

Introduction

There is a faith forgotten called “Nazarene,” whose literature is a delight to behold, not that too many ever did get to behold it, for after the 1st century a concerted effort was made by both Synagogue and Church to suppress its writings, but, beginning in the 19th century, thanks to remarkable manuscript finds, a small library of material began to come together, most of which is now available here.

A PRE-CANONICAL TEXT

Consequently, what we have to offer is not idle speculation, rather, solid evidence, beginning with the crown jewel of Nazarene literary effort, a *Nazarene Deeds Gospel*, which survived in a single, 14th century, Chaucerian English manuscript. Much else of interest has survived or else been recovered, not the least of which being God’s prophetic *Testimonia*, which is the voice of prophecy; also the voice of our Lord as preserved in extra-canonical texts. Then, too, we have the voice of the apostles, namely, their *Memoirs*, as Justin Martyr termed it, partially preserved in his mid-2nd century *Apologies* (a word in this context meaning “defense of the faith”) made to the Roman Senate. Then, too, there are fragments from the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* found in the writings of Jerome and various others from early centuries. As well, there is the voice of the summoned-out community preserved in the Nazarene Hymnal, the *Odes of Solomon*.

Because the Nazarene community in Jerusalem, in the years 132 to 135 AD, was caught, as it were, in a nutcracker, with the false messiah, Bar Kochba, on one side and the Roman legion on the other, the proto-Catholic Church was able to swoop in to pick up some of their literature while deep-sixing the rest. Nevertheless, a valuable remnant survived, squirreled away in odd places, awaiting discovery in a time when this deposition would be treasured.

RECOVERING THE LANGUAGE OF JESUS

Warrant exists for seeking to get behind the New Testament, not the least reason being to recover the original language. Here Greek is de-throned; it is *not* king. Our goal: to recover to the full extent possible the *ipsissimis verbis* of Jesus, that being in most cases, not Greek, but, rather, Aramaic and/ or Hebrew.

Historically speaking, language has been one of the great cleavage points. Thus we see the Latin west, Roman Catholic, separating from the Greek east, Orthodoxy. And the Syrian Church, too, went its separate way. Doctrinal formulations and ceremonial practices have a way follow linguistic lines with this a cleavage point for organizational ties, as well.

ON THE RIGHT HAND AND ON THE LEFT

On Jesus' right hand and his left was James the Just and Mary Magdalene. While James was largely airbrushed out of the canonical accounts, a 2nd century historian, Hegesippus, preserved important parts of his story. Because this was family, *Desposynoi*, the institutional Church took exception to both Mary Magdalene and James, preferring, instead, to see apostolic succession through the institution of the Twelve as being the only legitimately sanctioned form of succession. Yet, based on their personal integrity, and egalitarianism, Mary and James modeled a leadership principle which we could all do well to take to heart.

PROPHECY AND THE TESTIMONIA

Also, to be consider are the keys to the Kingdom which Jesus handed the apostle Peter and he to us. But how many know what those keys are or how they operate?

The Gnostics, in seeking to see Jesus apart from Scripture, promote another Jesus, a Jesus who never existed except as a figment of their imagination, but not the Jesus of the Nazarenes who held Scripture in high repute, for, more than just an instrument of proof, "proof texts," and more than just foreshadowing of the future, the Scriptures contain the future itself, from which present meaning is derived. Paraphrasing the *Epistle to the Hebrews*: in former times God spoke to us by way of prophets but in the latter times He spoke by way of His Son whom He appointed heir over all things. The "all things" includes the Scriptures of which Jesus is the second meaning, the meaning behind the meaning.

We have all heard the ancient maxim about the relationship between the Old and New Testaments:

"The new is in the old concealed, and the old is in the new revealed." While the words concealed and revealed do not entirely accurately describe the relationship between the testaments, they do help us grasp the fundamental truth that the New Testament is found in seed form throughout the pages of the Old Testament and that the Old Testament blossoms forth as a flower in the New Testament.

