

JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS  
SUPPLEMENT SERIES

JOURNAL FOR THE STUDY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT  
SUPPLEMENT SERIES

275

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# Apocalypticism, Anti-Semitism and the Historical Jesus

Subtexts in Criticism

Edited by  
John S. Kloppenborg

with

John W. Marshall

(2005)

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T & T CLARK INTERNATIONAL  
A Continuum imprint  
LONDON • NEW YORK

may vehemently dislike the *implications* of Paula Fredriksen's Jesus and quite like the *implications* of Burton Mack's Jesus.<sup>80</sup> The trick for me as a scholar, however, is to keep my mind open to Fredriksen's arguments, and their potential strengths, as well as Mack's arguments, and their potential weaknesses. And should I conclude that I do, on scholarly grounds, think that Mack is more correct than Fredriksen, my reasons for this conclusion should be limited as much as possible to the cogency of their arguments.

Naïve though it may be, I offer here a plea for a certain scholarly ethic, one which has been characterized by Bruce Lincoln as 'mythology with footnotes'.<sup>81</sup> As scholars, we are still human beings, and we in the humanities especially engage in the generation of human meaning, in the production of worldviews, in the *pensée sauvage* that organizes the universe around us. We are thus mythmakers ourselves even in our analysis of myth. In our reproductions of the historical Jesus, we are doing essentially the same thing that the gospel writers did, whether or not we are Christians or even attracted to the figure of Jesus: we are projecting our own beliefs onto a story (history) and so using narrative (of a sort) to create a myth. The responsibility that sets scholars apart from the more usual (especially religious) practitioners of myth-making is the care that we must take to *document* our claims, such that someday perhaps those claims may survive the inevitable desuetude of the myths they were designed to sustain.

80. Note my stress here on my like or dislike for the *implications* of these figures, and not on my like or dislike of the figures themselves. It has become fashionable in our field to assume that we will project the features we *like* onto the objects of our study: we will make Jesus or Paul or the Q people into replicas of ourselves. This strikes me as a presumptuous and simplistic notion of how bias works in our field. For some of us, there is simply no investment in Jesus, and no need to make him, in particular, 'like us'. Nor do I imagine that the Jesus of E.P. Sanders, for example, actually reflects his own behavior (at least, I hope not!). The point is rather in the way that the conceptualizations behind constructions of Jesus accord, or fail to accord, to our own worldviews, regardless of whether Jesus himself be presented as attractive or unattractive.

81. Bruce Lincoln, *Theorizing Myth: Narrative, Ideology, and Scholarship* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 209; cf. 207–16.

COMPASSION IS TO PURITY AS FISH IS TO BICYCLE  
AND OTHER REFLECTIONS ON CONSTRUCTIONS OF 'JUDAISM' IN  
CURRENT WORK ON THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Paula Fredriksen

Boston University

Jesus of Nazareth was a Jew. This seemingly unremarkable observation has been the starting-point for all serious scholarly work in this last cycle of historical Jesus research, the so-called 'Third Quest'. Earlier scholarship and much more distant treatises of ancient Christology have of course made the same affirmation. What distinguishes the claim in its current form is the effort that modern scholars have made to link their quest for the historical Jesus to an equally vigorous quest for his historical context, late Second Temple Judaism. The scholarly definition of ancient Judaism frames and facilitates the scholar's reconstruction of Jesus.

However, this procedure, common to current questers, has yielded no consensus in results. Instead, the last quarter-century has witnessed a proliferation of contesting historical reconstructions both of Jesus of Nazareth and of his native historical context. We can agree neither on the content of Jesus' message nor on the goals of his mission. Was Jesus an apocalyptic teacher, or not? Was his mission intended to challenge or reform some significant practices and beliefs of his people — indeed, perhaps, to reject some? Did his teaching represent something that was in some way radically new, which the majority of his compatriots (both before his execution and after) then rejected?

Over these ostensibly historical questions a host of others hover. What does it mean to assert that Jesus prophesied that the Kingdom of God was about to occur or arrive, given that he was so manifestly wrong? Is an apocalyptic Jesus, in short, a theologically usable Jesus? Is a reformist or rebellious Jesus an anti-Jewish Jesus? And if reform and radical critique were not his program, then what? Is a (normatively) Jewish Jesus a theologically usable Jesus? And do reconstructions of Jesus as reformer or critic succor Christian anti-Judaism and Western anti-Semitism?

