are, in fact, one and the same. Certainly, “John the Baptist” and the “Teacher of Righteousness” are epithets. The prophet we are seeking may have later been known by such monikers, but he would have carried neither as a “name.”

## **A Buddhist connection?**

A final possibility must be considered. Some like myself, who have studied both Christianity and Buddhism, have noted remarkable parallels between the two religions. My assessment of the 150 “core” Christian sayings shows that those sayings are astonishingly compatible with Buddhist teaching. We have, as a result, a situation where that which is authentic in the Jesus tradition is on the one hand *not* compatible with Judaism nor with Hellenism, but on the other hand *is* compatible with Buddhism. This situation opens another realm of possibilities.



There are two ways to proceed:

(1) The core sayings under discussion were distant offshoots of Buddhism and there was no “lost prophet” behind Christianity at all. Christianity would then be viewed as a western offshoot of Buddhism, one much perverted by Paulinism.

(2) The core sayings were the teaching of a lost Levantine prophet who himself came under Buddhist influence, and/or who arrived at a similar analysis of life as did the Buddha.

The difference between these two possibilities, of course, is that in the former case no western prophet is at the root of Christianity, while in the latter case one is.

In 2004 I self-published a book called **Buddhist and Christian Parallels** (PDF). It contains 57 short chapters and many citations showing remarkable parallels between the Buddhist and Christian scriptures. That book was the culmination of twenty years study of the Buddhist texts, many in the original language. According to my analysis, the possibility (1) above is ruled out. In other words, the Christian scriptures cannot reflect Buddhism *without* the mediation of an altogether unique western prophet. This can be concluded because the core sayings in question contain the unmistakable "stamp" of a single personality, one emphatically *not* present in the Indian tradition.

# Buddhist and Christian Parallels

Compiled from the Earliest Scriptures

by

René Salm

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"You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

— *Gospel of Matthew 19:19*

"As a mother at the risk of her life  
Watches over her own child, her only child,  
So let one cultivate a loving heart  
Towards all beings."

— *Sutta Nipata 149*

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KEVALIN PRESS  
Eugene, Oregon

2004

In fact, the unmistakable "stamp" of Siddhartha Gautama's personality similarly comes through in the Buddhist scriptures. It is clearly not the same personality as that of the western prophet. Both are strong, uncompromising figures, with a heroic and forthright manner which combines reason and effort in equal measure—mind and heart. But the styles of the two teachers are different. The Buddha explained through reasoned analysis, using stories as necessary to illustrate his

metaphysics. The Christ explained through stories, using reason as necessary to explain his art. One perhaps was left-brained, the other right-brained. Confirmation comes from the fact that—with only one or two late exceptions (such as “the Prodigal Son,” which probably comes from Mahayana Buddhism)—the 17 core parables of “Jesus” have no parallels in Buddhist scripture, *though they have the very same teachings*. This suggests that we are dealing with two different teachers, yet one teaching.

In sum, it appears to me that two teachers arose whose lives were separated by over five centuries. One was born in India and the other in Palestine. The two taught much the same ethical code, emphasizing humility, non-acquisition, and love. They also taught a similar path to truth (*gnosis*), emphasizing effort and renunciation. However, the different *form* of their teachings bears in each case the inevitable stamp of an independent, strong, and altogether positive personality.

## Part 3

### ***Lost Nazorean teachings***

#### **The background**

In the first two posts in this series I argued that a human prophet lay at the root of the Christian religion—certainly not ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’ This prophet taught a rigorous code of personal fulfillment out of step with both Hellenism and Judaism, yet conforming in fundamental ways with the uncompromising ethics and search for enlightenment (gnosis) found in Buddhism. The proof of these statements lies in a body of sayings preserved in the Christian scriptures themselves. Those sayings—which I have numbered at about 150—comprise a coherent body of material in tension with both the Jewish worship of Yahweh and with the Hellenist ethos of man’s domination over the material world. These “core” sayings are inward-looking and socially impractical.

In this post we will begin to look more closely at those sayings which, I submit, form the core of the Nazarene religion—the pre-Christian religion of those known to history as the *Ebionim* (Heb. “the poor”) and *hoi hagioi* (Gk. “the saints”). *Nazarene* is simply a term used for convenience, because it is familiar from the Greek Christian corpus. However, the term is a transliteration from the semitic root N-Ts-R, that is, nun-tsade-resh, with the general meaning “watch, guard, preserve” (BDB 665). The form *netsur+* is used in the Old Testament for “secret things” (Is 48:6) and it is here that we should probably look for the origin of the Greek Christian *Nazoraïos* (Mt 2:23) as an appellation for Jesus. The root is very old, predating Christianity by thousands of years and appearing already in Akkadian religious writings, where N-Ts-R is associated with secret wisdom, e.g., in the story of Atrahasis

("Ultra-Wise"), the primeval Noah. (Cf. [The Natsarene and Hidden Gnosis.](#))

Before the First Jewish Revolt, the Nazarenes were centered in Jerusalem under "James the Just" or "James the Righteous." They were the object of a donation of money collected by Paul (1 Cor 16:1 ff.). Besides being a well-intentioned charity, this collection was probably also a peace offering, for tensions between Paul and the Jerusalem Church are evident in the Pauline epistles. I won't investigate here whether the "false brethren" of Gal. 2:4 or the "super apostles" in Corinth (2 Cor 11:5; 12:11) were related to the Nazarenes. This may be the case, however. A major issue separating Paul's teaching from theirs was that Paul received his teaching from "revelation," (Gal 1:11-12; 2:2) –a source that the Nazarenes did not acknowledge. They appear to have received their secret teachings from an esoteric tradition handed down from an original prophet. At least some of the Nazarenes fled Palestine before the fall of the Temple, heading northeast. Traditions regarding this flight are preserved in Jewish Christian and in Mandaean writings. Indeed, the Nazarenes appear to have been the precursors of the Mandaeans, whose "priests" are called *natsuraiia* or 'keepers of secret knowledge' (Drower and Macuch, *A Mandaic Dictionary* 285). The Mandaeans claim to follow the teachings of John the Baptist. They revile "Jesus," whom they consider an *impostor*. Thus, the Nazarenes-Mandaeans may have been the first Jesus mythicists ("docetists")– people who denied the reality of "Jesus of Nazareth."

## **Nazorean teachings**

It is possible to form a contour of Nazorean teachings by studying the body of sayings preserved in the Christian tradition according to the three criteria [alluded to previously](#): dissimilarity, coherence, and impracticality. Mandaean writings provide further sources, but I don't include them in this introductory series of posts.

*Karma.*

One theme dominates the “core” Nazorean sayings and parables—almost to the exclusion of all other themes. Fundamental also to Buddhism, this theme is known to us as *karma*. Over and over, in various ways, Jesus teaches the Golden Rule: as you do to others, so it will be done to you (Mt 7:12). The Golden Rule appears in virtually all religions, so there is nothing unique here. However, in Nazorean teaching (as also in Buddhism) karma is not merely an ethical injunction—it is an immutable spiritual law, one by which we all live whether we know it or not.

The number of karmic sayings in the Christian scriptures is great, and includes all the beatitudes. For reference, I list them here as numbered in Crossan’s *Sayings Parallels*: 9, 36-41, 50, 60-63, 65-68, 70, 81, 85, 87, 123, 140, 170, 217-22, 225, 228, 318, 319 (total = 33). Some examples follow:

CHRISTIAN	BUDDHIST
<p>“Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” (Lk 6:37-38)</p>	<p>The slayer receives a slayer in turn. The conqueror will surely be defeated. The abuser will reap abuse, and the reviler be reviled. Thus, by growth of the very deed, one who injures is injured in turn. (S 1.3.15)</p>
<p>“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.” (Mt 5:6-7)</p>	<p>“When a fool does evil work, he forgets that he is lighting a fire wherein he must burn some day.” (Dh 136)</p>
<p>“Love your enemies and do good, and lend expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great.” (Lk 6:35)</p>	<p>For one’s deeds are not lost, they will surely return. Their master will meet with them. The fool who commits sin will come to feel the pain himself. (Sn 666)</p>
<p>“Ask and it will be given you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For every one who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.” (Mt 7:7-8)</p>	<p>If you fear pain, if anguish is hateful, Then do no evil, neither openly nor in secret. Do evil tomorrow, or do it today, and there is no escaping suffering Even though you spring up and flee. (Ud 5.4)</p>

**Other themes.**

A number of other themes—closely related to karma (see next post)—characterize the “core” teaching of Jesus. They can be broadly

grouped under the rubrics “Wisdom” and “Ethics” (*Gnosis* and *Behavior* below). All of these themes have parallels in Buddhist scripture. I list only some of them here with Crossan’s numbers. They are not in order of importance:

**Gnosis:**

- Need for gnosis: 76, 85, 254, 272, 292, 328.
- Need for earnestness/taking thought: 20, 21, 33, 364.
- Parables of accomplishment: 3-7, 15, 16, 19.
- The syzygy or law of opposites: 36-41, 293.

