

Fall Meeting 2007

Report from the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins

Stephen J. Patterson, Chair,
Steering Committee

The Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins convened on October 19-20 to take another swing at the Jesus movement in Galilee. (This was the second of three projected meetings on the subject.) Papers dealt with three general questions: Can we learn anything about the Galilean Jesus movement from the parables of Jesus? Can we learn anything from Q about the social location of the Galilean proto-Christians? Was the Jesus movement (or Jesus) concerned about the plight of slaves?

The first of these questions was taken up in two papers, one by Charlie Hedrick, the other by Brandon Scott. Scott really focused on the prior question—many thought long-settled—of whether the parables can really be shown to have come from a Galilean context. Are there signs, for example, that they were originally composed in Aramaic? No, said Scott, and the Fellows concurred (pink). The older argument concerning alleged Aramaisms (wordings in Greek indicating that the Greek is translated from Aramaic) scattered throughout the parables no longer holds sway—most are perfectly clear koine Greek expressions, argued Scott, and not “translation Greek” (the Fellows agreed). But the parables do presuppose a Jewish cultural environment (red), and no one seemed ready finally to dispute that Jesus (of Galilee) was responsible for a good many of them. So in the end the Fellows concurred that (most) of the parables we have in the Jesus tradition were composed in Galilee (pink), and if by Jesus, then orally.

Charlie Hedrick’s paper was, among other things, designed to test the Fellows on a new development in the scholarship of parables interpretation associated with William Herzog, Luise Schottroff, and Hedrick himself. Herzog and company generally reject the category of metaphor—so important in the Wilder-Funk-Crossan school of thought from the 1960s and 70s—and see the parables instead as fairly straightforward stories about whatever subject matter appears in the narrative itself. They are not ciphers for anything else, including the Kingdom of God. Hedrick phrased the issue in terms of this ballot item: “The stories of Jesus were secular, not religious.” Objections over imposing such a modern dichotomy on ancient narratives were registered, and the debate turned to the distinction Hedrick was trying for: stories that are really about life, and stories that serve as a transparency

Explanation of colors used in voting

- R true
- P probably true
- G probably not true
- B not true

through which one is brought to think about things typically associated today with religion: ethics, moral example, cosmic schemes and scenarios. The Fellows gave a surprising amount of support to this idea (pink). They also endorsed Hedrick’s proposition that Jesus pre-crucifixion associates apparently did not share the “moralistic and ethical values” that would emerge in the New Testament’s treatment of the parables.

But the basic question posed by the parables tradition remains largely unanswered: if Jesus’ parables form the bedrock of the tradition, and if we might assume that those who first remembered and repeated them took an interest in whatever the parables are interested in, then what, if anything, might be inferred about the interests and agenda of those first Galilean followers of Jesus who salvaged by hook and by crook so many of the parables? That will have to wait for a future meeting.

The next major question before the Seminar took the Fellows back to the subject of Q. In papers by Willi Braun and William Arnal, both authorities in the study of Q, the Fellows were asked to consider the identity and social location one might reasonably posit for the author(s) of Q. Both Arnal and Braun are of the view that Q was the intellectual property of small-time village scribes who ostensibly inhabited the small villages of the Roman provinces—including the Galilee—handling menial clerical duties and routine public functions requiring a little literacy. Braun summarized the theory succinctly in this ballot item: “The Sayings Gospel Q is the product of a schooled intelligence and scribal competencies.” The Fellows voted red on this, and pink on Arnal’s similar proposition calling the Q folk “low-level bureaucrats of some kind, probably scribal administrators.” The argument rests among other things on the apparent fact that Q was a written document (and thus requires a literate author) penned in Greek (so, someone who could write in Greek)—all less than obvious if one spends much time in the conservative scholarship that aims to undermine the Q hypothesis. Arnal spent much of his lengthy paper dismantling these challenges, and the Fellows seemed to be persuaded (Q to be understood as a Greek literary document—red). Braun argued that a number of Q sayings—blessed are beggars (Q 6:20), e.g.—reflect the “experience of perception of displacement.” The Fellows concurred (pink). But they also agreed with Arnal in rejecting the notion that the people responsible for Q were destitute (black). In my view this

Ballot One
Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins
Survivors of the Crucifixion
Charles W. Hedrick

	Vote	%R	%P	%G	%B
Q1 Jesus invented his stories by observation and creative imagination.	Fellows .61 Pink	28	44	13	16
	Associates .75 Pink	39	51	6	5
Q2 The stories of Jesus are secular not religious.	Fellows .49 Gray	28	22	19	31
	Associates .73 Pink	46	33	12	8
Q3 Jesus' pre-crucifixion associates reflect the rigid, moralistic, and ethical values emerging in New Testament literature and later orthodoxy.	Fellows .15 Black	3	0	35	61
	Associates .08 Black	0	4	15	81
Q4 Jesus numbered among his pre-crucifixion associates characters he featured in his stories.	Fellows .51 Pink	16	38	31	16
	Associates .65 Pink	28	49	13	10

Ballot Two
Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins
Parables in Galilee?
Bernard Brandon Scott

