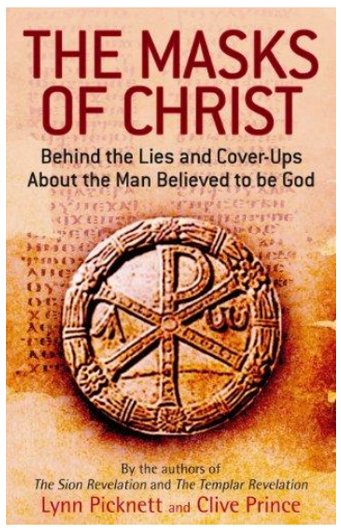



kindle

**The Masks Of Christ: Behind the Lies and Cover-ups about the Man Believed to be God**

van Picknett, Lynn, Prince, Clive

Gratis Kindle Instant Preview: https://read.amazon.com/kp/kshare?asin=B002TXZSF8

62 Highlights | Geel (62)

---

**Pagina 15**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 15**

> Jesus himself left no written testimony, nor indeed did any of the primary eyewitnesses to his life and pivotal death. For such a uniquely significant individual, his life is strangely unrecorded. There are writings that purport to be accurate

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 19**

> Jesus himself apparently wrote nothing. Not only do we not have anything even purporting to be from him, but no early Christian commentator - gospel writer or Church Father - makes any reference to him setting down his thoughts. He is only ever described as giving his teachings orally, either in private sessions with his inner circle of disciples or in public. It gets worse. Neither are there any writings dating from Jesus' actual lifetime or the years immediately afterwards, although his closest followers and those who joined the movement in the years after the crucifixion would undoubtedly have told or set down stories about him in their efforts to expound his teachings. Those oral and written memories were later brought together in the four Gospels and other early Christian writings. But we no longer have the original sources, and what we do have has clearly been changed over the intervening period, so it would be a mistake to take any of these texts at face value. It is possible, however, with dedicated detective work to decide what the originals may have been like, and to assess the value of the material we do have. Incredibly, the first known Christian writings are by someone who knew nothing about Jesus and indeed had no wish to know. Saint Paul, the persecutor turned zealot, created a new and potent religion in the name of a man he never knew by interpreting his life and mission in his own vivid and mystical way, remaking Christ in his own image. But although today Paul's is almost the only version of Christianity practised the world over, in his own day it was by no means the sole interpretation of Christ's message. Paul's fourteen Letters, or Epistles, date from roughly between the late forties and early sixties CE. His Letter to the Galatians, written between 48 and 54, is generally accepted as the oldest known Christian writing. The Letters are clearly only a fraction of Paul's output, and - to modern readers especially - they are extremely frustrating, making no attempt to describe Jesus the man or the background of his life. Paul was a fanatical preacher and missionary of the new spiritual movement or sect (it was not yet a religion proper) which called itself simply 'the Way' (odos) - a common description of religious movements at the time, with no exceptional significance. (The term 'Christian' had yet to be coined. According to the Acts of the Apostles, it was first used of believers in Antioch in Syria, and probably intended as an insult.)

**Pagina 20**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 20**

> As he journeyed around the Roman Empire - mainly the eastern Mediterranean - preaching the Way, Paul won new converts and organised networks of local groups, ecclesia. With one exception, which addresses a personal issue, Paul's Epistles deal with matters of organisation, administration and discipline - encouraging, exhorting, censuring and reproaching - besides addressing vexed questions about the new faith. He wrote in Greek, the common language of the eastern half of the Roman Empire after the Romans essentially took over the nations conquered by the Greek Alexander the Great. More specifically, Paul used the vernacular Greek dialect koine, spoken by virtually everybody as a second language; when the Gospels appeared, they too were written in koine. Too fragile on their scrolls of papyrus to survive, none of Paul's original writings have come down to us, but his letters were collected and copied at an early date. However, authorship was regarded in a different light in the first century, and those who came after Paul - much as they respected his memory - had no qualms about inserting their own contributions into his writings, or even completely changing them. Neither did Paul's near contemporaries see anything wrong with putting his name to entirely new texts. As the French theologian and philosopher Jean-Yves Leloup notes: 'In

**Pagina 21**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 21**

> But what do Paul's Letters tell us about Jesus and the early days of the Way? And where did he get his information about his Lord? Immediately we find ourselves plunged into the problem of the Jesus of history versus the Christ of faith. This is because Paul never knew Jesus. His entire belief that Jesus was divine came, not from anything the real man said or did, but from the visions and voices he experienced after Jesus' death. With what might well be considered objectively as staggering chutzpah, or just plain insensitive arrogance, Paul believed that those who had known and followed Jesus, even members of his own family and closest disciples - most significantly Peter - had got it all wrong. Only he knew the truth. Unsurprisingly, his lofty and elitist attitude was to cause major ructions within the Christian communities.

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 21**

> However, it is just about possible to piece together Paul's story as follows: no one knows when he was born or precisely how old he was when he undertook his self-imposed mission. Acts describes him as a 'young man' (neanias, an adolescent) at the time of the first persecutions of Jesus' followers in Jerusalem, within at most five years of the crucifixion (but as we will see, almost certainly considerably less). But this is immediately contradicted by Acts having him take the lead in the persecutions, which he could only do as a grown man. However, Paul's greatest period of missionary activity, during which the Epistles were written, did not begin until the late forties CE, and he disappears from history in the early sixties, by which time he was writing of the travails of old age. A reasonable guess is that he was between fifty and sixty when he wrote his last letters, which puts the year of his birth between 1 and 10 CE. Paul was Jewish by birth and religion - from the tribe of Benjamin, he writes - and trained in the schools of the Pharisees. He was also, according to Acts, proud of his Roman citizenship, which bestowed privileges he often exploited. Acts tells that he was born at Tarsus, a prosperous seaport in Cilicia (today's southern Turkey), and was by profession a tent-maker, an important and respectable trade. He had settled in Jerusalem by the time his story really starts. From Acts we learn that he was known by two names, Saul (which is Jewish) and Paul (which is Roman), although it seems that he favoured the second during his missionary days, probably because 'Paul' identified him with his Gentile flock. Roman citizens customarily took three names, the last being a cognomen, a nickname based on their appearance or something else distinctive about them. 'Paul' makes sense only as a cognomen, since it means 'small'. We never learn Paul's full name. Paul acknowledged that he was a zealous Jew, and presumably he moved from Tarsus to Jerusalem to be close to the Temple, the heart of the Jewish faith. But, like most fanatics, he was paradoxically easy to convert. And that is exactly what happened. Once an extremist, always an extremist, but not always on the same side.