**Behavior:**

- Need for chastity (encratism): 56, 236, 313, 348, 357, POxy 840.
- Need for self-control: 17, 53, 59, 60, 61.
- Need for self-watchfulness: 17, 45, 76, 203, 205-07, 235.
- Need for renunciation: 57, 121-23, 170, 229, 349, 352, 429.
- Need for honesty: 59, 276.
- Need for humility: 27, 38, 60, 134, 159, 172, 180, 227, 430.
- Need for love: 13, 62, 209, 286, 328.
- Need for perfection: 52-56, 64, 250.
- Need for separation from the world: 155, 281, 287, 291, 361, 454, Jn 4:24; 6:63; 8:23b.
- Uselessness of wealth: 18, 25, 36, 74, 78, 103, 217, 349-50, 482, 486.
- Against cant, ritual, and ostentation: 152, 176-89.

Together with the doctrine of karma, the above themes furnish the basic theology of the pre-Christian Nazarenes. Nothing in this list refers to God, nothing to a final judgment, nothing to atonement nor redemption, nothing to vicarious salvation though a redeemer figure—all hallmarks of the Pauline kerygma. Furthermore, there is no acknowledgment of central Jewish tenets: obedience to Yahweh, the chosen status of the Hebrew people, the impassable chasm between man and God. On the contrary: in these “core” Christian sayings there is an inherent tension with Judaism, as seen in the plethora of sayings/parables against cant and ritual (“phariseeism” and Temple) and in the basic “gnostic” outlook. The entire body of the above teachings rests on the belief that understanding of life (*gnosis* or *Manda d’Hayye*) is necessary, attainable, and fulfilling. The focus is sapiential and ethical:

finding gnosis through effort, and treating your neighbor as yourself—  
through renunciation and egolessness.

This was the gnostic theology of the Nazarenes, certainly based on the  
teaching of a “lost” prophet who inspired Christianity.

## Part 4

### ***Encratite spirituality***

#### **The highly redacted nature of Christian scripture**

In the [preceding post](#) of this series I listed a number of “themes” which provide a contour of Nazarene (i.e., pre-Christian) theology. Those themes can be deduced from sayings attributed to “Jesus” in Christian scripture, both orthodox and heterodox, according to the criteria of dissimilarity, coherence, and impracticality. They betray a gnostic outlook wherein the goal of life is to seek and find hidden wisdom (gnosis). They delimit a body of teaching that endorses separation from “the world” and the adoption of a rigorous ethical code including humility, renunciation, and chastity. This, I would suggest, is the contour of the pre-Christian Nazarene theology as evidenced by the surviving scriptural record.

The scriptural record, however, betrays internal signs of having been much redacted both generally and specifically. The overall gnostic theology (see below) has been placed in the service of the Pauline kerygma, with numerous consequences affecting specific pericopes and sayings. Over many decades of modern scholarly study, form criticism, [redaction criticism](#), and many other “criticisms” have revealed that the canonical gospels (4G) are often composed of highly evolved material.

I have posited the existence of a “lost” prophet at the origins of Christianity (Posts 1-3 in this series). However, given the highly redacted nature of the texts, it is not reasonable to expect the *ipsissima verba* of the prophet in the “core” sayings and parables—about 150, according to my tally. Rather, they betray *themes* which are

out of step with Judaism and Hellenism, as noted in the prior posts. They are, however, closely related to Buddhism in content. Because this core material betrays an underlying idiosyncratic personality, vocabulary, and style not found elsewhere (not even in Buddhist scripture), I have concluded that the Christian record contains not only quasi-Buddhist teachings, but the imprint of an original western prophet not represented in the Indian Buddhist tradition.

The question arises: Are the *ipsissima verba* of the prophet to be found in any of the material that has come down to us? Obviously, we can never know the answer for sure, but the theoretical response is: "Very possibly." In this regard, we might look especially at shorter parables, such as The Mustard Seed, The Leaven, The Treasure, The Pearl, The Fishnet (Crossan 3-7), etc. Consider, for example, the Parable of the Pearl (Mt 13:45-46):

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

We have here a very short story that, in its present form, is consummately terse. What has come down to us is the *essence* of a story that could easily be elaborated to considerable length. It could be that "Jesus" (or whatever he was called) spoke the above words. It could also be—and this is probably more likely—that the person recalling the story (or the redactor writing it down) transmitted simply the bare bones of the story, its *intent*. Incidentally, the particular teaching found in the above parable mirrors that of both the preceding and following parables (The Treasure, and The Fishnet—Mt 13:44; 47-48), so that we have three parables in a row with the same fundamental teaching.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are Buddhist parallels to this teaching. See "Parables of Accomplishment" (Chp. 49) of my [Buddhist and Christian Parallels](#).

Thus, it is hardly reasonable to look for a verbatim account in any sayings attributed to Jesus. It is more reasonable to suppose that what has been transmitted is the *intent, meaning, or teaching* of a story as understood by a tradent. In the Christian scriptures we have, at best, the essential teachings of the lost prophet at second (or third) hand.

The Gospel of Thomas is particularly instructive. Here, "Jesus" hardly ever represents a prophet at all: he speaks for "the Truth." Over and over, the Gospel of Thomas begins its logia with "Jesus said..."

Nevertheless, the compiler of this text had little interest in what any human prophet said when he wrote, for example: *Jesus said, "Become passersby"* (L. 42). Rather, *The Truth (Sophia, Wisdom, Manda d'Hayye) says, "Become passersby."* Here we have a further development of the tradition where "Jesus" is disembodied Truth. The human prophet has been left far behind and we have only the teaching, reduced to its most pithy form.

### **The Parable of the Ten Maidens**

Most parables are metaphorical and, by definition, require interpretation. Thus, in the above parable of The Pearl, the merchant is enjoined to give up all that he has for the pearl of great value. Interpreted, the individual is exhorted to give up everything in order to attain *gnosis* (for traditionalists, to attain *faith*).



The Wise and Foolish Maidens by William Blake

Occasionally, however, we encounter relatively lengthy parables with elements that defy common sense interpretations. This is an indication that the tradition has gone one step further in development and that we are no longer dealing with metaphors but with symbols—terms with hidden meanings that were known to the author but that may not even be known to the reader. This supposes a considerable developmental prehistory. Consider, for example, the Parable of the Ten Maidens (Mt 25:1-13):

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. /2/ Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. /3/ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; /4/ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. /5/ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. /6/ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ /7/ Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps. /8/ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ /9/ But the wise replied,

'Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.' /10/ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut. /11/ Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' /12/ But he replied, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.' /13/ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour."

Commentators have long been mystified by the unusual and even strange setting of this parable. A bridegroom meets with maidens at "midnight"; some maidens are foolish because they have insufficient "oil" in their lamps; others who are well provisioned go in with the bridegroom to the "marriage feast"; the foolish maidens go to buy oil, though it is midnight and no "dealers" would then be available; they are subsequently denied admission because the groom does not "know" them; the listener is enjoined "to watch."

There is no precedent in Judaism for the above scenario, as many commentators have acknowledged. We must, then, suspect that the meaning of the parable resides neither on a literal nor even metaphorical level, but on a symbolic level. The symbols used include: midnight, bridegroom, oil, lamp, marriage feast, sleeping, watching, and "know." The parable is now an allegory.

Such florid symbolism indicates a long developmental prehistory, with multiple symbols placed in a context that is only meaningful to a person 'in the know.' It is inconceivable that such a parable could have been related by a prophet to a general or casual audience, for its understanding requires knowledge of the correct interpretation of the numerous symbols. What we have here, then, is a hidden or "secret" teaching that already reflects a fairly advanced and well developed esoteric tradition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Such esoteric meaning together with symbolism is found also in Jewish scripture, e.g. 2 Sam 23:13-17. For discussion see my [The Nazarene and Hidden Gnosis p. 8](#) (PDF).

## Encratite spirituality

The above nexus of symbols is only understandable from a gnostic-encratite perspective. "Encratism" (from Gk. *egkrateia*) is "moderation in sensual pleasures, self-control, Lat. *continentia*... abstinence from or in a thing." The word derives from *en kratos*, "in strength," from which the Greeks also derived *egkratês*, "holding fast, stout, strong," i.e., "not yielding" (Liddell-Scott).

