

The Origins of Christianity

I. Gospels as Historical Source

A. Skeptical Approach

1. Hermann Reimarus (1694–1768), *Von dem Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger*, 1778
2. David Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874), *Das Leben Jesu*, 1835
3. Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 1906

B. Synoptic Problem

1. Q = *Quelle* (oral tradition of Jesus' sayings)
2. Stemmata for relationship of Synoptic Gospels

C. Relationship of Other Early Texts to New Testament Texts

1. Nag Hammadi
 - a. Gnostic Gospels
 - b. Hypostasis of the Archons
2. Secret Gospel of Mark
 - a. Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel According to Mark*, 1973
 - b. Clement, Archbishop of Alexandria (d. 215)

D. Recent Interpretations

1. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, 1974
2. Thomas Sheehan, *The First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity*, 1986
3. Wilhelm Reich, *The Murder of Christ*, 1953
4. Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician*, 1978
 - a. Carpocratians
 - b. Apollonius of Tyana (d. 96 A.D.?)
5. Dead Sea Scrolls

II. Textual Criticism of the New Testament

A. General Principles

1. a shorter reading is preferred to a longer reading
2. a more difficult reading is preferred to a smoother reading
3. the original may have contained mistakes
4. common readings in copies from diverse geographical areas are more likely to have been in the original than a reading common in copies from only one area
5. a stemma (genealogical relationship of the copies of a text) can be constructed on the basis of simple variants and then use to help determine the primacy of more complex variants

B. Specific Problems

III. Reasons for Christianity's Success

A. Composite Character

1. Judaism (Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots)
 - a. Dead Sea Scrolls
 - (1) International Team
 - (2) Edmund Wilson
 - (3) John Strugnell
 - (4) Lawrence Schiffman
 - (5) Norman Golb
 - (6) Robert Eisenman
 - b. Qumran—Roman fortress? Monastic community? Country villa?
2. Zoroastrianism (< Zoroaster, ca. 628 B.C.–ca. 551 B.C.)
3. Manichaeism (< Mani, 216–276 A.D.)
4. Stoicism
5. Mithraism
6. Greek Philosophy (esp. Neoplatonism)
7. Gnosticism (Iadalbaōth)

B. Appeal to Various Groups

1. The Poor and Downtrodden—"My kingdom is not of this world"
2. Appeal to Middle-Class Young Professionals of the Roman Empire?—Paul (Saul of Tarsus)—You don't have to be Jewish to become a Christian

Recommended Reading:

- A. Powell Davies, *The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, New York, New American Library, 1956.
- Robert Eisenman, *James the Just in the Habakkuk Peshet*, Leiden, 1986.
- Robert Eisenman, *Maccabees, Zadokites, Christians and Qumran*, Leiden, 1983.
- William R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis*, New York, 1964.
- Norman Golb, "The Dead Sea Scrolls," *American Scholar*, spring 1989, pp. 177–207.
- Burton Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins*, New York, HarperCollins, 1993.
- Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.
- Morton Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel According to Mark*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, , 1973.
- Morton Smith, *The Secret Gospel: The Discovery and Interpretation of the Secret Gospel According to Mark*, Clearlake CA, 1982.
- Edmund Wilson, *The Scrolls from the Dead Sea*, London, 1955.