**Pagina 23**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 23**

> After this Paul volunteered his services to suppress the new sect, eventually asking for letters of authority from the Temple leaders to go to Damascus in Syria and bring back to Jerusalem the Christians who had moved there. It was either on that road or in Damascus itself that Paul had his famous and dramatic revelation (in Greek an apocalypse) - a vision of Jesus that turned him from his most vehement enemy to his greatest champion. Curiously Paul himself gives no details of his conversion in the Letters, just that God chose 'to reveal his son in [not 'to'] me' and that it happened in or near Damascus.4 Acts tells the dramatic story of a dazzling light accompanying Jesus' voice and Paul being struck blind and subsequently miraculously cured by a Christian named Ananias.

**Pagina 24**

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 24**

> persecuting days. The core of Paul's message was that the end was nigh. For him, God's purpose in sending Jesus to the earth was to set in train events that would lead to the end of the world and the final judgement - which Paul clearly thought would happen within his own lifetime. He invested his preaching, that salvation came through Jesus' death and resurrection, with such passion and urgency because he believed that only true followers of the Way like himself would pass God's judgement and be saved. Paul was in a race to proclaim the 'good news' to as many people as he could before time literally ran out.

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 24**

> So, although Paul was the founder of Christianity as a religion, this was emphatically not his intention. Had he known that a global Church based on his ideas would exist two thousand years in the future he would have been appalled, disillusioned and utterly crushed, since it would have destroyed the very basis of his belief. What excited and motivated him was that there would be no future. So we have a great irony: the very existence of today's Christian Churches invalidates the basis on which the religion was founded. Nevertheless, can Paul enlighten us about Jesus? In fact, we learn almost nothing about Jesus from Paul, who was blithely unconcerned with his Lord's earthly life. As he had his own direct line to Jesus and God, he had no need to be, declaring with supreme confidence: 'the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any human source, nor was I taught it; rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.'6 For Paul, Jesus' story started with his death on the cross; everything before that was irrelevant.

**Pagina 25**

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 25**

> There are certain fundamental - and remarkably significant - omissions. For example, Paul never refers to the physical resurrection of Jesus that today's Christians believe in as the bedrock of the faith. Although he 'is risen' on the third day, he appeared to Paul only in the spirit. Similarly he never refers to Jesus being born of a virgin.

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 25**

> Although Paul was never slow to imply that his was the most important mission, his Letters make it obvious that he was competing with several other forms of the new movement, mentioning other apostles working throughout the Empire, and that the Way had even been established in Rome itself, and not by him. The most serious competition to Paul's movement came from Jesus' former disciples - who, according to later Christian writings, had been personally instructed by Jesus to carry on his work and word - and his own family. This other version of Christianity, which was radically different to Paul' s, was based in Jerusalem and led by Jesus' brother James 'the Just' and the leading disciple, Peter. But that, too, was already spreading beyond the borders of Palestine. The fundamental split between 'Pauline' and Jerusalem Christianity is well known today, but incredibly it was only as recently as 1831 that the German scholar Ferdinand Christian Baur first suggested that even the earliest Christians suffered schisms and major disagreement. Until then, despite the evidence in the New Testament itself, the accepted idea was that there had only ever been one form of Christianity, taught by Jesus and continued by his Apostles, Paul included. With amazing gall, Paul even calls

**Pagina 27**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 27**

> Paul proclaimed that Jesus voluntarily took on human form and sacrificed himself on the cross to redeem not only humankind, but even the cosmos itself, his death becoming the pivotal point of history and creation. And it was this idea that became the fundamental doctrine of the Christian Church. Paul also introduced an important change to Jesus' title of Christ (Christos). The Gospels tell us that his immediate followers called him 'the Christ' ('ho Christos'), showing they regarded him as the prophesied Messiah. Paul dropped the definite article, calling Jesus simply Christos, turning it into a name - Jesus Christ - probably to make him even more unique and distance him further from the Jewish interpretation of his mission. Another

**Pagina 29**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 29**

> The other Apostles against whom Paul warns were preaching both the Jewish version and the other Hellenised versions, but we also learn from Acts that there were 'Apostles' spreading the word not of Jesus but of John the Baptist. So there were four categories of missionary proselytising the Empire: the Jewish version, Paul and those following his 'revealed' form, others who also added a Hellenistic twist, and John the Baptist's followers. It was a busy, chaotic and heady mix, all inspired by those events that had taken place in a few short years in a far-flung corner of the Empire. The fact that the movement founded by Jesus split so early into Jewish and Hellenistic groups suggests an important ambiguity. If Jesus had been, as many argue, entirely Jewish, preaching purely for Jews, why should the markedly un-Jewish Antioch community have sprung up so early? On the other hand, if Jesus had not specifically targeted Jews or was even (as many maintain) explicitly critical of their religion, why should others of that first generation have built their worship around the Jerusalem Temple?

**Pagina 31**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 31**

> Paul disappears, rather mysteriously, from history at the beginning of the sixties, and Acts ends with him in Rome awaiting an audience with the Emperor Nero in order to appeal against charges brought against him in Judea. Tradition says he (and Peter) were martyred in 64, during the first trauma, the first persecutions of Christians in Rome, ordered by Nero. The second trauma was the Jewish Revolt of 66-70. An uprising by nationalist Jews had managed to drive the Romans out of a substantial part of Palestine. Naturally the Empire dispatched an army to retake the province, and although the Jews held on to Jerusalem for four years, after a bitter siege Roman troops ruthlessly sacked the city. The Temple, the centre of the Jewish religion, was utterly destroyed. The fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of its Temple was a watershed for both Jews and Christians. Many believe it marked the end of the Jerusalem Church and the triumph, by default, of Paul's Christianity. Even though the Jerusalem Church probably survived as the Ebionites, its authority lay in tatters. Also changed was the way the Christians perceived themselves and their public image. In order to survive they realised they had to distance themselves from the rebellious Jews that were now the focus of Rome's enmity. And it was against this background that the Gospels took shape.

**Pagina 34**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 34**

> All four Gospels place the blame for Jesus' arrest, condemnation and execution squarely on the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, regarding the Roman authorities, in the person of Pilate, as at worst acting out of expediency. However, as modern historians are very well informed about the laws and customs in Roman-occupied Palestine, it is now obvious that the New Testament version is by no means the whole truth. Crucifixion was a Roman penalty specifically reserved for rebels against Rome's authority, and it punished political, not religious, transgressions. Trying to establish their religion in the Roman Empire - and especially against the backdrop of Nero's first persecution and the Jewish Revolt - the gospel writers had to allay any official suspicions, and admitting that the religion's founder had been sentenced to death by those same authorities was hardly calculated to win them over. So the burden of blame was shifted on to the Jewish leaders (who were not exactly popular with Rome) and by extension all Jews - a charge that is particularly glaring in John.