In a religious context, encratism is well attested through a plethora of early Christian texts where chastity is an aspect of holiness and often a prerequisite for salvation. Most notable may be the non-canonical Acts of various apostles (Thomas, Andrew, John, Paul, Peter, etc.) that were particularly popular in antiquity. Two Syriac "Epistles to Virgins" attributed to Clement of Rome also survive. Encratism was apparently a pan-Christian phenomenon affecting both East and West, Hebrew and Hellenist, Gnostic and Catholic. The gospels of Thomas and of Philip are both heavily encratite, as are also many other tractates from the Nag Hammadi corpus.<sup>3</sup> Finally, I might mention that Origen and other Christians actually castrated themselves 'for the kingdom of heaven,' taking Mt 19:11-12 literally.

Understandably, encratism proved too difficult for the masses and the Church Fathers eventually argued that it was desirable but not mandatory, and then merely optional. Even in Paul we read the conciliatory dictum that "it is better to marry than to burn" (1 Cor 7:9), while in 1 Thess 4:1-8 marriage is tolerated if engaged "not in passion of lust."

What is little appreciated, however, is that encratite behavior rests upon a belief system that is inveterately gnostic.<sup>4</sup> The Great Church

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<sup>3</sup> Besides the gospels of Thomas and Philip, other strongly encratite works among the Nag Hammadi texts are: The Exegesis of the Soul, Book of Thomas the Contender, Dialog of the Savior, and Testimony of Truth.

<sup>4</sup> The sexual asceticism of the Dead Sea Sect must also be seen in the light of gnosticism, and provides

eventually recognized this and (falsely) dubbed Tatian ‘the founder of the sect of the Encratites’ (Eusebius, Jerome), while Irenaeus supposed that ‘the Encratites’ proceeded from Saturninus and Marcion. However, encratite spirituality predated all those heretics and is also emphatically found in the New Testament itself.

Without an understanding of its underlying belief system, encratism is little more than a bizarre maladjustment to society, an overweening asceticism with no rationale. However, once we enter into the gnostic worldview, it assumes unsuspected layers of meaning.

The gnostic essentially believes that the ultimate purpose of life is to attain understanding, *gnosis*. That task, however, is not possible as long as any other goal in life rules the heart and mind of man—most commonly, “pleasure.” From the gnostic perspective, pleasure in all its forms seduces man (and woman) away from the true goal—understanding. “Pleasure” is used broadly here to include sex, power, money, reputation... Only *gnosis*, on the other hand, confers enduring happiness, fulfillment, ‘salvation.’ This is the gnostic perspective that is readily found in the “core” sayings attributed to Jesus. Just as an arrow cannot be aimed at two targets, so each person must choose between pleasure and understanding. This is the gnostic *krisis* (“judgment”), modified by the Paulines into a *krisis* regarding belief in Jesus.

In light of the above, encratism (continence, chastity) is not an end in itself but is a by-product of the gnostic quest. Encratism and gnosticism go hand-in-hand. This critical point is generally not perceived by Christian scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

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a sectarian Jewish precursor to Christian encratite spirituality.

<sup>5</sup> Thus, C. Richardson wrote an article entitled “The Gospel of Thomas: Gnostic or encratite?” (*Orientalia Christiana Analecta* No. 195: 1973.) The choice between gnosticism and encratism is a false choice, for the two go hand-in-hand.



## Part 5

### **The name “Nazarene”**

#### **What’s in a name?**

In the [preceding post](#) I suggested that a number of “core” sayings found in the Christian scriptures have already been extensively redacted. They are not the *ipsissima verba* of the “lost” prophet whom I propose existed in history (certainly not Jesus of Nazareth). Rather, those sayings are the product of a fairly complex and sophisticated religious tradition. For convenience I may sometimes call that tradition “Nazoreanism” and the movement to which it refers the “Nazarene” movement. This terminology is somewhat incorrect, however, for the movement that these posts describe was never Hellenist but existed purely in the Semitic realm. Hence, it should not be referred to by a term derived from Greek which contains the “z” sound—a definite marker of the normative Hellenist Christian tradition.

It appears that the Hellenists strategically effected an artificial nomenclature at an early stage of Christianity. They were confronted with a pre-existing Semitic religious movement on the ground which referred to itself as the *Netsarim* or *Netsurim* from the root nun-tshade-res, “watch, keep, preserve.” Translated, then, we have a group which called itself The Watchers, Keepers, or Preservers. I have pointed out [elsewhere](#) that N-ts-r is a very old and rather exalted root in semitic religion, one going back at least to the second millennium BCE. The root also lies behind the “Watchers” of the Enochian traditions, a connection we will look at in a future post.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The Aramaic Book of Enoch preserved in the DSS uses ayin-yod-res for “watcher,” which is the Aramaic form of Heb. N-Ts-R. On the rather complex linguistic issues that unite the apparently

These Natsarenes (as I call them) espoused a rigorous ethical code and laid claim to the teachings of an astonishing prophet of recent history who had given impetus to their movement. At first they held all the cards in their favor. Already in existence, the Natsarenes had every claim to authority through an unbroken (and probably short) chain of links to the “lost” prophet. At the time the Hellenists were just organizing (mid-1 CE?), the Natsarenes had a fairly subtle theology, as we see from the surviving “core” sayings—e.g., the Parable of the Ten Maidens ([post #4](#)).

The Hellenists, however, appear to have rebuffed the impracticality of the Natsarene movement, which was gnostic and inward-looking. Focusing on the Hellenist world, they incorporated the sayings of the prophet into their theology (the Pauline *kerygma*) and added a wonderfully grandiose biography (Jesus of Nazareth).

One might ask: Why did the Paulines (the incipient Great Church) find it so important to repudiate gnosticism? This repudiation, it should be noted, is hardly limited to Christianity—it has repeated over and over in history. The answer is rarely recognized and purely practical: gnosticism is fundamentally and irrevocably incompatible with institution building. Any religion which seeks broad-based popular support must repudiate gnosticism. This is because gnosis requires outward sacrifice and repudiates ‘the world.’ This places gnosticism diametrically at odds with the purposes of every institution, for institutions require not the rejection but the *support* of society. In sum, the world is the price of gnosis, and this is essentially the teaching of “Jesus.” Gnostic salvation is individual. No corporate element whatsoever is required nor even admissible. The gnostic goes his own path—usually into the ‘wilderness.’ He has no use for sacraments, rites, bishops, or a vicarious savior. Obviously, the gnostic is of no use to any

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different Aramaic and Hebrew roots (via Ugaritic), see R. Murray, “The Origin of Aramaic ‘ir, Angel” (Orientalia 53 [1984] 303-17).

church. On the contrary, he is a weakening agent, a force of diffusion, decentralisation, and confusion. Anyone who wishes to amass power will be the enemy of the gnostic.

Gnosis is closely associated with the root N-Ts-R, for (as we shall see) the Natsarenes interpreted the root to signify “be awake,” i.e., “be enlightened.” Natsarene theology is built around this understanding and goal. The Pauline kerygma, however, repudiates gnosis and, in its place, substitutes faith. Thus, in seeking to excise gnostic teachings, the Hellenists also excised any allusion to the term N-Ts-R.<sup>7</sup>

This explains the use, first employed by Mark, of the Greek term *Nazarêne*. The (aspirated/voiced) “zeta” in the Greek word does not conform linguistically with the (unaspirated/unvoiced) tsade found in the pre-existing Semitic cognates. This is but one of myriad changes, small and large, effected by the evangelist. The intent is clear: it points future readers/hearers to an entirely different Semitic term—the *nazir*, that is, the “nazirite.”

Samson and Samuel were both lifelong nazirites. Numerous parallels can be drawn between the newly invented prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, and those two Old Testament figures. The birth of Samson is especially instructive in this regard. The Septuagint passage (Judges 13) reads:

/2/ And there was a man of Saraa, of the family of the kindred of Dan, and his name was Manoe, and his wife was barren, and bore not. /3/ And an angel of the Lord appeared to the woman and said to her, “Behold, you are with child, and you shall conceive a son. /4/ And now be very cautious and drink no wine nor strong drink, and eat no unclean thing, /5/ for behold you are with child and shall bring forth a son, and there shall come no razor upon his head for the child shall be a nazirite to God from the womb, and he shall begin to save Israel from the hand of the Philistines.” ... /24/ And the woman brought forth a

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<sup>7</sup> The Aramaic Book of Enoch preserved in the DSS uses ayin-yod-resch for “watcher,” which is the Aramaic form of Heb. N-Ts-R. On the rather complex linguistic issues which unite the apparently different Aramaic and Hebrew roots (via Ugaritic), see R. Murray, “The Origin of Aramaic ‘ir, Angel” (Orientalia 53 [1984] 303-17).

son, and she called his name Samson; and the child grew and the Lord blessed him. /25/ And the Spirit of the Lord began to go out with him...