... On nearly every page of the New Testament, God sovereignly reminds us that everything He has done, is doing, and will do is in accordance with the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The common refrain of the New Testament, "according to the Scriptures," is by no means to be taken lightly but is to drive us over and over again to behold the faithfulness of God, the trustworthiness of His revelation, and the beautiful harmony

of the testaments as God shows forth His sovereignly woven scarlet thread of redemption from creation to glorification, all according to the covenant of redemption of our triune God. In each of the three portions of the Old Testament — the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings — the Lord majestically sets forth that which Jesus Himself set forth when He was with the two men on the road to Emmaus interpreting to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. (Burk Parsons, *The Christ of the Old and New*)

Could the keys to the Kingdom be the *Testimonia* which unlock Scripture? We see as an example of this how that might be, that on the day of Pentecost, when the apostle Peter identified the events of that day (*Acts 2:16-21*) with Joel's prophecy (*Joel 2:28-32*) and 3000 souls were convicted and baptized that very day. Peter knew which text to quote because prior to Jesus' ascension, he and the other disciples had participated in a six-week, non-vocational Bible course conducted by Jesus in which he showed them the things in Scripture pertaining to himself. This Matthew recorded and, as copies were vouchsafed to others, this became the bedrock on which the community of faith was built.

When the apostle Paul went to Thessalonica, as was his custom, he "three days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures" (*Acts 17:2*). Three days? That's a lot of reasoning, giving credence to the idea that the Testimony Book was a substantial work.

When juxtaposing *Testimonia* and Gospel, we do not innovate so much as follow in the footsteps of the great scholars of previous generations:

David said: – 'By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all their power by the breath of His Mouth.' [*Ps xxxiii*]. And again, 'He spake the Word and they were made, etc.' [*Ps. cxlviii. 5*]. And again, 'My heart hath uttered a good Word.' [*Ps xlv. 1*]. Solomon also shows that it is the Word of God Himself by Whose hand these works of the world were made: – 'I came forth from the mouth of the Most High before all creatures.' [*Ecclus. xxiv. 5*]. And again: – 'When He prepared the heavens I was there, etc.' [*Prov. viii. 22*]

So it was certain from these testimonies that the Word was in the beginning, and that He was with God at creation, and that all things were made by Him, and without him was not anything made that was made. (B. P. Stather Hunt, *Primitive Gospel Sources*)

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE HEBREWS

Moving on, this having to do with an instance of tampering to a vital text which was expunged from the canonical Gospels regarding what God the Father said to Jesus on Jesus' being baptized:

After the people were baptized, Jesus also came and was baptized by John. And as Jesus came up from the water, Heaven was opened, and He saw the Holy Spirit descend in the form of a dove and enter into Him. And a voice from Heaven said, 'You are my beloved Son; with You I am well pleased.' And again, 'Today I have begotten You.' Immediately a great light shone around the place; and John, seeing it, said to Him, 'Who are you, Lord? And again a voice from Heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.' Then John, falling down before Him, said, 'I beseech You, Lord, baptize me!' But He forbade him saying, 'Let it be so; for thus it is fitting that all things be fulfilled.'

(Epiphanius, *Panarion* 30.13.7)

In the Gospel written in the Hebrew script that the Nazarenes read, the whole fount of the Holy Spirit descends upon Him, for God is Spirit and where the Spirit resides, there is freedom. Further in the Gospel which we have just mentioned we find the following written: "When the Lord came up out of the water the whole fount of the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and rested on Him saying, 'My Son, in all the prophets was I waiting for You that You should come and I might rest in You. For You are My rest. You are *My first begotten Son* that prevails forever.' (Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* 4)

This language agrees completely with the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, which reads:

For unto which of the angels said he [God] at any time, 'Thou art my Son, *this day have I begotten thee?*' (Hebrews 1:5)

Not just one non-canonical text but the witness of much of antiquity likewise attests:

He was in the habit of working as a carpenter when among men, making ploughs and yokes; by which He taught the symbols of righteousness and an active life; but then the Holy Ghost, and for man's sake, as I formerly stated, lighted on Him in the form of a dove, and there came at the same instant from the heavens a voice, which was uttered also by David when he spoke, personating Christ, what the Father would say to Him: 'Thou art My Son: *this day have I begotten Thee.*' (Justin Martyr, *Trypho*)

Moreover, some of the oldest manuscripts of Matthew and Luke also contain the "this day" formula. What happened? Tampering. Occasionally Orthodox corruption of Scripture happened, this particularly in conjunction with the great, 4th century, Christological controversy in which the Council of Nicea in 325 AD declared Jesus' eternal sonship, and yet:

. . . it is demonstrated that the doctrine of the eternal Sonship of Christ is absolutely irreconcilable to reason, and contradictory to itself. ETERNITY is that which has had no beginning, nor stands in any reference to time: *SON supposes time, generation, and father*; and time also antecedent to such generation: therefore the rational conjunction of these two terms, Son and eternity, is absolutely impossible, as they imply essentially different and opposite ideas" (Adam Clarke Commentary)