**Pagina 39**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 39**

> Mark is also conspicuous for certain highly significant omissions - such as the virgin birth and, in the earliest manuscripts, Jesus' post-resurrection appearances. When Mark was grouped together with the other three Gospels these lacunae were relatively inconsequential. But when it was realised that Mark came first, serious questions had to be asked about why these episodes, so fundamental to Christian belief, were not there and why they only appeared in the Gospels that came after his. Matthew and Luke have added entirely

**Pagina 41**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 41**

> John’s Gospel, or the Fourth Gospel as it is sometimes known, appears to have little or no relationship to the other three. This fundamental split has always been recognised, but in the eighteenth century the term ‘synoptic’, from the Greek for ‘seen as one’, was coined to describe Mark, Matthew and Luke. Notoriously, John’s Gospel relates the events of Jesus’ mission in a completely different sequence, missing out incidents that are crucial turning points in the other books and including equally key episodes that are absent from the synoptic gospels, as well as presenting an entirely different view of Jesus’ mission. In fact John is so different that we wonder, if by some chance it had been lost to history and was only discovered now, it would be rejected as too late and inauthentic, as happened recently with the Gospel of Judas.

**Pagina 42**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 42**

> Turn to the last verses of Mark today and there are indeed the stories of the risen Christ’s appearances, but sadly they were added much later, simply because their absence was so glaring - not to mention embarrassing. (Whoever took it upon himself to add them based his version on Luke’s Gospel.) Neither of the two earliest complete versions of the New Testament, the Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus, included any post-resurrection episodes. But was Mark truly unaware of these momentous happenings, or was what he wrote about Jesus after the resurrection deemed unacceptable later, and hastily removed? Or was his original ending somehow lost? Without knowing the exact circumstances in which Mark’s Gospel was composed and handed down, nobody can answer these questions conclusively. But it is very odd that what is for Christians the single most important event in Jesus’ life is missing.

**Pagina 47**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 47**

> In other words, according to Clement there were effectively three levels to Jesus' teaching: one for public consumption - in the canonical Mark; a more spiritual set for 'initiates only'; and a third grade so exalted that it was beyond the capabilities of human expression and could never be written down at all, presumably reserved for highest graduates and passed on orally. After telling Theodore how the Carpocratians had managed to steal a copy of the 'mystic gospel' which they adulterated, Clement quotes a couple of extracts as examples, which comprise one long and one short episode, not found in the canonical Mark. Of the two the first, longer one is more significant, telling of Jesus raising an unnamed young man from the grave in what is clearly an alternative version of the famous raising of Lazarus (now only found in John's Gospel). Smith dubbed the text from which Clement quoted the Secret Gospel of Mark, his translation of Clement's 'mystikon evangelion'. However, as one critic comments, this was 'not only incorrect but misleading'.29 It is 'secret' in the sense that it has hidden meanings, not because it had to be kept secret (though reserved for initiates only). It really means, as Clement calls it, a 'more spiritual Gospel'. Some prefer to refer to it as the 'Longer Gospel of Mark', abbreviated to LGM, or simply 'Longer Mark', but for us 'Secret Mark' says it all. So we have two questions: was the letter really by Clement, and if so, were the extracts he quoted genuinely from an alternative version of the Mark? Smith made an in-depth comparison of the style and vocabulary of the letter to Clement's other writings, concluding that it did indeed reproduce many of his characteristics of vocabulary, style and use of scripture. He submitted his research to eighteen leading scholars, all but three of whom agreed with his findings. At least it seems the letter itself was genuine. After two years of meticulous work

**Pagina 56**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 56**

> Where Mark is straightforward, even simple, storytelling, Matthew and Luke put their own spin on the material, but their agenda is still transparent. John, by contrast, is a complex piece of writing, weaving together many themes and layers of symbolism, besides drawing on several literary genres, not just Jewish traditions. With the synoptics, basically what you see is what you get, but with John's Gospel everything is shrouded in layers of paradox and mystery. In the writer of John we have an author whose mind is recognisably similar to a modern novelist's - seeking to tell a well-rounded, multi-layered story without any loose ends. This is the only one of the New Testament Gospels that explicitly claims to be derived from the eyewitness account of one of Jesus' followers, the mysterious 'beloved disciple'. It ends with the bald statement - after Jesus has said farewell - that 'This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true.'45 However, the use of the third person makes it clear it was not actually set down by the disciple but based on his written memoirs.

**Pagina 65**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 65**

> Another aspect of the origins of John's Gospel that, in our view, has never received nearly enough attention is its connection with Samaria. We would go so far as to say that it is effectively the 'Gospel of the Samaritans'. Back in 1967 New Testament scholar Wayne A. Meeks demonstrated in The Prophet-King that its portrayal of Jesus was tailored to a specifically Samaritan audience. An essential difference between Jews and Samaritans was that the latter only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament - the Pentateuch - which were attributed to Moses, and rejected the other books, particularly the prophets. To the Samaritans, Moses was the only prophet. They, like the Jews, had their own distinct beliefs about the imminent end of days and a Messiah-like figure who would come to restore God's rule on earth. But none of their expectations focused on a Messiah of the line of David - the royal line of the detested Jews - but either on the return of Moses himself or the advent of the Taheb (the 'Returner' or 'Restorer'), a kind of second Moses.

**Pagina 68**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 68**

> This theme recurs in another important 'lost and found' Gospel. Often mistakenly lumped together with the Nag Hammadi collection (because it was included in the first major translation of all the texts), the Gospel of Mary is known from a single fifth-century papyrus copy. Frustratingly missing some key pages, including the opening ones, it was found in an antique shop in Cairo in 1896, ending up in the Berlin Museum, its existence remaining unknown outside specialist circles. It was not until 1955 that a full translation was published. A fragment found at Oxyrhynchus has been dated to the early 200s. Some scholars place its original writing as 150 or even earlier - making it possibly contemporary with the canonical gospels.62 The Gospel of Mary is short and rather sweet, opening with 'the Teacher' or 'the Blessed One' giving a last lesson to his disciples, including Mary Magdalene, the only woman mentioned, before he finally leaves them. Although it seems to describe Jesus' valedictory post-resurrection appearance before ascending bodily into heaven, without the opening pages it is impossible to be sure. It is Mary who rallies the bereft and despairing male disciples - it seems that without her articulate and vigorous intervention they would have sunk into a depressed apathy. She tells them of a vision she had of Jesus, who gave her more teaching, which divides the disciples, particularly Peter (never her friend nor inclined to be sympathetic to women), over whether they should accept what she has said, with some suggestion she invented the whole thing. Levi then steps in and effects a reconciliation - which one suspects was reluctant and only temporary, at least on Peter's side. At that point the Gospel ends. There