Here we have the annunciation of an angel to a woman, she will bear a particularly distinguished son, and he will be a nazirite, that is, "separated to the Lord" from birth. In fact, the Greek term used in this passage for "Nazirite" (Alexandrian text) is *Nazeiraion*—the only place in the Septuagint where this term occurs. It would appear that the Matthean evangelist noted this. He continued the Markan usage of the "z" sound—thus perpetuating the connection of Jesus to the Jewish nazirite tradition. But he also wrote:

And he went and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, "He shall be called a Nazoraios." (Mt 2:23)

*Nazoraios* is not precisely the *Nazeiraio[s]* of the Septuagint, but given the florid invention of the evangelists, precision was hardly of interest. It is evident that "Nazareth" also goes hand-in-hand with removing any allusion between the invented figure of Jesus and the Natsarenes. By assigning Jesus' hometown to Nazareth, Matthew did exactly this and further divorced Jesus from the Natsarenes. As it happens, the town of Natsareth came into being ca. 100 CE—precisely when the Matthean redactor was active.

In the cognates under discussion, Semitic speakers uniformly use unvoiced sibilants: *Natsareth* (the continuing name of the town in Israel), *Natsraia* (Mandean priests), *Nasrani* (the Arabic name for Christians to this day). On the other hand, Hellenist Christianity uniformly uses the voiced sibilant "z" and has from its inception: *Nazara*, *Nazareth*, *Nazarène*, *Nazôraios*. The linguistic divide may here seem slight, yet it offers a clue to the immense theological and conceptual gulf separating the Natsarenes from the Pauline "Nazarenes."

## Rupture in the fellowship

Thus, we have a two-stage process whereby the Hellenist Christians separated their savior-hero Jesus from the hated Natsarenes. I write "hated" because the Natsarenes were perfectly positioned to give the lie to the Hellenists. Intimately acquainted as they were with the prophet (whose biography is still lost to us) and with his gnostic-encratite teachings which they followed rigorously, the Natsarenes were surely appalled at the crass invention of "Jesus of Nazareth." Thus, the actual followers of the prophet were doubtless the first Jesus mythicists—in existence already at the earliest stage of Christianity.

In Acts 6:1 ff. we read of bickering between two factions in the earliest Church: the "Hellenists" and the "Hebrews." This reflects a stage of growing tensions within the Jerusalem church, that is, within the Natsarene movement itself, elsewhere referred to as "The Way." Hellenism was a perennial cause of tension in late antiquity, not only cultural but also religious, being an unavoidable part of the general culture of Palestine. We can imagine that some Hellenists—those who preferred the Greek language, Greek ways, and who were theologically less wedded to Jewish tradition—were in the minority among the Natsarenes and suffered the onus of continually being more or less 'reprobate.' They would never rise to leadership positions in the movement and it was clear that their path forward was blocked. The widows of Hellenist members who had died were being neglected, and one can infer that the Hellenists were given the servant positions of 'waiting on tables' (all the names in Acts 6:5 are Hellenist).

We can infer that some Hellenists broke away from this one-sided arrangement. One can only speculate as to the exact circumstances. It is very possible that they were seduced by a radical new conception—the Pauline kerygma—perhaps at the aegis of Paul himself when he was in Jerusalem. At an early stage Paul was persecuting the Way. He may have been trying to seduce some Hellenists away from the movement

with rather exotic ideas about a divine man sent by God who died for our sins. Regardless of Paul's own inner convictions and sincerity, one can have no doubt that he himself contributed to a split within the Natsarene movement, whether he did so before the rupture and/or was vigorously active after the fact.

In any case, we can infer that some Hellenists broke away from the Natsarene movement and adopted/developed the theology we know today as the Pauline kerygma. They would have brought with them acquaintance of Natsarene teachings, including intimate familiarity with the prophet's sayings. Thus, we find many of those sayings in Christian scripture—now much redacted and adapted to the Pauline kerygma.

Ample clues reveal the handiwork of the Hellenists in regard to "Nazareth/Nazarene." First of all, the town of Nazareth was not yet in existence at the turn of the era when Jesus supposedly lived. Secondly, the Semitic name of the town is inconveniently spelled with a tsade. Thus, it does not reflect the name in the New Testament—a clear sign that the "Nazareth" of the gospels is an awkward invention. Thirdly, in Acts 24:5 Paul is called "a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes." It would be most curious if he were a leader of inhabitants of Nazareth...

## Part 6

### **Secret Mark**

In the **fourth post** of this series I looked at the Parable of the Ten Maidens (Mt 25:1-13) and concluded that it was an allegory—certainly not the *ipsissima verba* from the mouth of the human prophet who lies at the origins of Christianity. The incipient Great Church needed to erase that flesh and blood prophet to make room for its invented and grandiose “Jesus of Nazareth.” It needed to do this because the gnostic doctrine of the “Nazarene” (Natsarene) prophet was diametrically opposed to its doctrine of faith which lay at the heart of the Pauline *kerygma* (“proclamation”).

Erasing the prophet from history was a fairly easy task, for that prophet has—as we can see—left few if any traces. However, one can infer from the surviving sayings that he was poor, a teacher of secret/hidden wisdom, had a small circle of disciples, and was opposed to normative Judaism. It is also very possible that he was killed by the state on trumped up charges of sedition and with the collusion of the Jewish authorities.

The Paulines (as I characterize those who authored the New Testament and who built the Great Church) created “Jesus of Nazareth,” a divine man designed to spread their religion of an atoning savior among the gentiles. Meanwhile, the most oblique allusion to the original prophet was retained in the form of Jesus’ contemporary, “John the Baptist” (a moniker, not a name)—though what we read of John in the New Testament can hardly be trusted.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> For example, at Mt 11:7-10 John is described. However, the parallel in the Gospel of Thomas (L. 78) applies that description to Jesus himself.

Though it was possible to “erase” the prophet from history, it was not possible—nor desirable—to entirely jettison his teachings which were formidable, trenchant, and pithy. The Paulines had the sense to make as much use as possible of remarkable teachings which they received—already elaborated and modulated—from the Natsarene movement. After all, the Paulines were a breakaway from the Natsarenes (see **Part 5: Rupture in the fellowship**). Where the teachings dealt with gnosis, the Paulines substituted “faith.” After all, in Natsarene religion gnosis is the active agent:

And [Jesus] said, “Whoever finds the meaning of these sayings will not experience death.” (Th 1)

But in Pauline Christianity, faith is the active agent:

And [Jesus] said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” (Mk 5:34)

The Natsarenes were strictly interested in the spiritual realm, and they sought to transcend (or overcome) the world (Th 56, 80-81, 110-11; Jn 16:33). For the Paulines, on the other hand, the efficacy of Jesus extends to the physical plane, as we see in his many theatrical healings.

## **Natsarene spirituality**

In **Part 4** we looked at the Parable of the Ten Maidens (Mt 25:1-13), which I described as “enkratite.” It has a number of symbols that would have been understandable only to an “in” group (bridegroom, maidens, midnight, oil, lamp). As it stands, the parable conforms neither to Jewish nor to gentile customs and its allegorical nature is patent. This parable could not have been spoken by the prophet—it is, rather, a Natsarene theological elaboration *based on* the teachings of the prophet.

The appearance of a bridegroom at midnight and his association (read: marriage) with maidens is the theology of the bridal chamber, a

theology particularly associated with Valentinian gnosis (II CE). The Gospel of Philip is a Valentinian work where we read: “The Lord did everything in a mystery, a baptism, and a chrism, and a eucharist, and a redemption, and a bridal chamber” (Ph 67). In the same gospel we read that “The Nazarene is he who reveals what is hidden” (56), and also “Nazara is the truth. The Nazarene, then, is the truth” (62). This understanding of the terms “Nazara” and “Nazarene” conflicts with the association of Jesus with the settlement of Nazareth (II CE). On the other hand, it supports the view that “Jesus of Nazara” (the earliest literary form of the town’s name)<sup>9</sup> may originally have signified “Jesus of Truth.”

In the bridal chamber, the groom obviously unites with his bride. Generally this signifies a sexual union, yet encratism is violently anti-sexual: it erases gender difference and endorses sexual continence, *egkrateia*. As intimated in Post 4, religious encratism seeks to replace pleasure with understanding. This is based on the view that the two are incompatible and, hence, one must choose. That choice is the gnostic *krisis*.

In a gnostic encratite context, the “bridal chamber” is purely metaphorical. It has nothing at all to do with sexual union. Quite the contrary: it has to do with the union of the disciple (the bride, virgin, maiden, young man) with gnosis (the groom).

In the Parable of the Ten Maidens, those maidens (disciples) who had no oil in their lamps were not prepared for the acquisition of the groom (gnosis). In other words, they “missed” the wedding feast for they were unworthy to themselves become his brides. The oil and the lamps evidently signify those attributes which are required to attain gnosis: chastity, effort, and perseverance.

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<sup>9</sup> “Nazara” is in the putative Q source at Lk 4:16 (cf. Mt 4:13).