These last are second-order questions. Yet they seem to arise with urgency in our current scholarly context. Too often, they shape or seem to

shape the first-order questions by which we direct our research. The goal of this volume is to give several of us, who stand on different sides of debate about Jesus, Judaism, and apocalyptic, a chance to consider critically the relation of these second-order questions to our primary, historical ones. Today, in brief, our question is: What is *at stake* in current reconstructions of Jesus?

I propose to respond by taking a seemingly circuitous route. Let's leave modern New Testament scholarship for the moment, and drop in somewhere else: the ancient Mediterranean.

## I

Linguistically, geographically, sociologically, early Christianity developed in two distinct Mediterranean contexts. Jesus himself lived and moved in the overwhelmingly Jewish environment of Galilee and Judea. His spoken language was most probably Aramaic, his biblical tradition (whether written or, more likely, oral) Aramaic or Hebrew, his culture primarily that of villages. The earliest texts through which we know about Jesus and the movement that begins in the wake of his mission are, of course, in Greek. Their provenance is the Eastern Mediterranean. Their social environment is (probably) the mixed Jewish and pagan milieu of diaspora synagogues in the Graeco-Roman city. Their biblical tradition is written, and Greek (the LXX).

Despite their differences, however, much unites the early Jesus movement in both its matrices – 'home' (Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, the Temple) and abroad (Greek-speaking Jewish communities in the Diaspora) – with ancient Mediterranean culture in general, and with what we think of as 'religious' culture in particular. To present this common cultural context, I offer two egregious generalizations:

*In antiquity, gods ran in the blood.*

*In antiquity, all monotheists were polytheists.*

To divine/human hematology first. Ancient gods lived with humans in two different ways. First, gods attached to particular places, whether natural or man-made. Groves, grottos, mountains; cities, temples and, especially, altars: all these might be visited or inhabited by the god to whom they were sacred.<sup>1</sup> Gods tended to be emotionally invested in the precincts of their habitation, and they usually had distinct ideas about the etiquette they wanted observed when humans approached them there. What offerings, at what times, of what sorts, in what manner, by what sorts of

1. For a lively evocation of this context, see Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 11–261.

persons, prepared in what ways: Gods typically communicated this necessary information to their worshipers through various media (theophanies, prophetic inspiration, sacred texts, and dreams). Exodus through Deuteronomy, in the Bible, give us Jewish examples of this sort of communication; epigraphy and classical literature provide copious pagan examples.

Humans, in consequence, took care to safeguard the purity, sanctity, offerings and financial security of holy sites because it mattered to the god. And the god would know because, in a simple way, the god was there: gods 'lived' in their precincts, and especially around their altars. We catch a nice statement of this common ancient idea in the Gospel of Matthew, wherein Jesus observes that 'he who swears by the Temple [in Jerusalem], swears by it and by *him who dwells in it* – the god of Israel, who abides in his temple (Mt. 23.21; cf. similarly for Paul, Rom. 9.4).

But divinity attached to humanity in a more intimate way. For ancient people, gods really did run in the blood. Put differently: cult, as enacted and as imagined, defined ethnicity. It identified one's people or kinship group, the *genos*. Herodotus, in his *Histories*, exemplifies this way of thinking when he defines 'Greekness' (*to hellenikon*) in terms of shared blood (*homaimon*), language (*homoglōsson*), sanctuaries and cult (*theōn hidrumata koina kai thusiai*), and customs (*ēthea homotropa*, 8.144.2–3).<sup>2</sup> When distinguishing *Ioudaismos* against *Hellenismos*, the author of 2 Maccabees employs a similar definition: his heroes defend 'the temple, the city, and the laws' (2 Macc. 2.21).<sup>3</sup> Colloquially, deities were known by the people who worshiped them: the god of Israel, the gods of Rome, the god at Delos, and so on (cf. Acts 19.28: 'Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!')

This family connection between gods and their humans was also expressed and imagined in terms of descent. Rulers – kings of Israel, or Alexander the Great, or Julius Caesar, for example – were deemed the 'sons' of their particular god.<sup>4</sup> So too might whole peoples be. Hellenistic and later Roman diplomats wove intricate webs of inter-city diplomacy through appeals to consanguinity inaugurated, in the distant past, by

2. See esp. the essays assembled in *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity* (ed. I. Malkin; Washington DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2001), many of which consider the quotation from Herodotus 8.