**Pagina 70**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 70**

> The difference between the two approaches has obvious implications for the concept of authority. In the ‘faith’ system, an organised church, sanctioned by God and with a distinct hierarchy, is needed to guide the believer and help with any crisis of faith. Gnosis requires no such organisation: since salvation is in one’s own hands, gnostic teachers are more like gurus, guiding individuals along the path but unable to lead them. Small wonder, then, that gnosis lost the battle. Faith’s victory means that history has been biased in its favour: not unnaturally, the Church portrayed its approach to Christianity as the authentic version taught by Jesus himself, while gnosticism was condemned as a contamination of the religion that bore little or no relation to his true meaning. This was the prevailing view for centuries: by definition gnosticism was just plain wrong. However, modern scholarship has shown that this is a gross oversimplification. It is not often appreciated that the struggle between faith and gnosis shaped conventional Christian doctrine and theology just as much as it did gnostic Christianity. Gnosticism helped orthodox Christianity define itself. As Yale professor and specialist in gnosticism Bentley Layton puts it, ‘to some degree proto-orthodox theology was conceived of as being what gnostic theology was not’.64 But what exactly is gnosticism? The Greek gnostikos referred to the ability to acquire knowledge, but an early Christian sect adapted the term, calling itself gnostikoi, ‘the Knowers’. The earliest reference to this sect is in a condemnation by Irenaeus, Bishop of Lugdunum (modern Lyon) written about 180 CE. This ‘knowing’ relates to personal understanding rather than intellectual cognition - analogous to the French connaître as opposed to savoir. Gnostics often claimed a secret revelation as the source of their information and authority - but then again so did Paul. However, there is considerably more

**Pagina 71**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 71**

> To gnostics, the world is inherently flawed, having become separated from its creator, causing an antipathy between the divine and matter, a view known as dualism. Since gnostics regarded creation itself as intrinsically evil, they had a radically different view of the nature of sin: rather than it being solely the province of individual ethics, to them it was nothing less than a cosmological problem. (At the start of the gnostic Gospel of Mary, Jesus himself talks in these terms.) And it was this that led them to a concept of salvation entirely different from that of conventional Christianity.

**Pagina 77**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 77**

> First, there are Paul's Letters. Although he never met Jesus, Paul did write (to fellow believers, not propagandising like the Gospels) of his meetings with Jesus' brother James and chief disciple Peter. How could a non-existent character boast a brother and a righthand man? And there is one - albeit controversial - source that mentions Jesus, which, while not precisely contemporary, dates from about the same time the Gospels were taking shape. These are the works of the Romanised Jew Flavius Josephus (37-c.100 CE). At the outbreak of the first Jewish Revolt in 66 CE he became commander of the Jewish defence in Galilee. Captured by the Romans, he acted as interpreter and negotiator for their commander, Vespasian, who was proclaimed emperor and handed over command to his son Titus - another subsequent emperor - for whom Josephus continued to work and even befriend. At the end of the campaign he accompanied him to Rome, even taking his family name of Flavius. Titus gave him a villa and a pension that kept him as he penned his books.

**Pagina 79**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 79**

> completely invented.3 Even though Josephus is disappointing as a source of information about Jesus, the reference does at least show that to the chronicler he was a real person.4 There is also a brief mention in the works of the Roman writer Tacitus of the (unnamed) founder of the Christian sect having been crucified by Pilate - written c.115 CE, long after the event but at least revealing that Tacitus, too, believed him to have been a flesh-and-blood man. Other arguments also seriously undermine the 'non-existent Jesus' theory. The concept of inventing purely fictional characters was unknown at that time: even completely imaginary stories were peopled either with figures from myth or, as in Plato's dialogues, real historical characters. Even fabricated tales about Jesus would have been based on a real man, who must have made some sort of impression. Then there is the 'irrefutability principle', which, as applied to this issue, is explained by Geoffrey Ashe: 'if Jesus had not been a real person, somebody would have said so'.5 From the very beginning Christianity had its opponents in both the Jewish and pagan worlds, but even they took Jesus' existence as read. Finally, why should such time and energy have been devoted to convincing people about the reality of a non-existent man? Why did so many people invest so much effort in perpetuating a completely false memory?

**Pagina 80**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 80**

> As we saw in the previous chapter, the origin of the text designated ‘Q’ was deduced from the fact that Matthew and Luke share certain of Jesus’ sayings taken from a common source - but which certainly wasn’t Mark. This school argues that Q was the earliest Christian text, a collection of Jesus’ sayings. Mack concludes that Jesus was revered solely as a great and profound teacher, everything else being later invention and mythmaking. In other words, we should recognise only Q as authentic, and not any other parts of the Gospels. According to Mack, Mark consciously invented most of his Jesus story, including such pivotal moments as his baptism by John the Baptist (Mack arguing that the two never actually met) and even the great climax where Jesus was betrayed, condemned to death and crucified. But is Mack correct?

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 80**

> The scholars argue that the original Q reveals Jesus as at best a kind of generic wisdom teacher, without any hellfire-and-damnation end-times message (or even any affiliation to Judaism). But a first-generation group of followers in Judea, living through the horrors of the Roman suppression of the Jewish Revolt, adopted a more apocalyptic vision, and reinvented Jesus as an end-time visionary. Mack claims it was at that time that the revision happened. The original book of sayings was left intact, but extra passages developed his words in terms of the revisionists’ new, extreme message. After that another group rewrote Jesus even further, creating the tale of his crucifixion and resurrection - a new myth encapsulated in Mark’s Gospel. Both versions were put together when Matthew and Luke used Mark and the revised Q for their own Gospels. So to the Q school, although Jesus was real, all the alleged biographical information, from birth to crucifixion, is fiction or myth. Only the original Q represents the true man: simply a wisdom teacher.

**Pagina 81**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 81**

> He entirely dismisses any notion that Jesus might have been thought of as the Messiah by his followers, declaring this to be a part of the revision or even later. However, as we will see, we believe the evidence does not support Mack’s argument: Jesus did preach an end-times message and there is no doubt that he was crucified, even if parts of the story are essentially fantasy. There are other possible scenarios to explain why the original Q should have been revised - perhaps to create a more complete story of Jesus by incorporating other sources. The major problem for Mack’s reconstruction is the need to justify the claim that only Q retains anything genuine about Jesus. He himself identifies several different groups of early traditions about Jesus that coalesced in the Gospels. Besides those who collected Jesus’ sayings to produce Q, Mack identifies a further group that created other ‘pronouncement stories’ - from which came the parts of Jesus’ teachings in the Gospels that did not come from Q - and another that invented ‘miracle stories’ about Jesus. But because they make no appearance in Q, Mack rejects them as later folklore. But why would anyone who didn’t already believe Jesus did these things revere him highly enough to invent the stories?

**Pagina 82**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 82**

> But as the very core of Mack's conclusion that Jesus was a Cynic comes from a comparison with the many similar figures at that time, by definition there was nothing particularly special about Jesus. Why then should the first generation of his followers have felt so compelled to reinvent this particular teacher? Why didn't it happen to the others? After all, there were many to choose from - would-be Messiahs and strange, ranting, apocalyptic figures with the fires of hell in their eyes. Why not find solace with them, instead of somebody with (to Mack) no hint of messiahship or the characteristics of an archetypal sacrificial dying-and-rising god? Why invent stories to force him into the role, like Cinderella's stepsisters painfully and pointlessly trying to cram their feet into the glass slipper? None of this explains why this particular man inspired so many different reinventions.