Thus it is that sexual imagery actually conveys the opposite. This is the key to finding the “hidden” meaning in encratite works. It is the reason that orthodoxy has been unable to penetrate such works and has continually misunderstood them, even to the point of caricaturing gnostic groups as “libertine.” Outsiders were misled by the overt sexual imagery. It is clear that encratite groups relished their hidden knowledge and did not mind being misunderstood by outsiders.

## **Secret Mark**

We are now able to appreciate the theological context behind the **Secret Gospel of Mark**, a passage discovered in 1973 by Morton Smith. I have no doubts at all that the document is authentic—it fits in perfectly with the encratite spirituality that we have been discussing. The Greek text is part of a previously lost letter of Clement of Alexandria. It reads as follows:

And they come into Bethany. And a certain woman whose brother had died was there. And, coming, she prostrated herself before Jesus and says to him, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me.’ But the disciples rebuked her. And Jesus, being angered, went off with her into the garden where the tomb was, and straightway a great cry was heard from the tomb. And going near Jesus rolled away the stone from the door of the tomb. And straightway, going in where the youth was, he stretched forth his hand and raised him, seizing his hand. But the youth, looking upon him, loved him and began to beseech him that he might be with him. And going out of the tomb they came into the house of the youth, for he was rich. And after six days Jesus told him what to do and in the evening the youth comes to him, wearing a linen cloth over his naked body. And he remained with him that night, for Jesus taught him the mystery of the kingdom of God. And thence, arising, he returned to the other side of the Jordan.

A second short excerpt is to be inserted, according to Clement, in Mark 10:46:

And the sister of the youth whom Jesus loved and his mother and Salome were there, and Jesus did not receive them.

In the main passage of the Secret Gospel we read of a “youth” (*neaniskos*) whom Jesus “raises from the dead.” In gnostic-encratite symbolism, the youth is the equivalent of the maiden in Matthew’s parable, i.e., the disciple/gnostic aspirant. “Jesus” is a symbol for gnosis, i.e., for the “Truth” as the Gospel of Philip defines Jesus of “Nazara” (see above). It is no surprise that nuptial imagery would be chosen to express the acquisition of gnosis, for such acquisition was, for the gnostic, the most desirable as well as the most intimate of all life events—one which brings happiness ever after. I also have no doubt that the gnostics knew they were misleading outsiders with their hidden symbolism. They viewed those outsiders as crass materialists who could not appreciate the higher spirituality of “hidden gnosis.”

Of course, the youth “loves” Jesus—for he loves gnosis/Truth. He will “beseech [Jesus] that he might be with him.” Indeed, he wishes to be with Jesus [gnosis] forevermore. The “six days” that Jesus stays with the youth is a symbolic timespan which leads up to the perfect number seven. The Jews, of course, venerate the seventh day. So did the Therapeutae described by Philo,<sup>10</sup> and the next post in this series will discuss parallels between the Therapeutae and Natsarene spirituality. The “linen cloth” (*sindon*) is also an encratite symbol. It represents the state of ignorance that must be abandoned when acquiring gnosis, symbolized by the “robe” (*stolê*). All these are technical terms in Natsarene spirituality: youth, maiden/virgin, linen cloth, robe, lamp, oil, wedding, groom, etc.

Once we are familiar with the encratite worldview, we readily perceive its symbols surviving in the canonical writings. The Parable of the Ten Maidens has been discussed, but many other passages echo Natsarene religion and form a backdrop to the gospels, e.g.:

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<sup>10</sup> Philo, *De Vita Contemplativa* 36.

And a young man [*neaniskos*] followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth [*sindon*] about his body; and they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked. (Mk 14:51-52)

Leaving the linen cloth behind is symbolic for leaving the old self of ignorance behind. Mark describes this as having occurred before the crucifixion/resurrection, which suggests that the evangelist viewed the crucifixion/resurrection as the critical events in salvation—precisely as the Pauline kerygma maintains. This is an indication that the Marcan evangelist is midway between Nazoreanism and Paulinism.

And having entered the tomb, they saw a young man [*neaniskos*] sitting on the right, clothed with a white robe [*stolê*], and they were greatly amazed. And he said to them, “Do not be amazed; you seek Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here... (Mk 16:5-6)

Of course, “risen” in a gnostic context meant “came to gnosis.” Familiarity with Natsarene/encratite symbolism now allows one to make several equivalences which were certainly pre-Christian: baptism = resurrection = marriage = acquiring gnosis.

The Natsarenes employed the imagery of detested sexuality/sensuality to convey their most cherished ideals. One can be sure they were quite aware of the acute irony of this veiled theological symbolism. It may also be mentioned that a critical element in their “marriage feast” was the kiss. It symbolized the passage of gnosis through teaching, from master to pupil, i.e., mouth to mouth. The kiss is a euphemism for “imparting/learning gnosis, becoming wise.” When Jesus kisses Mary Magdalene on the mouth (Gospel of Philip 63) it is by no means sexual—except to outsiders.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “Jamesian” works are particularly endowed with this Natsarene theology of the kiss, also known as the “door” or “gate.” Cf. The Apocryphon of James, The First Apocalypse of James, The Second Apocalypse of James, all in the Nag Hammadi library.

## Part 7

### ***“Watching” and “being awake”***

We have seen that the spirituality which preceded and led up to Christianity (what I call “Natsarene” spirituality) was marked by two broad characteristics—gnosticism and encratism. The former has reference to the goal of finding gnosis. The latter characterizes the way to the goal: through continence and a general repudiation of pleasure. The gnostic considered that no one can “serve two masters,” and recognized that a fundamental decision occurs in life, one between pleasure and understanding. **We have looked** at the Parable of the Ten Maidens (Mt 25:1-14), touched upon Secret Mark, and noted the broad popularity of encratism in early Christianity, evident in the non-canonical Acts of the Apostles and in many gnostic writings from the Nag Hammadi Library. One hallmark of encratism is that sexual imagery is used to convey gnostic events and dynamics: the wedding feast, the bridegroom, the kiss, etc. This symbolism baffled unsympathetic outsiders in the Church who were happy to conclude that gnostics were degenerate libertines.

The Therapeutae, famously described by Philo in *De Vita Contemplativa* (and nowhere else) share many elements of the Natsarene spirituality that I’ve described. Philo distinguishes the Therapeutae from the Essenes by saying that while the Essenes are “practical” the Therapeutae are “contemplative.” Philo speculates that they may be called “Therapeutae” due to their healing powers, but he is emphatic that those powers are “to heal souls” while the Essenes were known as healers of the body. Thus he makes a distinction between two groups of “healers.”

## **“Watching” and “being awake”**

Philo notes that “the Therapeutic sect of mankind, being continually taught to see *without interruption*, may well aim at obtaining a sight of the living God” (11, emphasis added). “To see without interruption” = “be awake, watchful.” This is no casual allusion but certainly has deep roots in religion both East and West, as will presently be shown. To obtain “a sight of the living God” is the Gnostic ascent. Note that in Judaism, ever since the time of the early prophets, that sight has been anathematized and considered fatal to any human being. This is one indication of how Judaism quite early repudiated gnosticism and the gnostic ascent.

In section (6) of his treatment of the Therapeutae, Philo characterizes demigods as “ridiculous.” For how, he goes on, “can the same man be both mortal and immortal?” This seems to be a swipe at those Enochian Watchers who had fallen (Gen 6:1-8; 1 Enoch 6-7). Philo writes of demigods who are...

full of youthful intemperance... as if they, being madly in love with mortal women, had connected themselves with them, while we know gods to be free from all participation in and from all influence of passion, and completely happy.