3. Daniel Boyarin, 'Semantic Differences; or, "Judaism"/"Christianity"', in *The Ways that Never Parted* (ed. A.H. Becker and A.Y. Reed; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2003), 65–83, esp. 67–71; though cf. the argument of Denise Buell, reference below, n. 6.

4. Alexander was descended from Heracles; Julius Caesar's house, through Aeneas, from Venus. These divine connections proved politically useful. For the Israelite king as God's son, see, e.g., 2 Sam. 7.14, Ps. 2.7, and frequently elsewhere. Later Christian exegesis referred these biblical passages to Jesus.

prolific deities.<sup>5</sup> Jewish scriptures frequently referred to Israelites as the sons of their god. The apostle Paul, repeating this biblical commonplace, distinguished his kinship group (*suggenos*) in terms reminiscent of Herodotus. To his *genos*, Paul said, through their god, belonged sonship (*huiothesia*), the presence of the deity (*doxa*, a reference as well to the altar and the Temple), customs ('covenant' *diathēkai* and 'law' *nomothesia*, that is, Torah), and cult (*latreia*, also a reference to the Temple, where the cult was performed; Rom. 9.4). Later in the second and third centuries, when non-Jewish Christian communities sought to formulate their identity, they too would fall back on this native Mediterranean language of divinity and blood-kinship or ethnicity.<sup>6</sup>

The embeddedness of the divine in antiquity, and consequently the normal multiplicity of gods, should help us to better understand what we call ancient 'religion', and what we call ancient 'monotheism'. The existence or non-existence of the gods of outsiders (much less 'belief' in them) was not at issue: other gods obviously existed, just as their peoples did. True for pagans, true for Jews, true for those former pagans who eventually became Christians of various sorts. Jewish biblical tradition clearly acknowledged the existence of these gods (e.g., Mic. 4.5, and frequently elsewhere). Hellenistic Jewish biblical traditions accommodated Greek gods more respectfully than did their Hebrew prototype, the Canaanite deities: Exod. 22.27, for example, 'Do not revile God', became 'Do not revile *tous theous*, the gods' (Exod. 22.28 LXX).

Jews of apocalyptic bent typically had more of an attitude. The End, they said, would bring with it the destruction of the images of these divine personalities worshiped by the nations. The End would establish globally what Jewish apocalypticists argued with particular fierceness: not that these other gods were not 'real', but rather that *their* god, the God of Israel, had precedence over the gods of the nations, and was the sole rightful object of human piety. Paul serves as a good case in point. Non-Jewish gods, he tells his Gentiles-in-Christ, are celestial light-weights, mere cosmic *stoicheia* (Gal. 4.8–9). They may have some power now; they might even frustrate the 'Christian mission' (an anachronistic term for this period, but let it stand, 2 Cor. 4.4); but Christ when he returned would destroy them (1 Cor. 15.24). 'There are many gods and many lords', Paul tells the Corinthians; but they must stop worshiping them and worship only the god of Israel through his Son (1 Cor. 8.5–6). Baptized into Christ, receiving the Spirit, Paul's ex-pagans would thus gain protection against *two* kinds of divine wrath: that of their insulted native deities (who can do no harm, Paul assures them, now that they are 'in Christ'), and that of

God the Father and of his Son (who have had enough of majority culture, e.g., Rom. 1.18–36; cf. 1 Thessalonians *passim*).

A century after Paul, ex-pagans of sufficient education brought the principles of *paideia* to bear on their construction of the Christian message as they saw it mediated through the LXX. This second wedding of *paideia* and the LXX – the first was performed by Alexandrian Jews in the centuries preceding our period – marks the birth of Christian theology. Christian intellectuals of various stripes, using philosophy and the constructs of Hellenistic science, systematized their culture's religious commonplace, namely, that divinity was on a gradient. The High God was the pinnacle of this gradient; but divinity flowed through the super-celestial and celestial intelligences residing in and structuring *kosmos*,<sup>7</sup> through the superhuman messengers (*angeloi*) who communicated between these different strata, to, finally, the special human beings who functioned as heaven's agents (not least among whom, to either side of 312 CE, the emperor). What distinguished Christian 'monotheism' specifically from Jewish monotheism, and from various forms, high-brow and low, of pagan monotheism,<sup>8</sup> was the introduction of the Son, himself 'another god' (*heteros theos*), identified both with the creator god of the LXX and with the historical personage of Jesus.<sup>9</sup> 'Monotheism' in antiquity defined divinity's pyramid architecture, not its absolute numbers. With the (Christian) Son of God or without, the Mediterranean cosmos was a thickly populated place.