HIGH CHURCH, LOW CHURCH, NO CHURCH

According to Eastern tradition and belief, the Liturgy's roots go back to Jewish worship and the adaptation of Jewish worship by Early Christians. . . . Eastern Christians participating in the Liturgy also traditionally believe that the Eucharist is the central part of the service, as they believe it truly becomes the real Body and Blood of Christ, and through their partaking of it, they see themselves as together becoming the Body of Christ (that is, the Church). (Wikipedia)

Termed “high church,” most Christians for most of the last two thousand years both believe and participate in the above form of worship, what might be termed “sacramental magic.” Liturgy helps enforces a uniformity of practice which binds the members of a denomination together, while distinguishes them from all others. Some find it comforting that millions of others are on the same page with them but what is comforting to some other find confining. As part of this conforming process, lectionaries of various kinds, some running on an annual cycle and some which run on a three-year cycle, have been developed:

A Lectionary is a table of scripture readings that are appointed for worship. The practice of having specific texts for a specific day began as early as the fourth century and continues to our present day. (*The Episcopal Church*)

Various churches, in their presumed official capacity as keeper of Holy Writ, have had gospel manuscripts so rubricated as to indicate where separate lections had their beginnings where they had their endings. It is hard to see how such a practice can adversely affect the message but the lectionary currently employed among Roman Catholics by juxtaposing the Levitical law about ostracizing lepers with Jesus' healing of a leper, can only create the unfortunate impression that the OT God is a God of judgment whereas the NT “God,” Jesus, is a God of mercy. Wouldn't it have been better if Jesus' healing had been paired instead with that carried out by Elisha on the leper, Naaman? (*2 Kings 5:1-14*).

On the other hand, most denominations arising since the Protestant Reformation, having dispensed with this set of beliefs, are termed “low church.”

Frequently in Christianity a distinction is made between "liturgical" and "non-liturgical" churches based on the elaboration and/or antiquity of the worship; in this usage, churches whose services are unscripted or improvised are called "non-liturgical". (Wikipedia) I

I don't want to make an overall assessment of the Church, or of various churches, whether they be “high church” or low. I just want to move on from all that.

Here I must affirm that the Gospel was not written for the sole purpose of serving as a lectionary in a high church service, nor exclusively for public reading in a low church service, nor simply for reading by folk like myself who eschew all churches, but the gospels exist for public and private reading of every type. Let us not allow the gospels to be dragged into a tug-of-war conducted by various partisan interests.

THE CODEX SINAITICUS AND OTHER GREEK TEXTS

In 1985, I paid a visit to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. By prearrangement I met one of the archivists working there, a man of Greek extraction, and together we worked out a deal whereby for a price, I was given a microfiche of the facsimile of the Codex Sinaiticus. At the time I had the notion that its text was uniquely valuable. It is valuable, I acknowledge, but not uniquely so. Anyhow, it is beautiful. The Tsar authorized an edition with special type cast to look like that in the manuscript. And in 1862, a copy was sent to America which is the copy in the Library of Congress that was made available to me.

A PEACEABLE, LIVE-AND-LET-LIVE FAITH, OR A WARLIKE, CRUSADER FAITH?

What then of this rivalry between the emergent Church and the Nazraene community? For one they operated by different texts. More significantly, even though they shared a common heritage in the Hebrew prophets, their interpretations radically differed. For one, the Church was influenced by the militant religion of Mithra, the Sun God, from whom it got Sunday worship and much else besides, such as "sun wafers," remarkably similar as to what is handed out in a Roman Catholic communion service, for Mythraism was a sacramental faith whose ceremonies were efficacious, its priests standing as intermediaries between the Diety and their communicants. This was the religion favored by various Roman emperors and of the Roman legions. Conversely, influencing the Nazarenes was in the peaceable religion of Buddha. Carried to Europe by missionaries sent forth in the 3rd century BC by Asoka, King of India, it became established in Alexandria as a semi-monastic order called Theraputae whose communal meals resembled the Nazarenes' love feasts. These were not sacraments, were not efficacious, had no power to save, only to inspire and instruct.

How the findings presented here are received will likely depend on one's views on the institutional Church and the role it has played over many centuries, for through errant canonizations and physical suppression, the institutional Church for a long time controlled our understanding of Gospel formation. But now we know that the Rock on which Jesus built was not the institutional Church but, rather, the community of the faithful, a society of friends, His chosen instruments to preserve His word.