The Fallen Watchers atop Mt. Hermon ("Paradise Lost" by Gustave Doré)

Here we witness Philo's encratite leanings, in that the gods are "free from all participation in and from all influence of passion, and completely happy." So, being free from passion = being divine = "watching." When the angelic Watchers "fell" they stopped being "watchful/awake," they engaged in sexual intercourse with women,

and they spawned the odious giants (nephilim) who then terrorized the world:

These (giants) consumed the produce of all the people until the people detested feeding them. So the giants turned against (the people) in order to eat them. Then they began to sin against the birds, wild beasts, reptiles, and fish [the vegetarian ideal]. Then their flesh was devoured the one by the other, and they drank blood. And then the earth brought forth an accusation against the oppressors. (1 Enoch 7)

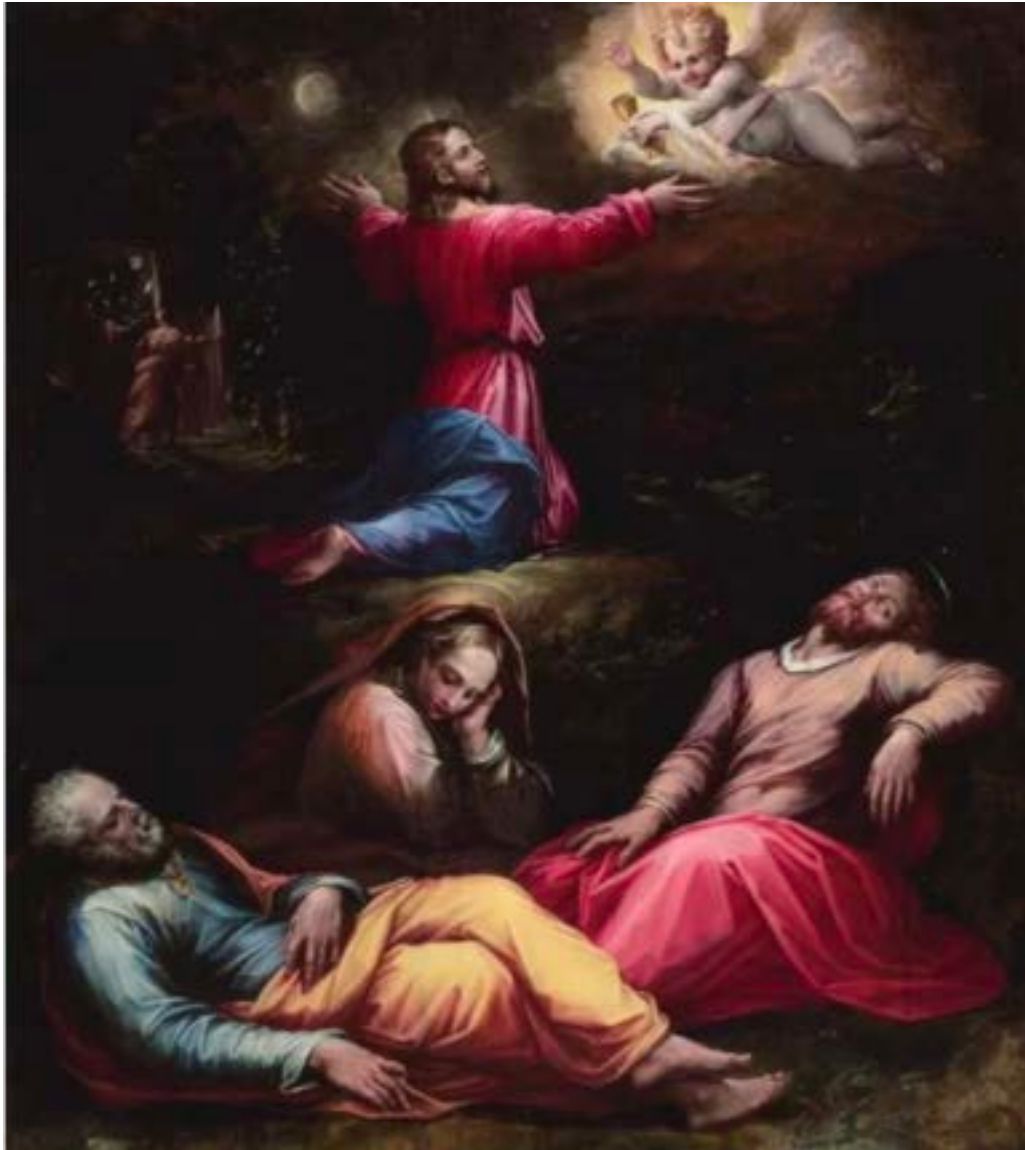
Prior posts in this series have explored the Semitic root n-ts-r with its semantic fields of “watch, guard, keep **secret**” (BDB 665-66). The idea of “watching” is often associated with “staying awake” (cf. Mk 13:33-37; 14:37-41, below). This concept remarkably echoes Buddhism—*Bodhi* (from which the epithet *Buddha*) means “unsleeping, understanding, awake”:

Derived from the root budh, ‘to wake,’ [Buddha] means one who knows in the sense of having become one with the highest objects of knowledge, Supreme Truth. (C. Humphreys, *Popular Dictionary of Buddhism* 48-49.)

“Here someone—in things never heard before—understands by himself the truth and therein attains omniscience and mastery in the powers. Such a one is called a universal Awakened One [Buddha], an Enlightened One.” (Puggalapannatti 29)

Buddhism is the quintessential gnostic-encratite religion. It preceded Christianity by over five centuries. In Buddhism the goal is to achieve understanding of life while renouncing pleasure. Buddhism reached the West most obviously in the mid third century BCE, when the Indian emperor **Ashoka the Great sent missionaries** (no doubt with considerable pomp) to Emperor Ptolemy II in Alexandria as well as to other Western cities. Ptolemy II, incidentally, was a great patron of the Alexandria library. It is virtually certain that Buddhist sutras were in that library and available to cognoscenti from c. 250 BCE onwards. This significant communication between East and West followed the

composition of the Septuagint yet preceded the writing of the Dead Sea Scriptures and the incipience of the Therapeutae.



The Garden of Gethsemane by Vasari

In the New Testament, of course, we also find eloquent evidence for the theology of “watching” in the sense of being “unsleeping, awake, understanding” (*Bodhi*). We have looked at the Parable of the Ten Maidens (Mt 25:1 ff)—those maidens who had sufficient “oil” in their lamps were able to watch. Thus, they were present and awake (= alert,

knowing, full of gnosis) when the “bridegroom” arrived at the time least expected, that is, at midnight:

“Watch therefore, for you do not know when the master of the house will come—in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning—lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch.” (Mk 13:35-37).

And they went to a place which was called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here, while I pray.” And he took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be greatly distressed and troubled. And he said to them, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” ... And he came and found them sleeping, and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to answer him. And he came the third time, and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?”... (Mk 14:32-42, selected)

It is evident that the above is an enactment through drama of a theological statement: one must watch, be awake. In gnostic terms, one must “have understanding, gnosis.” However, the Pauline Christians who constructed this fictive scene obscured the original gnostic message which, in fact, lies at the heart of Natsarene religion. They reduced the element of “watching” and of possessing gnosis to the banal element of being physically awake/asleep. Originally, being awake was a metaphor for attaining something deeper, namely, *gnosis*. In the transition from Nazoreanism to Paulinism, however, the deeper gnostic element has been lost—deliberately.

## Part 8

### ***Early Buddhist influence on the West***



Emperor Ashoka Maurya

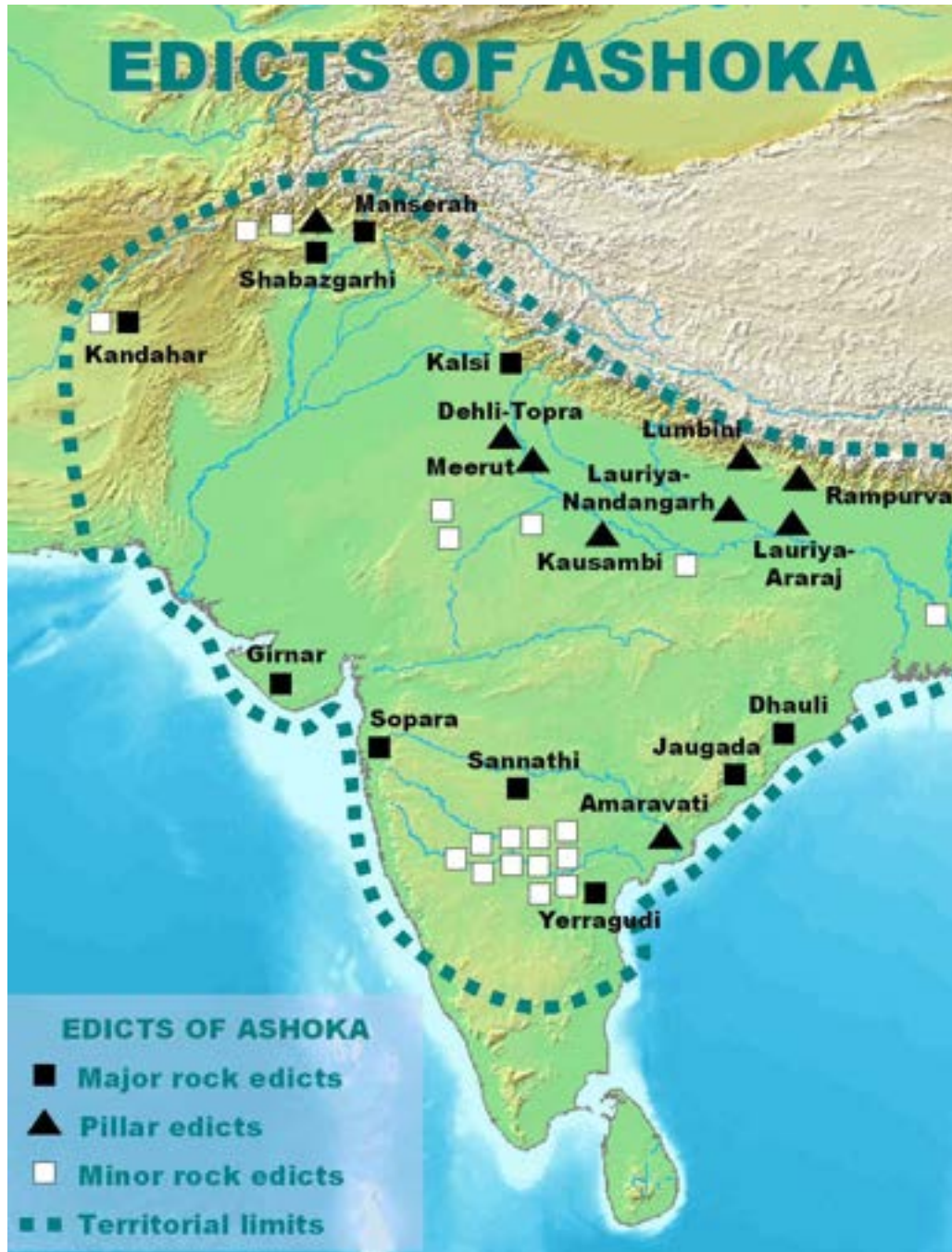
It is hardly acknowledged by Christian scholarship that Buddhism potentially exercised considerable influence in the Western world as early as the third century BCE. In the middle of that century, Ashoka (r. 269-232 BCE)—the Mauryan “Emperor of Emperors” who conquered most of the Indian subcontinent—sent a Buddhist missionary contingent to Alexandria at the official request of the curious and enterprising emperor Ptolemy II of Egypt (r. 283-246 BCE)—the same