## II

I could, of course, go on; but I fear that I have gone on for long enough. I embarked on our quick tour through Mediterranean culture in order to make some general observations about ethnicity, religious etiquette and ancient theology. With these points in mind, I would like to address the theme of this volume: Whence the urgency of questions about apocalypticism, anti-Judaism and theological significance in current work on the historical Jesus?

7. The architecture of the universe was ecumenical, as we see both in archaeological remains (such as the zodiac mosaics evident in pagan, Jewish and Christian buildings) and in texts. For a pagan statement of this cosmology: Sallustius, *Peri theōn kai kosmou* (ed. and trans. A.D. Nock; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926); Jewish: Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* (ed. and trans. F.H. Colson and G.H. Whitaker (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929–1962); Christian: Origen, *On First Principles* (trans. G.W. Butterworth; New York: Harper & Row, 1966; repr. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1990).

8. See the essays assembled in *Pagan Monotheism* (ed. P. Athanassiadi and M. Frede; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

9. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 56 on Jesus's identity as 'another god' and as the personality appearing in the theophanies of the LXX.

5. C.P. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), esp. ch. 6, on Lycians and Jews.

6. Denise Buell, 'Race and Universalism in Early Christianity', *J ECS* 10 (2002): 429–68.

Concerns about anti-Judaism arise for good reason in our work. For at least the past 16 centuries, Christianity has articulated its ideal views of itself by constructing 'Jews' and 'Judaism' to serve as its negative anti-type. This identity-building enterprise has had horrific social consequences, whether tolerating, sponsoring, encouraging, or actually causing violence against real Jews. On this score, the last century was the worse so far. And the new millennium is not off to a glorious start. In the current climate of Israeli/Palestinian belligerence, anti-Zionism has given respectable cover to anti-Semitism; Israeli policies have been criticized by invoking the blood libel and traditional charges of deicide; and a pop movie on Jesus' passion has extravagantly exploited anti-Jewish prejudices.<sup>10</sup> Who among us would want her or his scholarship to be usable in support of such things?

As authors, we have little or no control over how our work is read or used. And all our reconstructions, as William Arnal's essay makes clear, can be construed as supporting particular agendas, whether that be our intention or not. But as scholars, our choice in preferring one colleague's Jesus over another's can only be made in terms of our assessment of the coherence of his or her argument, its plausibility, its success in addressing problems in the evidence, and so on. I assume that each of us produces our respective reconstructions because we believe that we are doing the best, *historically*, that we can do.

I have presented my case for an apocalyptic Jesus, and I have criticized different construals of a non-apocalyptic Jesus, in several publications, and will not repeat my earlier arguments here.<sup>11</sup> I readily grant that a non-apocalyptic Jesus often presents a figure who is ethically more usable to us than is his apocalyptic counterpart. We are right, I think, to feel strongly about such issues as sexism, racism, colonialism, and economic oppression; and to deplore discrimination on the basis of sexual preference. But I do not think that Jesus need have worried about these issues as I conceive them in order to justify my own position on them. I'm a Massachusetts Democrat; he was not. My two points are, first, that arguments from utility (whether ethical or, as I'll explore below, theological) cannot settle

10. On Christology, the blood libel, and anti-Israel political commentary, see Paula Fredriksen, 'What Does Jesus Have to Do With Christ? What Does Knowledge Have to Do With Faith? What Does History Have to Do With Theology?' in *Christology: Memory, Inquiry, Practice* (ed. A.M. Clifford and A.J. Godzieba; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 3–17, at p. 13, and nn. 26–28. On the marketing of Mel Gibson's cinematic Passion play, and the ways that his advertisement has fed into classic deicide accusations, see [www.seethepassion.com](http://www.seethepassion.com) and [www.supportmelgibson.com](http://www.supportmelgibson.com). (This last website explicitly correlates Gibson to Jesus, and Abe Foxman, head of the Anti-Defamation League, to Caiaphas.)