**Pagina 84**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 84**

> However, while the Q school's conclusions may be overstated, they have made two valuable contributions. The first is to recognise that many of Q's sayings came from a Greek, not a Judaic, worldview. The second is to stress that the story of Jesus must be set against the context of his time and place, particularly in presenting Galilee as a cosmopolitan place in which the religious and philosophical ideas of many cultures were often interwoven, rather than confined to the Gospels' limited picture. Jesus could have been - and probably was - open to influences other than a narrow schooling in Judaism.

**Pagina 97**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 97**

> The problem is that the wholesale destruction of the Jewish lands during the Roman suppression of the two revolts created a void in the historical record. We can see ideas about the Messiah developing over the last centuries BCE as just described, but then everything disappears into a dark tunnel, only emerging when the dust settles after the second revolt, in the mid-second century CE. As we emerge blinking into the light we can see that many of the ideas about the Messiah had become very different from what they were when we entered the tunnel. Frustratingly, there is no way to be sure exactly how, when and with whom the messianic concepts relevant to Jesus originated and were developed. That was why the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls was so valuable, for they shed a little light on some of the ideas being explored in the tunnel, although many areas remain dark and unknowable. All that we really know is that different groups were speculating, often wildly, about the Messiah, creating sometimes contradictory permutations of a whole raft of prophesies and dreaming up novel and exotic variations. A famous example is the concept, found in the Dead Sea Scrolls (and elsewhere), that there would be two Messiahs, one a king and one descended from Israel's first priest, Aaron, the nation's spiritual leader. This was not, however, a widespread view.

**Pagina 101**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 101**

> Then there is the greatest irony. Jesus not only signally failed to achieve what was expected of the Messiah, but actually created the opposite effect. The Jews expected their great longed-for hero who would not only free them and restore their golden age, but would make them the greatest nation on earth, reigning supreme over the whole planet. In Jesus, however, they got someone in whose name (through no fault of his own) a religion was created whose devotees ensured the Jews were reviled as deicides rejected by God - a direct result of which was centuries of repression and the most atrocious, remorseless and unrelenting pogroms. In terms of the original meaning of 'Messiah', there is no doubt that to millions of Jews over the centuries, purely by an accident of fate, Jesus was actually the anti-Christ.

**Pagina 132**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 132**

> So to sum up: we know almost nothing about Jesus before he began his public career. Most of the information in the Gospels is demonstrably fictitious, and what is left is questionable and unreliable. The little that does seem to be accurate makes a very short list. We know his mother's name and those of his male siblings, and probably his father's. We know there was something odd about his paternity, setting the scene for stories of both his miraculous conception and his illegitimacy to circulate. He emerged from Galilee, but whether it was his family home or the place of his birth remains unclear. There is nothing that can be said for certain about when, where or in what circumstances Jesus was born, or anything about his family background. Neither is there the slightest clue as to where, or even if, he was educated. Despite the popular belief he was a carpenter, in fact there is no real information about what he did for a living. He may or may not have come from Nazareth. But even the blanks and the inventions tell us something - that those who made it their job to set down a record of Jesus' life knew nothing about it before he made his debut on the public stage. This must mean that none of his first followers did, otherwise some scraps of information would surely have been passed down to the gospel writers. Jesus must have been a mystery even to those closest to him. (This is even odder given that members of his family emerged to take charge of the movement after his departure. Did they fail to tell anyone anything about his background?) Why the mystery? Was it simply that his origins were too ordinary or too obscure? Or was the secrecy deliberate, either to build an air of mystery about him or because Jesus had a secret that needed to be kept?

**Pagina 145**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 145**

> The fact is that baptism was not a vague ritual unconnected with any sect or cult. On the contrary, baptism in the Jordan was a very specific act, for it marked an individual's entry or initiation into John's movement. When Jesus was baptised by John, dress it up how one may, he was not showing the population merely how to be washed clean of one's sins. He was becoming a disciple of John the Baptist and therefore the example he was showing the world was that of a devotee to someone else's sect. So rather than a unique Son of God, chosen for his singular role from the start and deigning to be baptised by the Baptist as an example to lesser beings, in fact what we have is someone who simply began as a member of John's cult. Jesus was subservient to the Baptist - his spiritual superior.

**Pagina 168**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 168**

> But, according to the Gospels and Josephus, John himself can hardly be said to have kept a low profile - and he was certainly regarded by most people as an innovator. The obvious deduction is that whatever John the Baptist was part of, it had been decided that the time was right for it to go public. Whether this was a policy decision made by the sect, or John's decision alone, it is impossible to tell. But it does explain why neither the Gospels nor Josephus was able to place the Baptist in any specific Jewish tradition. The Suba cave provides evidence of a hitherto unknown, and by definition secretive, group that had existed in Judea for several centuries before John and Jesus' day and whose rituals centred on baptism (or at least some kind of immersion). It would be an enormous coincidence if such a baptismal sect had no connection with the mysterious baptiser named John. And the presence of a shadowy sect behind him would indeed explain a great many of the mysteries that surround him. But who were these people? What did they believe and when was their sect founded? What happened to them? Although the answers to those questions

**Pagina 175**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 175**

> declining population the country'.11 It could be that Jesus began his work there because it was not predominantly Jewish: what he was preaching could be extended to its other cultures - the view taken by, for example, Burton Mack. To Mack, the majority of Galileans were apathetic about matters of Jewish nationalism or criticisms of the Temple authorities, so if a significant number were caught up by Jesus' teaching it had to be for other reasons.12 Conversely it could be because it was a hotbed of opposition, albeit underground, to either or both the Romans and the Jewish Temple authorities. This is the view of, for example, Robert Eisenman, Professor of Middle Eastern Religions and Director of the Institute for the Study of Judeo-Christian Origins at California State University.13 Which is correct? In order to reach a conclusion we will need to know exactly what Jesus taught and at whom his message was aimed, which we will come to later.

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 179**

> The first is Jesus' famous parable of the Good Samaritan, given in a discussion of the Levitical injunction 'Love your neighbour as yourself ' and the consequent question (posed by a Jewish canon-lawyer), 'Who is my neighbour?' A victim of robbers (by implication a Jew) left injured by the side of the road is ignored by two fellow Jews, a priest and a Levite, but taken care of by a kindly Samaritan, revealing himself to be the man's true neighbour.16 Jesus' point is that it is altruistic actions that define fellow feeling, not kinship or ethnic identity. The parable openly plays on the Jews' anti-Samaritan prejudice, as it is the man a Jew would least expect to be helped by who actually does so. But, as far as Luke is concerned, this is far from a wholesale repatriation of all Samaritans - this one is very much an exception.