TRANSMITTING THE WORD

Truly amazing survivals have occurred. For instance, the manuscript *Codex Regius* (now kept in Paris), dating from 1364 AD, once contained the sole surviving text of Justin Martyr's 2nd century writings. Without it we would know nothing about the Memoirs of the Apostles. Likewise with the Nazarene narrative/deeds gospel, it survived for centuries in one 14th century manuscript, which for a while was lost in inventory by Cambridge's Magdalene Library. Finally, in 1921, it was published but, regrettably, left untranslated until another couple of generations passed. Another amazing survival is that of the first Christian hymnal known as *The Odes of Solomon*, which was first published in 1909. The 1st century *Didache*, also known as the *Teaching of the Twelve*, only came to light in the late 19th century. Various other important Christian documents also barely survived, while others did not.

As we have seen above, the stream of transmission had narrowed almost to the point of ceasing. Now, thanks to manuscript discoveries, scholarship, and modern means of communication, including, the worldwide web (www), the spigot is wide open, not that we can count on this state of affairs to continue indefinitely, for who owns the internet, the people or the powers that be? And what are the powers that be, as custodians of the internet, doing? As recently revealed, they are using the web to conduct espionage and sabotage. America's Hacker-in-Chief, who is quite up for violating attorney/client, doctor/patient, husband/wife, or any other kind of privileged communication, is also actively spying out the freedom that is ours in Jesus Christ. Good-bye www, corrupted from its very inception, as those nations yet having a lick of independence work to create alternatives. Christians, too, must ponder their options to escape the NSA dragnet, since the violation of privacy is at root a violation of autonomy and autonomy is the root of freedom. Yes, the Holy Spirit is moving but the unholy dark is moving, too.

BE PROACTIVE

We must do what we can while it is yet day, for night approaches when none can work. Therefore, with thumb drive in hand, let us preserve what we can of our common heritage à la Edward Snowden (patron saint of truth tellers) and make hard copies, too, for the day approaches when not only truth-telling will be perceived as a revolutionary act in need of suppressing but the mere act of listening to, or reading the truth will also be interpreted as revolutionary acts. This we know, that at some point the powers that will ring down the curtain on the free exchange of ideas and round up the participants. Already in the Middle East the powers that be, using as their means the American military juggernaut, are bringing to fruition their age-long dream of eradicating Christianity from the Middle East, particularly from Palestine and from Syria where, in Antioch, believers were first called Christians.

IN CONCLUSION

You won't find fancy theological formulations advanced on this web site but sober, historical evidence from which each can draw his or her own conclusions. Reference materials of a highly mixed character are enclosed, including, for instance, that of the highly learned, 2nd century theologian, Irenaeus. It was his rigid, doctrinaire dictum that there are four and only four Gospels. Probably no other individual in history did more than he to cause the loss of the richness of Nazarene witness. Such was the result. Nevertheless, his essay titled *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, is included here because it happens to contain what appear to be valuable, early Nazarene *Testimonia* material. For the sake of that, we tolerate the rest.

One item not featured here is an extended discussion about the "synoptic problem." Google "synoptic problem" and see how many hits you get; Google "synoptic solution" and see how few hits you get. Obviously more people think there is a problem than a solution.

Certainly no one can easily account for the similarities and dissimilarities as exist among *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke*. So what? Why is that a problem? Parts of the puzzle are missing, so what? The only problem is thinking that this is a problem. Can't we be grateful for having what we have and not worry ourselves to distraction over what we don't have? A scholarly book exists by Jay M. Harrington, a historical survey of more than 900 pages, reviewing the different positions taken by partisans in this debate. Its bibliography alone runs 75 pages!

No doubt some useful data has emerged from a century of investigation into the Synoptic problem, though I suspect far more heat has been generated than light. So be it. For most of us, what we really want is just to connect with the Gospel. What we don't want and don't need is junk prophecy or junk theology or pseudo-scholarship that lead nowhere.

When the best in piety is combined with the best in reason and historical research, then cant and heresy are easily banished to outer darkness. For various reasons, in the late 19th and early 20th century, the most capacious minds in the world were attracted to study of the Gospel just when many of the most important manuscript finds were made. Now that their works are in the public domain, our job is to gather it together and make it available in an easy-to-use format.

The Gospel is for everyone. It's not just for clergy or academia but for ordinary folk in the ordinary circumstances of their lives. The vision, then, is to make available to people of all walks of life, to husbands, wives, single folk, old young, rich, poor, intellectuals, peasants, the great scholarship of the past.

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee
So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding;
Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;
If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt
thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. (*Proverbs 2:1-5*)

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