11. See primarily *From Jesus to Christ* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2nd edn, 2000); *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1999); 'What You See is What You Get', *Theology Today* 52 (1995): 75–97.

arguments about historical plausibility; and, second, that anachronism is the first and last enemy of the historian. I cannot but suspect the historicity of any Jesus whom I would gladly vote into public office. (For the record, I wish desperately that John Dominic Crossan's Jesus would put his hat in the ring.) This is not to say that an apocalyptic Jesus is *eo ipso* more likely to be historical, or any less potentially anachronistic. We have to decide in each case.

This tendency of current constructions of a non-apocalyptic Jesus – imputing to him the sort of politics that makes him an attractive figure to us – functions in another, I think unfortunate, way. In this phase of the Quest, with its characteristic emphasis on Jesus' Jewish context, these same putative ethical concerns are marshaled, *à l'inverse*, to describe the Judaism of Jesus' contemporaries. Thus, Jesus was egalitarian; other Jews affirmed and insisted upon hierarchy. He was kind to women; the ill, the poor; his contemporaries scorned them. Jesus focused on ethics; they focused on ritual. He preached compassion; they practiced purity. And so on.<sup>12</sup>

Are these putative 'descriptions' of Judaism demeaning? Unquestionably. In our culture, at our moment, 'inclusive' and 'egalitarian' rate higher than (understand: 'are morally superior to') 'exclusive' and 'hierarchical'. But are they thereby intrinsically anti-Semitic? To put the question this simply is to confound it, because it distracts by virtue of its sensationalism from the chief problem. These descriptions, *au fond*, are quite simply unbelievable. If we think ourselves back to the ancient Mediterranean that is supposed to be their context, they appear impossible.<sup>13</sup>

If, for instance, what we think of as 'religion' corresponds to ancient constructions of ethnicity, then to construct a Jesus who is 'anti-nationalist' or 'anti-racialist' is simple nonsense.<sup>14</sup> Our post-nineteenth-century concepts of 'nation' and of 'race' sit too loosely upon ancient ones to have such a putative description to be useful. Further, the god whom

12. For my criticisms of the work of John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, and N.T. Wright on this point, see 'What You See', 83–84, 86–91, 94–97; also *From Jesus to Christ*, preface to the new edition, xxvi–xxviii.

13. For a similar conclusion on other points of ancient religious practice, and specifically ancient Jewish practice that scholars will deny affected Jesus, see E.P. Sanders, 'Jesus, Ancient Judaism, and Modern Christianity: The Quest Continues', in *Jesus, Judaism, and Christian Anti-Judaism* (ed. P. Fredriksen and A. Reinhartz; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 31–55, esp. 34–36 ('Jesus as the Only Modern Man who Lived in the Ancient World').

14. This formulation is N.T. Wright's particular contribution. See his *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress; London: SPCK, 1996). Wright thinks of his Jesus as 'apocalyptic', but he so redefines the term that it is scarcely usable as a description for his Jesus, who pursues an elaborate, highly metaphorized program, and who also thinks he is god.

Jesus worshiped, and the god whom Paul urged that his Gentiles commit to exclusively, was quite specifically the god of *Israel*. He might be the god of the universe, but he was also, and precisely, the god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the god who hardened Pharaoh's heart to free his people from Egypt; the author of the laws and the promises; the divine father of Paul's kinsmen. The ethnic specificity of this deity, and of his message as tendered through Jesus and, later, through Jesus' apostles, should neither offend nor upset us. Ancient gods *were* ethnic. So too ancient 'religions' – even Christianity.

A related example of a modern, ethically pleasant misconstrual: Paul's much-misconstrued sound bite in Gal. 3.28. Champions of the non-eschatological Jesus have referred to Paul's statement to describe Jesus' 'social policy' as well.<sup>15</sup> But this sentence did not mean in the first century what we like to think that it means now. Paul thought that Gentiles should remain Gentiles (for his most intemperate statement of his position, see Galatians) and that they not convert to Judaism, that is, not 'become' Jews (itself an incoherent thought in antiquity).<sup>16</sup> He shared this conviction with the majority of his *suggenoi*: the only Jews in antiquity who seem to have mounted actual missions to Gentiles in order to turn them into Jews were Paul's Christian-Jewish colleagues, whom he repudiates.<sup>17</sup>