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 179**

> Later in the story - although apparently not later in the journey to Jerusalem, as he is somehow back on the border of Galilee and Samaria - Jesus heals a group of ten lepers, but is dismayed when, after going to the priests to be pronounced ritually clean, only one can be bothered to come back and thank him - and that one is a Samaritan (by implication the only one in the group).17 Again, though, the whole point of the story is that the Samaritan would be least expected to show gratitude. Luke's inclusion of these two passages does go a little way to countering the prejudice that is so evident in the Samaritan village episode. Even so, clearly both the parable and the healing story work on the understanding that Samaritans are usually not very nice people. As an ethnic group they are not exactly the heroes of the synoptic gospels.

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 179**

> Matthew includes in Jesus' instructions to the twelve disciples, 'Do not . . . enter any town of the Samaritans' (the only gospel writer to have such an injunction).18 Since Jesus and John the Baptist both went there, as did (according to Acts) his post-crucifixion apostles, including Peter and John, this is clearly a product of Matthew's own anti-Samaritan prejudice. By contrast, the Fourth Gospel was written for an early Samaritan Christian community, showing Samaritans in a much more favourable light and even links Jesus himself with their land. There is even a scene where a Jewish crowd yells at Jesus: 'you are a Samaritan and have a demon'.19 While indignantly denying he has a demon, he pointedly avoids denying the Samaritan accusation. In fact in the Fourth Gospel it is the Samaritans - or at least 'many Samaritans' - who are the first people besides the disciples to recognise Jesus as the Messiah, even before he arrives in Galilee to begin his mission. It is a Samaritan, too, who features in one of the strangest episodes of the New Testament. It happens when Jesus leaves Judea for Galilee (because of the hostility of the Pharisees) and passes through the buffer state of Samaria, and encounters a woman at a well - to be precise, Jacob's Well near the town of Sychar.20

**Pagina 180**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 180**

> To a Jewish or Samaritan reader at the time the words were written, the ‘physical betrothal’ would have been startlingly blatant, being compounded by sexual metaphors and euphemisms in the exchange of words between Jesus and the woman. Lincoln explains:

**Pagina 184**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 184**

> Simon’s nickname of Peter is left unexplained in the two root Gospels, Mark and John. Only in Matthew do we find the pun ‘on this rock I will build my church’, which basically doesn’t work. Jesus speaking of ‘my church’ is an anachronism, since there could have been no concept then either of a Church as an organised entity or as a building. The word used, ecclesia, referred to a local community of Christians, not the building where they met. So the pun is clearly back-projection by later Christians to explain Simon’s nickname. So why was he called ‘Rock’? A reasonable guess is that it was a reference to his physique. As Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln point out in The Messianic Legacy, it is the equivalent of the modern ‘Rocky’.27 Other disciples had nicknames bestowed on them by Jesus: James and John became the ‘Sons of Thunder’, but we never learn why - presumably, like Peter, they had a short fuse. (As we have seen, Jesus had to restrain them from ‘calling down fire’ on the Samaritan village.) In any case disciples with nicknames like ‘Rocky’ and ‘Sons of Thunder’ hardly makes the band sound meek and mild. It seems they were a rough lot.

**Pagina 186**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 186**

> Famously, Jesus established an inner circle of twelve disciples to whom he later delegated his authority and power, passing on his ability to drive out evil spirits (presumably a secret technique), and sent them out in pairs to work in his name, after giving them detailed instructions. While Jesus probably did create an inner circle or top rank within his disciples, did it really consist of the magic Twelve or was the number chosen by later mythmakers? Or was the whole thing invented retrospectively to bestow his authority on the missions of contemporary apostles? The evidence points to the former. One of Jesus’ instructions to the Twelve supports the idea that he was consciously evoking the twelve tribes of Israel. He tells them that if any town or village should refuse to accept them in his name, then as they leave they should shake the dust from their feet. This was not just a somewhat melodramatic turn of phrase: it was a symbolic act that Jews carried out when reentering Israel, preventing its sacred soil from being contaminated by foreign dust. Basically Jesus meant that any town or village that refused to accept his disciples - and therefore him - was no longer considered part of the Jewish nation, regardless of its geographical location.30 As this would not have been important to the movement when the Gospels were written, it shows that the idea of twelve disciples representing the twelve tribes was Jesus’ own idea and intention, which in turn indicates that he saw his mission as in some way connected with gathering together the scattered twelve tribes.

**Pagina 213**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 213**

> As the ‘not peace but division/sword’ statement embarrassingly clashes with the popular image of Jesus the pacifist, it is usually assumed to be symbolic, often even by Christians who accept the whole Gospel package as genuine. However, this highlights another huge potential problem: taking a pronouncement Jesus made about a specific situation and turning it into a universal truth. For example, Hugh J. Schonfield suggested that Jesus’ pacifist statements in Galilee - love your enemies, pray for your persecutors and so on - were intended to reassure Herod Antipas’ men that he posed no threat and to warn the populace to do nothing that would precipitate action against them.15 In other words, they were only temporary instructions for that phase of the mission, to prevent it being nipped in the bud, like John the Baptist’s. It is not possible to say conclusively that Schonfield is correct, but it is plausible. And if so, it might well be a grave error to take the ‘pacifist’ statements at face value. And, as we will see, in the final days in Jerusalem, Jesus undoubtedly acted in ways that would inevitably have precipitated violent outbursts among the people - not necessarily with his approval, although he must have been aware of the likelihood of trouble.

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 213**

> Jesus is said to claim to work strictly within the Law, commanding his followers to obey it: Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. Truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of the pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.16 But elsewhere he defies at least certain aspects, even instructing his disciples to contravene the Law - for example, the ‘cult leader’ injunction to abandon one’s family flies directly in the face of the fifth commandment. So does his teaching on divorce, in which he insists on stricter rules than those decreed by Moses.17 Whether these represent a genuine inconsistency in Jesus’ teaching, or were introduced by the first generations of Christians (who were embroiled in the controversy over how Jewish the new religion should be), is impossible to tell. For all these reasons, sifting through Jesus’ teachings saying by saying to decide which to keep and which to reject would be both lengthy and fruitless. However, some aspects of his teaching are worthy of special attention.

**Pagina 255**

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 255**

> Despite the very different picture painted by the Christian Churches, as we now know, Jesus began his career in John the Baptist's movement, later launching his own group, chosen from its ranks. But does this mean Jesus was John's chosen successor, furthering the cause with his former mentor's blessing, or was he a rival - or even a usurper? The early Christian community was uncomfortable and ambivalent about the relationship between Jesus and the Baptist. Carl Kraeling says that for the gospel writers it was 'a source of both joy and embarrassment',1 while Walter Wink poses a far-reaching question at the beginning of his classic study John the Baptist in the Gospel Tradition (1968): 'Why did Jesus lavish on John words of such high praise that the church would later find them a source of profound embarrassment?'2 However, as even the pages of the New Testament make abundantly clear, the evidence reveals that, at least during the early Galilee phase, Jesus was not only considered by others as John's successor, but that is how he portrayed himself to the people. Whatever the background to Jesus' new role, the relationship between the two men seems to have suffered a major breakdown, although church-goers are still routinely kept in ignorance of the fact. But almost unbelievably, there it is in the Gospels - while languishing in Herod's jail, John sends a message to Jesus expressing his doubts about his disciple's activities. Originally from Q, the astounding passage is found in Matthew and Luke, but not in Mark or John. This is Matthew's version:

**Pagina 256**

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 256**

> The implications are truly seismic. For some tantalisingly unknown reason, John the Baptist began to doubt Jesus, and was worried enough while in prison to send a delegation to convey his concerns directly to him. Significantly, we do not learn John's response to Jesus' gnomic reply, but had it mollified him we would certainly have been told. As it is, apparently John went to his death still doubting Jesus. The episode also implies that even though Jesus had his own following, John still considered himself to be in charge - why else would he feel he had the authority to question him?