emperor who founded the great Library of Alexandria (eventually destroyed, **probably by Christians** in 391 or 415 CE).

Both Ashoka and Ptolemy II were extraordinary figures. After a particularly bloody victory against the Kalingas, **Ashoka Maurya** converted to Buddhism and became a pacifist. Surrounded by corpses after the battle, walking through the Kalinga capital, he famously uttered:

What have I done? If this is victory, what then is defeat? If this is justice, what then is injustice? If this is gallantry, what then is cruelty? Is it valorous to kill innocent children and women? Did I do this to extend the empire and prosperity—or merely to destroy the other's kingdom and splendor? Here someone has lost her husband, here someone a father, here someone a child, here someone an unborn infant... Aiiii!  
What have I to do with this endless debris of corpses?

Ashoka became a devout Buddhist—the first pan-Indian emperor to convert to the religion. Thenceforth, he “conquered by the *dharma*” (Buddhist teachings) rather than by the sword—as he writes in one of his famous **rock edicts** scattered throughout his vast empire, which encompassed India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. With the zeal of the true convert, Ashoka sent Buddhist missionaries far and wide. He built residences for Buddhist monks all over South and Central Asia, sent his only daughter Sanghamitra and son Mahindra to spread Buddhism to Sri Lanka (then known as Tamraparni), and sent many prominent Buddhist monks (bhikshus) all over the known world—including to the West.



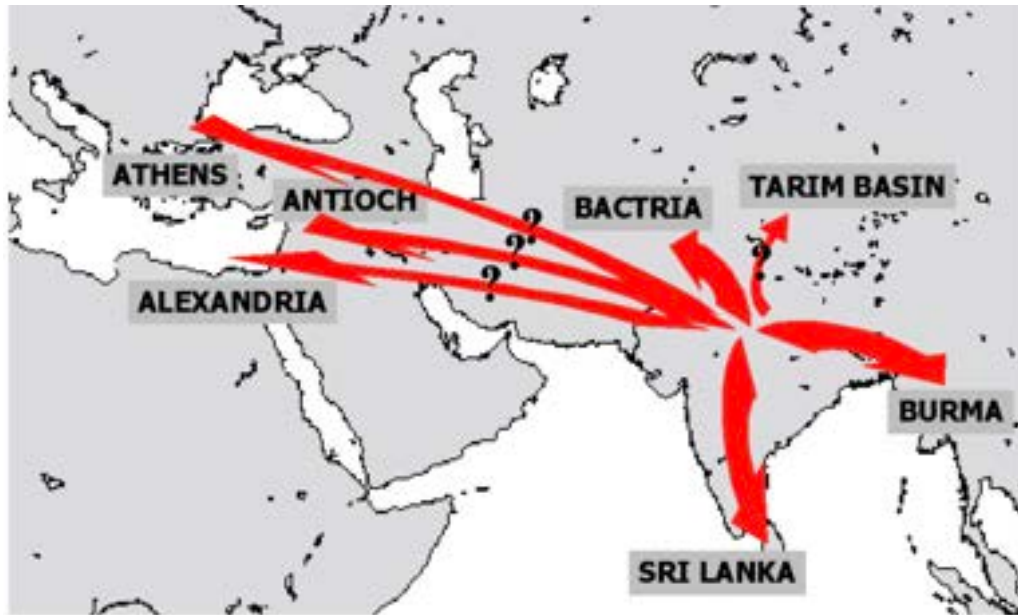
In his second rock edict, Ashoka writes that he sent missionaries to “where the Greek king Antiochos rules, and among the kings who are neighbors of Antiochos.” In his fourteenth rock edict, he writes:

Now it is conquest by Dharma that Beloved-of-the-Gods [= Ashoka] considers to be the best conquest. And it (conquest by Dharma) has been won here, on the borders, even six hundred yojanas away, where the Greek king Antiochos rules, beyond there where the four kings

named Ptolemy, Antigonos, Magas and Alexander rule, likewise in the south among the Cholas, the Pandyas, and as far as Tamraparni. Here in the king's domain among the Greeks, the Kambojas, the Nabhakas, the Nabhapamkites, the Bhojas, the Pitinikas, the Andhras and the Palidas, everywhere people are following Beloved-of-the-Gods' instructions in Dharma. Even where Beloved-of-the-Gods' envoys have not been, these people too, having heard of the practice of Dharma and the ordinances and instructions in Dharma given by Beloved-of-the-Gods, are following it and will continue to do so. This conquest has been won everywhere, and it gives great joy – the joy which only conquest by Dharma can give.

The Hellenist Egyptian monarch Ptolemy Philadelphus II was Ashoka's contemporary. He maintained a splendid court in Alexandria, magnificent, dissolute, yet also intellectual, compared by some with the Versailles of Louis XIV. Philadelphus had numerous concubines and mistresses, married his full sister, prized pomp and splendor, and even had exotic animals from far off lands sent to Alexandria. His Grand Processions formed some of the most ostentatious spectacles the world has ever seen, with as many as eight pairs of elephants, lions, leopards, panthers, camels, antelopes, wild asses, ostriches, bears, giraffes, and rhinoceros'. Philadelphus instigated the Library of Alexandria or, at least, vastly expanded it to include all the world's literary treasures. He routinely pilfered visiting ships for foreign books (a special section of the Library was devoted to "Books of the Ships"), sometimes paying enormous sums for rare material. The head librarians of the Alexandria Library themselves are known by name:

- Zenodotus (early 3rd century BC)
- Callimachus, (early 3rd century BC), the first bibliographer and developer of the first library catalog.
- Apollonius of Rhodes (mid-3rd century BC)
- Eratosthenes (late 3rd century BC), author of the lost "Geographica" who collated all known knowledge of India
- Aristophanes of Byzantium (early 2nd century BC)
- Aristarchus of Samothrace (late 2nd century BC).