If we take the finale of Romans as some sort of polished statement of his idea of what he was doing, Paul still operated within the polar universe – Israel and the nations – that described the framework both of his Bible and of his social experience. He worked toward building a better Gentile, a 'Gentile-in-Christ'. But the point of the Gentile's being 'in Christ' was that he or she acted less like a 'normal' Gentile (one of *ta ethnē ta mē eidota ton theon*, 1 Thess. 4.5) and more like an 'apocalyptic' Gentile – a Gentile still, for sure, but one who now knew (the Jewish) God, and who worshiped him exclusively. In this way, these ethnically-mixed *ekklesiai* served as a prolepsis for the Kingdom, when all the nations would turn to

15. Thus, explicitly, John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), xii, 263; on the post-ethnic (that is, post-Jewish or post-Zionist) Jesus more generally, see 'What You See', 81–91, 95–97.

16. Since ancient gods and religions were ethnic, what we term 'conversion' was an odd idea in antiquity. In the period before Christianity, conversions to Judaism were imagined and presented on the analogy of forging political alliances; see Shaye J.D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 125–39, 156–74. Aristocrats who switched alliances could be perceived, and treated, as traitors; Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana* 67.14.1–2 (Domitian).

17. Paula Fredriksen, 'What "Parting of the Ways"? Jews, Gentiles, and the Ancient Mediterranean City', in *The Ways that Never Parted* (ed. A.H. Becker and A.Y. Reed; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 2003), 48–56; also 'Judaism, the Circumcision of Gentiles, and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2', *JTS* 42 (1991): 532–64.

the Jewish god. Just as 'neither slave nor free' certainly did not mean that Paul repudiated slavery; and just as 'neither male nor female' certainly did not mean that Paul repudiated gender-specific social and ritual activities, so also with 'neither Jew nor Greek'. And if Paul, the 'apostle to the Gentiles', then *qal va-homer* Jesus, who on the evidence scarcely ever bumped into any Gentiles at all, and who left no clear instructions (again, on the evidence) on something we might construe as 'Gentile' policy.

So too with other pleasant ethical/political abstractions, imputed to Jesus, denied to his Jewish contemporaries: the prime *intellectual* problem with the caricatures of Judaism that they presuppose or present is *not* that said caricatures demean Judaism (which they do), but that they fail as historical thinking. Purity rules, for another example, normally inform etiquette regulating divine/human encounters in antiquity. The closer to the hot-zone of this encounter (a temple, an altar), the thicker the webbing of rules. To call purity a 'politics', to contrast it to 'compassion', and to assign concern for the one to 'Jews' (or 'priests') and the other to Jesus is to signal a modern ethical position ('compassion is nice'). But by any measure relevant to ancient Mediterranean cultures in general and to late Second Temple Judaism in particular, such a construal of purity wildly misdescribes its function, and weds it to a totally false antimony: compassion is to purity as fish is to bicycle. Historically, this supposed contrast gets us nowhere, and requires us to overlook all the evidence of normal purity concerns in the Jesus tradition.<sup>18</sup>

An apocalyptic Jesus is awkward for other reasons. As Dale Allison's essay lays out, such a Jesus is problematic both for ethics and for theology. Jesus' ethics end up confined to what he thought would be the brief interim between his proclamation of the Kingdom and its advent. And he ends up being wildly wrong in his time-keeping: Jesus preached the Kingdom, but it was the SNTS that arrived. In what sense could the author of such an emphatically disconfirmed prophecy be 'god'?

Again, here I think that we have to go back to the context within which this claim was first made. Originating early with Paul and with John; sustaining various systematic developments in the Christian *paideia* of Valentinus, Marcion, Justin, Ptolemy; reifying into doctrine in the period of imperially-sponsored councils: claims about Jesus' super-human, divine status took shape within a culture when such thoughts were thinkable. Such a claim, in such a culture, could be advanced without calling into question either the integrity of Jesus' humanity, or the ontological distinctiveness of the High God. And the claims of Christology, however constituted, expressed views of redemption that cohered and coordinated with other ideas about flesh, body, soul, time, cosmos, and so on.