**Pagina 263**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 263**

> But the truly telling difference is that where the episode conventionally has Jesus saying that the prophets and the Law prophesied until John the Baptist arrived (marking the momentous transition from the old days to the new era of Jesus), the Hebrew version has them prophesying about John. Everything in the Old Testament was geared towards the appearance of John - not Jesus! In Mark's Gospel Jesus equates the Baptist with the prophet Elijah a second time, after John's death. Jesus has gone up a mountain with Peter, James and John, where his face transfigures and his clothes become shining white before Moses and Elijah appear and speak to him. On the way down the mountain, when the disciples ask him, 'Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?' Jesus replies: 'To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him.'22 The

**Pagina 264**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 264**

> Jesus is, once again, depicting the Baptist as the herald of the end-times, beginning the process he himself is to complete. However, once again, the Hebrew Matthew contains an enormously significant difference. While the traditional Greek version declares that Elijah 'restores all things', in the original Hebrew he 'will save all the world'.25 Here is Jesus himself proclaiming it is John the Baptist, the new Elijah, who was the Saviour of the world.

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 264**

> Matthew's Gospel was rewritten by the early Church to downplay John the Baptist's importance and influence over Jesus. If John was Jesus' Saviour, they were determined that he would be no one else's. Even if it went against everything that Jesus stood for or ever sought, the Church would downgrade the Baptist in favour of their preferred Christ. And so it became.

**Pagina 269**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 269**

> In other words, Antipas feared that Jesus had used black arts to raise John's spirit from the dead, and this was the source of his power. However, the significance is not so much that Antipas had these fears, but that Mark thought it necessary to include them, even as examples of erroneous beliefs about Jesus.

**Pagina 270**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 270**

> However, in our view it seems more likely that Mark had another group in mind: the John the Baptist sect. Did they believe that Jesus had in some way magically enslaved their master?

**Pagina 276**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 276**

> However, by far the most significant aspect of the Simon Magus story is the striking parallels between him and Jesus Christ, which proved so awkward for the early Church, both in Simon's alleged deeds and the fact that he could so easily be taken for a Christian - after all, the Acts of the Apostles describes him as such, if only for a time. Epiphanius, in his major work against heresies, wrote that Simon Magus worked 'under the cloak of Christ',50 and there is even a suggestion that he claimed to be the resurrected Jesus: Epiphanius fumed that Simon 'told the Samaritans that he was the Father, and the Jews that he was the Son, and that in undergoing the passion he had not really done so but that it was only in appearance'.51 Even the Church Fathers' depiction of Simon Magus as a demonic parody of Jesus is telling - after all, a parody has to be rather similar to what it parodies. They also vilified him as the originator of the 'first heresy',52 but again, the terminology hides a clue. A heresy is a variation of a religion - believed by traditionalists to be a distorted or even perverted form, but nevertheless something that derives from the same root. And then there is the remarkable revelation that modern studies show that Jesus himself used the techniques of a magus, overturning the centuries of denial of any similarity between him and Simon. The fact that the Magus and the first

**Pagina 281**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 281**

> By describing Simon Magus, not Jesus, as John's true heir, the Pseudo-Clementines imply a great gulf and rivalry between the two spiritual leaders. But was it true? If there is even a glimmer of fact behind this, then the unthinkable has to be faced: much of what Christians believe about the origins of their religion is utterly and completely mistaken.

**Pagina 304**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 304**

> What we were proposing was not so much that Jesus initiated the crime, but that his supporters could have done so. Although we will examine this more fully in the next chapter, there was a network of supporters outside the immediate circle of disciples who worked to smooth Jesus' path. Perhaps they took it upon themselves to remove this obstacle to their Chosen One's elevation. There would have been no need to act under his instruction, or even consult him. It is usually safer not to tell the individual whose career you are trying to further. The exact circumstances of John the Baptist's death are suspicious, and all that can be said is that it was the result of some kind of palace intrigue into which Herod Antipas was either tricked or goaded against his wishes and all political sense. Curiously, it does seem that Jesus had his supporters within Antipas' household. We have seen that the wife of his steward was one of the women who travelled with Jesus, and Acts mentions in an aside that one of the first to join the new Christian sect after Jesus' crucifixion, Manaean, was Antipas' foster-brother.116 So there may have been a group of Jesus sympathisers in the palace that orchestrated John the Baptist's execution. Whatever really happened, there is no doubt that the Baptist's death worked to Jesus' advantage, allowing him to take over John's movement - and marking a significant change in his own mission. Now he set his sights on Jerusalem, and his ultimate destiny.

**Pagina 348**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 348**

> Taking the evidence as a whole, Judas Iscariot probably did betray Jesus, but all the reasons - and especially the curiously unconvincing business at the Last Supper - are fiction. But why? Mark supplies no motive at all: although the chief priests give Judas money, it was only after the evil deed is done. Matthew, obviously seeking a plausible motive, has him negotiating a price with the priests, while Luke takes this idea even further. But this merely highlights Mark's failure to provide a motive: as C.H. Dodd asked, 'Is it not possible that the earliest tradition of all knew nothing about the motive of Judas' treachery?'61 Logically, unless Judas was debriefed after the event, none of his former companions could have known what made him betray his master. Most modern researchers assume he had become fatally disillusioned, having devoted himself to a leader who had failed to live up to his expectations. However, we find it significant that both gospel traditions link Judas' betrayal with the blood/wine rite. Such pagan teaching is exactly what would have scandalised a fiery Jewish nationalist - if the sicarius derivation of his surname is correct - as John's Gospel tells us it did a number of his other disciples. On this reasoning it was Jesus' inner teaching that Judas betrayed to the chief priests. However, with or without the shadowy Judas, the Jesus story now reaches its terrible climax, with a torn and twisted body nailed to a cross - the end of a common rebel. Yet out of such a shameful death rose one of the world's greatest and most enduring religions.