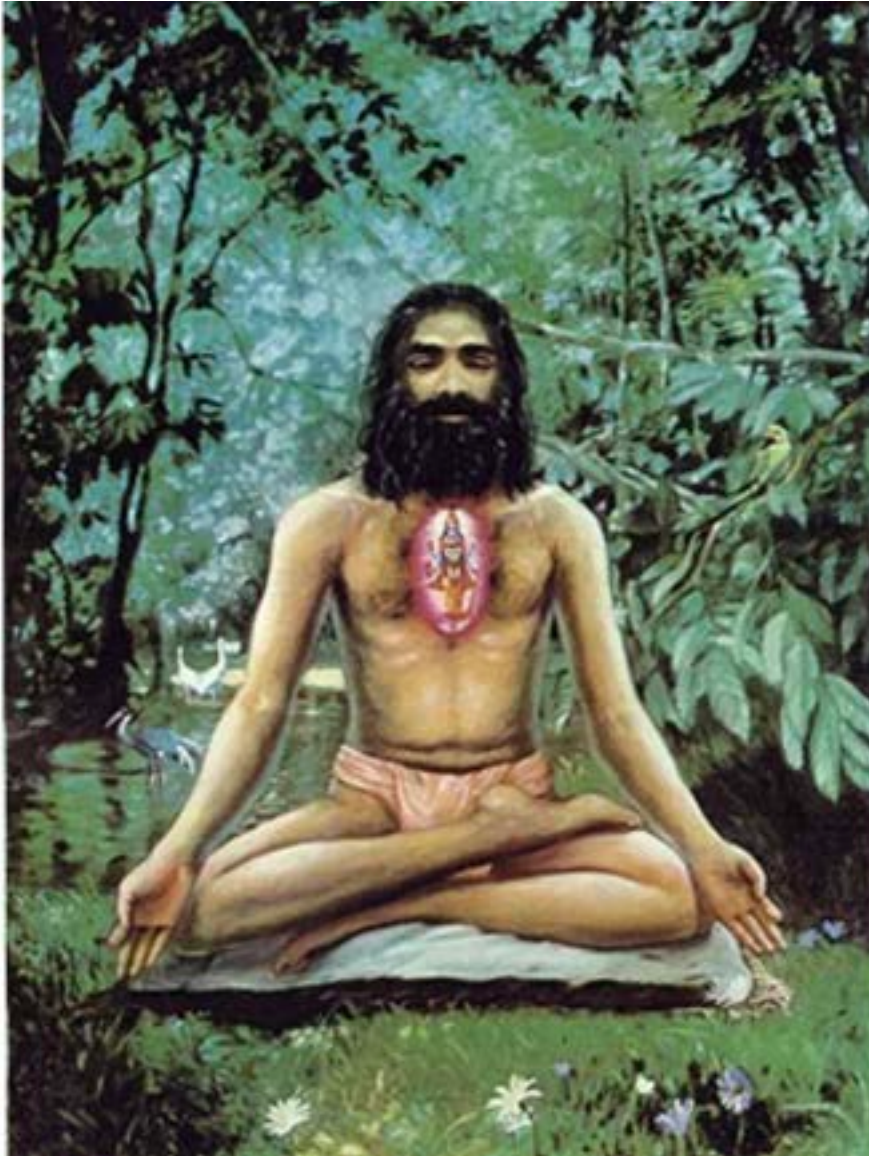
Philadelphus is known to have sent an emissary to the Ashokan court, a certain Dionysus. In return, **the emperor Ashoka returned a full complement of Buddhist monks to Alexandria**, trained renunciants who had memorized the more important Buddhist sutras (discourses), together with palm-leaf copies of seminal Buddhist texts. One can only imagine the amazement of the dissolute Alexandrian court when the severe, bald-headed monks from India filed into the royal presence, aloof and dispassionate, clad in saffron-colored robes, bearing the precious manuscripts of the Buddha, manuscripts which they handed over to Philadelphus and which he then commanded to be immediately translated and enshrined with care in the Library of Alexandria.

This first remarkable religious encounter between East with West occurred between 269 and 246 BCE—probably towards the middle of the century. Its importance for the western world cannot be overstated:

“Future historians will consider the meeting of Buddhism and Christianity at their deepest levels as the most important single event [in world history].” –Arnold Toynbee

Regarding asceticism, Sir Flinders Petrie has written: "It was entirely foreign to the Western Ideals, yet it took root quickly after Ashoka's mission." (*The Status of the Jews in Egypt*, London, 1939:159). Indeed, Buddhism is the oldest monastic order in the world, and Christian monasticism is almost certainly a borrowing from the East.

We have other examples of early borrowings from India. The Greek noun *sindôn* refers to "a fine Indian cloth, muslin" (Liddell-Scott), that is, to fabric imported from India ("Sind". Cf. Isa 3:23, where *sadinim* means "fine linens"). The Greek word occurs six times in the New Testament, most interestingly at Mk 14:51-52, where the naked young man (*neaniskos*) flees from the Garden of Gethsemane leaving his *sindôn*—and Jesus—behind.



“One often wonders whether the ubiquitous half-naked Indian gymnosophist whom the reader encounters in classical Greek literature as an ascetic ideal has anything to do with the beginnings of the Greek ideal of chastity and vegetarianism” ...

Strabo (c. 62 BC - 21 AD) gives information of a flourishing trade between Egypt and India in the first century BC during the Roman rule. He himself accompanied one such trade trip down the Nile to Ethiopia, where goods were transferred overland to Myos Hormos on the Red Sea. About this time Alexandrian merchants used to send about 120 ships to India.”(Z. Thundy, Buddha and Christ, 221, 238).

We have some indications that Buddhist monks were ensconced on the fringes of the Red Sea in BCE times. “Some archaeological

evidence seems to support the view that a colony of Indians existed at Memphis as early as 200 BC" (Thundy 243). Certainly, Indians are found in Egypt in 1 CE, if we are to believe testimony attributed by Philostratus to Appolonius of Tyana (15?-100? CE), who allegedly visited them.

Some have opined that the Therapeutae of Philo "were Indian Buddhists of the Theravada group which 'embraced the speculative life' or emphasized salvation through gnosis" (Thundy 244). According to Philo's account, this group followed a monastic lifestyle devoted to study, contemplation, celibacy, fasting, and vegetarianism (*De Vita Contemplativa*). Philo claimed that Therapeutae were to be found "in many parts of the world... They are, however, in the greatest abundance in Egypt."

## **The Natsarene religion as the first stage of Christianity**

In this series of posts we have investigated what I call "the Natsarene religion" ("Nazoreanism"), an aspect of Christian origins which is generally unknown—or ignored. The height of irony is that the true origins of Christianity have long been rejected by Christians themselves. It is as if a person rejects his own youth, or his ancestors... The result is that to be a Christian has little to do with Jesus and much to do with Paul, little to do with understanding and much to do with faith, little to do with our potential and much to do with God's grace. So, the religion has moved far, far away from its roots which—as posts on this site show—were gnostic and world-denying.

The first stage of Christianity, Nazoreanism existed before Jesus of Nazareth came on the scene. As late as the Gospel of Mark, the "Nazarene" was not a resident of the mythical settlement of Nazareth, but was a holy person, one who "kept [*natsar*] secret gnosis." When we strip away the false Pauline overlay of Christianity—the *kerygma* or "proclamation"—we find a core teaching of some 150 sayings and

parables which, I've suggested, delimit Nazoreanism and go back to a founding prophet.

Though no divine man "Jesus" existed, it is clear to me and to a few others that some prophet was indeed responsible for the birth of Christianity. Scholarship (both within and outside the guild) is systematically peeling away the layers of the onion to reveal that remarkable personality who, it increasingly seems, lived in the early part of the first century BCE, that is, about one century before the traditional "Jesus."

What this means is that everything ordinarily associated with Christianity is 'late.' Christianity has a pre-history. There were pre-Christians, and they were called in Semitic *Natsraia*, in Greek *Nazarenoi/Nazoraioi*, in English *Nazarenes*. The Church made all these words derivative of the new settlement of "Nazareth" (Mt 2:23) and, in so doing, effected a sleight of hand. This was also a betrayal, for in so doing the Christian tradition turned it back on the gnostic religion which gave it birth.

The emergent Church also turned its back on the founding prophet. It suppressed his biography and even his name, supplanting these with the far more commanding biographies which we read in the canonical gospels, and with the epithets "Jesus of Nazareth," "Christ Jesus," and "our lord and savior Jesus Christ." The Christian scriptures themselves witness to the schism caused by this breaking away, as "Hellenists" separated from "Hebrews," and as believers in (the newly invented) Jesus Christ separated from those who were quite aware that such a character never walked the face of this earth.

I discuss the core body of logia [here](#). When one examines that limited body of sayings, it soon becomes clear that it reflects a worldview in tension with Hellenism as well as with normative Judaism. It is foreign, and the 'god' it proclaims is a foreign god who has little to do with the world. At the same time, the core teachings possess extensive

parallels with Buddhism, a philosophy which focuses on transcending the world.

The view that Buddhism and Christianity share links (historical and/or doctrinal) has been known for some time yet viewed with a jaundiced eye in the West, and even held anathema in traditional circles. That is understandable, for such a view implies that Christianity is not unique but has a 'relative.' This in turn implies that Jesus Christ was not the *unique* Son of God... The researcher who views Buddhism and Christianity synoptically is *persona non grata*, for a global view undermines the entire Pauline *keryma* and Christianity as we know it.

Nevertheless, significant links between Buddhism and Christianity have been well nigh obvious for a long time. Over the years, they have been documented in a number of scholarly books and articles more or less ignored by biblicists—as is the entire field of comparative religion. An extensive literature exists on the subject and I won't treat that bibliography here, but refer the reader to signal works in the field, such as Albert Edmunds' *Buddhist and Christian Gospels* (1914), Roy Amore's *Two Masters, One Message* (1978), my own ***Buddhist and Christian Parallels: Compiled from the Earliest Scriptures*** (2004), and Marcus Borg's less extensive *Jesus and Buddha: The Parallel Sayings* (2007).

—René Salm