18. Paula Fredriksen, 'Did Jesus Oppose the Purity Laws?' *Bible Review* 11 (1995): 18–25 and 42–47.

If theology – or, specifically for our question now, Christology – has fallen on difficult times, I think that that is due more to the changes in our culture (and specifically in philosophy) since the Renaissance, than to any challenge posed by an historical construction of an apocalyptic Jesus. In our disenchanted universe, God no longer has quite so many neighbors: post-sixteenth century divinity is not on the gradient it once was. To designate a human being ‘god’ complicates modern monotheism unbearably. It also assaults current conceptualizations of ‘human’. ‘Flesh’ and ‘mind’ or ‘spirit’ do not define ‘human’ for us in the ways that they did in antiquity: modern humans seem constituted rather by genes, memory, contested definitions of ‘self’. In short, Platonizing metaphysics – the matrix of classical Christology – has died a natural death. But the old christological formulae remain, embalmed by institutional sanction.<sup>19</sup>

Modern believers have several options. At one extreme, they can opt to become keepers of the museum, dusting the traditional formulae and not thinking too hard about them. Fundamentalists – enslaved, ironically, to precisely the over-valuing of empirical reality that they decry in ‘secular’ science, and which arises, again, in the Renaissance – can just assert more and more loudly that everything they believe is simply what the Bible says, and that their beliefs are accordingly (in this simple, empirical way) ‘true’. But the source of liberal alarm is not dissimilar: If Jesus is ‘divine’, how could he have been so wrong?<sup>20</sup> Here antiquity’s greater flexibility with the meaning of texts served it well. Ancient theologians could either allegorize what Jesus meant by the coming Kingdom; or – more typically for the Latin West – they might interpret the second, bodily ‘coming of the Son of Man’ as the establishment of the Church, since the Church is Christ’s body.<sup>21</sup> Seen in this light, Jesus’ prophecy had already been realized, beginning at Pentecost.

We no longer read texts with these various levels of ‘truth’ or meaning – the allegorical, the aetiological, and so on – in mind. But to wring modern meaning from traditional texts, we still must wrestle with the angel of interpretation. (What I say here of Christianity I also think true for Judaism and Islam as well.) We’ll come away limping, no doubt; but that, in biblical perspective, is the consequence of close encounters with the divine. An apocalyptic Jesus will lead to one kind of theological struggle; a non-eschatological Jesus, another. Absent fundamentalism – a principled refusal to think – I see no way out of this. Perhaps the difficulty of the situation is what occasions the sense of urgency in our discussions.

That said, I would like to make the pitch, *as an historian*, that we

19. Fredriksen, ‘What Does Jesus Have to Do With Christ?’

20. See the finale of Dale Allison’s essay for further thoughts on this issue.

21. The *locus classicus* for this argument is Augustine, *City of God*, Book 20; he cribbed the interpretation from the Donatist theologian Tyconius.

beware a sort of creeping fundamentalism in our own work, a sort of fallacy of intention. The problem is this: to legitimate or authorize an ethical belief, too often, scholars impute that belief to Jesus himself. (Hence Jesus the feminist, Jesus the champion of peasant land reform; Jesus the anti-nationalist agitator, and so on.) To legitimate or authorize a theological belief about Jesus, that belief is imputed to Jesus himself. (Thus, Jesus thought that he was god; that he wanted to establish a non-Jewish biblical community; that he knew he had to die for the sins of the world.) In both modes, if Jesus did not himself think a thought – a social or political thought in the first instance; a theological thought in the second – then that thought seems less than legitimate for the tradition.

I would prefer to leave the historical Jesus in his own century, and put the obligation to make sense of Christian traditions about him where it belongs – not on him, but on us. Different Christians of different denominational affiliations will do so differently: that has been the case, on the evidence, since the movement itself began. I would also prefer to judge the adequacy of our reconstructions of Jesus not by criteria of ethical or theological utility, but by the usual standards by which any historian judges a historical description. To do that, we need to reconstruct Jesus’ contemporary context. Hence my quick tour at the beginning of my essay.

I would like to close with a brief meditation on styles of historical thinking and ways of doing history because, in a sense, that question of style fuels our foregrounded issues of apocalyptic, anti-Judaism, and theology. We have no consensus about methods. Some of us examine texts *à la loupe*, getting in as close as possible to passages, sentences, phrases, words. John Kloppenborg’s work on Q, and the essays by A.-J. Levine and by Robert Miller for this volume, are examples of this kind of approach. Some of us rigorously apply methods derived from so-called social sciences; others do literary analysis, and so on – methodologically, we’re a promiscuous bunch. I think that’s just fine.