**Pagina 355**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 355**

> However, there is no reason to doubt the basic story, that Jesus was arrested by the Jewish leaders and sentenced by the Roman prefect. The big question - way beyond mere academic or theological interest - is the balance of responsibility between them. The Gospels unequivocally have the Jewish leaders bearing the brunt of the blame: Jesus is arrested on their initiative and they dragoon a reluctant Pilate into passing a death sentence, a scenario that laid the foundation for generations of the most horrific anti-Jewish hatred by Christians. Scholars have taken many views about the balance of responsibility, at one extreme basically agreeing with the Gospels, that it was the Jewish leaders' initiative and they connived to persuade Pilate to have Jesus killed, and at the other having Pilate pressuring the Sanhedrin to find some way to rid himself of this nuisance. (As he had appointed the high priest, their interests coincided anyway.) Of course, even if it was agreed that the Sanhedrin was entirely to blame, that would do nothing to justify Christianity's anti-Semitism, since it meant that only the Temple leaders of that time (who were disliked by most of the people in any case) were responsible. The gospel writers' unforgivable crime against humanity was to extend the blame to all Jews by having the crowd agree with them. (At least Mark has them being whipped up into hysterical demands for Jesus' death by the duplicitous chief priests.) But why, exactly, was Jesus condemned? Clearly the outcome was a Roman penalty for a crime against Rome: crucifixion was the punishment set down throughout the Empire for those who challenged its authority, either slaves who rebelled or subject peoples who organised revolt or spread sedition. According to the New Testament, when Jesus was handed over by the Sanhedrin, Pilate was concerned with just one question: 'Are you King of the Jews?' Making such a claim would be by definition rebellion against Rome (irrespective of whether it was backed with force) since it denied the sovereignty of the Emperor. In Mark Jesus' reply is gnomic: 'You have said so.'13 But how would Mark know what he said? None of Jesus' followers were present.

**Pagina 356**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 356**

> Except that, as Maccoby points out, according to the Gospels Jesus was framed by the Jewish leadership, who had actually found him guilty of blasphemy but had no power to execute him, and so concocted a charge that would persuade Pilate to do it for them. But was it the evangelists who were guilty of framing - by falsely accusing the Jews?

**Pagina 377**

---

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 377**

> Once we discount the resurrection as a real event - there is no way around that - there are only two possibilities: either somebody moved the body, or Jesus was not dead.

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 379**

> It is often pointed out that in Mark's Gospel the word Joseph of Arimathea uses when he asks Pilate for Jesus' 'body' is soma, which means a living body, though when Pilate replies he uses ptoma, corpse. However, as we have seen, the story of Joseph's meeting with Pilate was probably contrived, so it is pointless to read anything into the linguistic subtleties. (And in any case, asking Pilate for Jesus' 'living body' might be a bit of a giveaway.) Instead, perhaps Mark's hidden message is that Jesus' followers knew him to be living for time and all eternity. Schonfield suggested that Jesus had arranged to be given a narcotic to induce the semblance of death, and it was this - not wine vinegar - that was on the sponge lifted up to him on the stick. As he points out, if anything vinegar should have had a stimulating effect, but if the Gospel is accurate Jesus immediately slumped as if dead after drinking it. But can we really trust such fine detail, especially as the Gospels have demonstrably altered the facts to conform to Old Testament prophecies (for example, gambling for Jesus' clothes)? Crossan links the vinegary sponge (as well as the wine and myrrh drink offered to Jesus at the beginning of his ordeal) with the end with Psalm 69: 'They put gall [poison] in my food/and gave me vinegar for my thirst'.73 If Crossan is correct, then Schonfield's argument is built on very shaky foundations. All this is arguable, but it is nowhere near proof. Some positive evidence of Jesus' survival is needed, such as a reliable report of him being seen later - which ironically, the Gospels' accounts totally fail to supply. First, they can easily be shown to be later mythmaking, and secondly, because if he came round from a coma or narcotic-induced unconsciousness he would have been in no condition to walk around, still less talk not just coherently but triumphantly, later that day (certainly not attempting the seven-mile walk to Emmaus and back) or indeed for at least many days, if not weeks, afterwards. Not to be put off, researchers cite other controversial claims - that records exist of Jesus' life after the crucifixion. Donovan Joyce's book The Jesus Scroll (1973) was the result of a strange experience in 1964 when he was waiting in Tel Aviv airport for his flight home. He was approached by an Israeli who claimed to be an archaeologist but admitted using an assumed name, who offered him $5000 to smuggle out of the country an ancient scroll he alleged had been stolen from the current excavations at the fortress of Masada, the scene of the Jews' last stand after the end of the first Jewish Revolt, in 73 CE. (Researching the excavations for a novel had taken Joyce to Israel in the first place.) The mystery man took Joyce into the airport lavatory and hurriedly told him about the scroll: it had been written during the siege of Masada by one 'Jesus son of Jacob of Gennesareth', who said he was eighty years old, the legitimate heir to the line of Maccabean kings, and that he had a son. The implication is that this was proof that Jesus was still alive in 73 CE - and that he had been married and had at least one child. Although intrigued, Joyce declined the offer of the scroll, fearing the consequences if he was caught, and never heard of it again.74

**Pagina 388**

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 388**

> Perhaps, though, the body was removed to create precisely the effect Christians take to be proof of Jesus' divine triumph over death and the grave, creating a mix of hope for his followers and fear for his opponents. (Herod Antipas was deeply disturbed by the thought that John the Baptist might have come back to haunt him, so how would he react to Jesus' apparent rising from the grave?) Given the stakes he was playing for, Jesus - and his backers - could not have been unaware of the possibility that he might end up on a Roman cross. Maybe the group of which he was part had (with or without his knowledge) devised a 'plan B' to salvage what they could if the worst happened, or even turn it to their advantage. Lüdemann makes the point that, because of the disarray among the disciples after Jesus' arrest, they were in no position to organise the theft of his body. However, the Eleven were not his only devotees - the other 'fixers', at Bethany, could have organised it. (And if Mary Magdalene was Lazarus' sister, then it was one of the Bethany group who first brought news of the empty tomb.) It is a long way from that essentially simple subterfuge to the rise of a major international religion based on the idea that he rose from the dead.

**Pagina 417**

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 417**

> The survival of various sects who upheld the primacy of John the Baptist - the most long-lived being the Mandaeans - always threatened to reveal the truth. Indeed, as we argued in The Templar Revelation, the Johannite secret has raised its head from time to time, only to be ruthlessly suppressed each time.55 The deadly 'Johannite secret' has always been there, lurking just under the surface, threatening to haunt the Roman Church. And there are signs that efforts to stop it leaking out - moves as old as the religion itself - continue to this day.

**Pagina 427**

**Highlight (Geel) | Pagina 427**

> If nothing else, it might have inspired the kind of close interest in the Baptist they have always been so keen to avoid. If it was thought - or even speculated - that John's disciples had taken his body to Qumran, then it would inspire greater interest in the link between the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Dositheans and most significantly, the Mandaeans, which has been so successfully downplayed.