But, to draw on a cinematographic metaphor for a moment, I want to make a pitch for the virtue of the wide-angle lens, for establishing the broad sweep before moving in for the close-up. If we considered the sort of data about the developing traditions on Jesus that we find in Paul – who writes at least one generation before the evangelists – then I think that we could have some surer traction up the slopes of the gospel material. If we worked with a better sense of ancient Mediterranean culture generally, I think that it would be harder to make some of the claims about Jesus and Judaism that we still see in print fairly routinely. And if we look not just to patristic material, but to the range of inscriptional and archaeological evidence that we have access to, we could establish a surer historical context within which to place our particular reconstructions of early Christianity, and also of the historical Jesus.

In the first instance, for example, we find a Pharisee going to pagans and walking them into a social no-man's land by demanding that they stop showing respect to their native deities and make an exclusive commitment to the god of Israel, *without* converting to Judaism. He does so explicitly because the Kingdom of God – heralded already by the resurrection of his Son – is about to arrive. In the second instance, we find that *all* ancient peoples saw ancestral custom and antiquity (understand: 'ethnicity') as the measure of proper 'religion' and as an index of piety; and that when Gentile Christianity of various sorts becomes visible in our evidence, these people make the same claim: that they too are a *genos*, and that that *genos* is also legit, because ancient. In the third instance, we see that Jews and pagans, and eventually Jews, pagans and Christians, mixed and co-celebrated in various religious functions throughout this period, in both pagan venues (gymnasia, theatres, law courts, town councils) and in Jewish ones (the Temple, until 70 CE; in 'synagogues' on either side of the War).

In Paul's case, we have an early statement from a contemporary of the original apostles who was in contact with those others who had known Jesus before Easter. This group itself chose to give up its Galilean roots – if they had any – and to live in Jerusalem. They all experience Christophanies; they believe that the Kingdom is coming; they are concerned to integrate non-practicing pagans – Gentiles, that is, who are willing to make an exclusive commitment to the god of Israel – into their communities. All these data cluster coherently around strong themes in Jewish apocalyptic. If we want to scissor the historical Jesus out of this context, we of course can, and some do. But then all this behavior – the earliest we have evidence for from this movement – becomes that much more difficult to account for.

With ancient ethnicity, it means that we have yet one more reason to exorcise some of the routinely employed language of invidious comparison when describing ancient Judaism. Jews may be one of the few Western groups now for whom ethnicity and religion closely coincide; back then, it was the least odd thing about them. And with the ancient urban evidence, it means that we should stop imputing to ancient Christianity the 'novel' idea that Jewish scriptures could be shared with non-Jews, or that Gentiles were 'no longer impure', or that the religious mixing of Jews and non-Jews was Christianity's revolutionary new concept.<sup>22</sup> It gives us an extra reason to be aware that our assumption that Christianity and Judaism were two distinct, even antagonistic, religions or movements or groups is extravagantly anachronistic: what was clear to Justin Martyr or Tertullian in the

22. Fredriksen, 'What Parting?', 40–48.

second century was obviously unclear to Origen's or Chrysostom's shul-hopping congregations in the third century and in the fourth.<sup>23</sup>

As for the ideological uses that any or all of our Jesuses can be put to, I can only observe that, if we ourselves do this, we will still have to make our case by an appeal to evidence; and that we all need to count on each other for collegial criticism for help in seeing, or hearing, what we ourselves say. And while we can control what we write, we cannot control how we are interpreted, as anybody who has ever had his or her book reviewed knows full well. Here again, collegial colloquy can only help. And so, again, for all of us, I thank the Jackman Symposium for enabling this particular round of thinking with, speaking with, and listening to each other.

23. Origen, in Caesarea (c. 230 CE), tells his Gentile Christian congregation not to discuss in church questions they heard raised the day before in synagogue, and not to eat meals in both places (*Hom. Lev. 5,8; Select. Exod. 12,46*). Chrysostom, notoriously, before the high holidays in 387 in Antioch, complains that members of his church fast, keep Sabbath, go to synagogue, take oaths in front of torah scrolls, and co-celebrate Passover and Sukkot ('When did they ever celebrate the Pasch with us?' *Against the Judaizing Christians 4.3*; see *passim*). Church canons go on forbidding this sort of behaviour on through the Visigothic and Byzantine period in the seventh century; see A. Linder, *The Jews in the Legal Sources of the Early Middle Ages* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997).