	Vote	%R	%P	%G	%B
Q1 The Parables are Jewish in origin.	Fellows .80 Red	57	29	11	4
	Associates .88 Red	76	18	1	5
Q2 The Parables were composed in Galilee.	Fellows .67 Pink	19	61	19	0
	Associates .65 Pink	11	73	13	3
Q3 The Parables were composed in Judea.	Fellows .31 Gray	3	6	71	19
	Associates .33 Gray	5	5	75	15
Q4 The Parables were composed outside Palestine.	Fellows .23 Black	0	3	63	33
	Associates .28 Gray	9	4	52	35
Q5 The Parables were originally composed in Aramaic.	Fellows .34 Gray	3	13	67	17
	Associates .37 Gray	3	23	57	18
Q6 The Parables were originally composed in Greek.	Fellows .62 Pink	27	40	27	7
	Associates .59 Pink	22	41	28	9
Q7 The Parables show signs of translation Greek.	Fellows .30 Gray	11	11	33	44
	Associates .16 Black	1	12	19	67

Ballot Five
Jesus Seminars on Christian Origins
Schooled Intelligence, Social Interests
Willi Braun

	Vote	%R	%P	%G	%B
Q1 The Sayings Gospel Q is the product of a schooled intelligence and scribal competencies.	Fellows .74 Pink	36	54	7	4
	Associates .86 Red	61	36	3	0
Q2 The motive forces in the production of Q (as text and as group) were rooted in the experience of perception of displacement.	Fellows .59 Pink	7	66	24	3
	Associates .64 Pink	8	76	15	0
Q3 In so far as one can speak of Jesus as a mimetic ideal animating Q, this ideal is a means for thought and imagination, not the motive in the formation of Q.	Fellows .51 Pink	4	54	36	7
	Associates .56 Pink	5	66	23	7
Q4 Q has no privileged evidentiary value for reconstructing the historical Jesus.	Fellows .40 Gray	3	34	41	21
	Associates .43 Gray	7	30	49	15

Ballot Six
Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins
The Trouble with Q
William Arnal

	Vote	%R	%P	%G	%B
Q1 Q should be understood as a (Greek) literary document at all recoverable stages of its documentary history.	Fellows .83 Red	62	31	0	7
	Associates .93 Red	81	17	2	0
Q2 The material in Q1 employs naturalistic and inversionary rhetoric to promote local political and administrative autonomy.	Fellows .50 Gray	0	54	43	4
	Associates .58 Pink	2	72	26	0
Q3 The people responsible for Q were destitute.	Fellows .36 Gray	0	28	52	21
	Associates .19 Black	0	9	40	51
Q4 Q has privileged evidentiary value for reconstructing the historical Jesus.	Fellows .23 Black	0	11	46	43
	Associates .14 Black	2	5	25	68
Q5 The endeavor behind the written composition and redaction of Q is essentially the preservation, rationalization, and study of the principles and arguments that represented the Q group's original agenda.	Fellows .56 Pink	0	83	3	14
	Associates .64 Pink	2	88	11	0
Q6 The social formation that best accounts for the preservation of the Q materials in written form, and their progressive acts of rationalization, is that of a school.	Fellows .60 Pink	3	79	10	7
	Associates .59 Pink	3	74	19	3
Q7 The people responsible for the original Q agenda, as well as the composition, transmission, and emendation of Q as a document were low-level bureaucrats of some kind, probably scribal administrators.	Fellows .53 Pink	7	48	41	4
	Associates .60 Pink	2	77	21	0

Ballot Seven
Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins
Jesus in a Slaveholding World
Jennifer A. Glancy

	Vote	%R	%P	%G	%B
Q1 The parton-client is an inadequate and inappropriate rubric for analysis of chattel slavery.	Fellows .94 Red	87	10	3	0
	Associates .96 Red	88	10	1	0
Q2 The “servants” who appear in Jesus’ parables are chattel slaves.	Fellows .79 Red	53	33	10	3
	Associates .85 Red	63	29	7	0
Q3 Jesus interacted with Jewish and non-Jewish slaveholders, some of whom opposed him and others of whom were attracted to his message.	Fellows .89 Red	70	27	3	0
	Associates .91 Red	76	19	4	0
Q4 The saying that whoever wishes to rank first must be slave of all is a challenge to the ethos of slaveholding.	Fellows .76 Red	48	38	7	7
	Associates .76 Red	46	42	4	7
Q5 The institution of slavery was of central concern to Jesus.	Fellows .38 Gray	7	25	43	25
	Associates .28 Gray	1	16	48	35
Q6 The institution of slavery was of central concern to the Gospel writers.	Fellows .25 Black	11	0	43	46
	Associates .09 Black	0	1	25	74

represents a conundrum: would not displaced low-level scribes be destitute, or at least relatively so? In any event, the Seminar seems to have reached bedrock on one of the earliest groups of proto-Christians. The Fellows are willing to call the Q folk a school of displaced scribes.

Finally a third question: slavery. To what extent did the Jesus movement meditate on the problem of slavery? This was the subject of Jennifer Glancy’s paper, which reflected in part her widely regarded *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006). Glancy’s efforts have been to raise the profile of slaves in the texts (who often disappear behind the translation “servant”), an historical correction for which Glancy drew wide assent from the Fellows (“The servants who appear in Jesus’ parables are chattel slaves”—red). But as much as one might like to imagine Jesus and his associates in the Jesus movement as concerned about the injustice and cruelty of slavery, there is very little evidence for this. Given the ubiquity of slavery in the Roman world, one must assume that Jesus was in constant contact with slaves and slave holders, and yet he never condemns slavery or slave holders. Slaves and masters inhabit his parables without explicit comment. They seem then to have been part of the culture that did not attract special attention or moral scrutiny from Jesus:

The institution of slavery was of central concern to Jesus: gray.

The institution of slavery was of central concern to the gospel writers: black.

The sole, slim evidence that Jesus might have sought implicitly to undermine the ethos of slave-holding is the saying ascribed to Jesus in Mark 10:43–44: “Whoever wishes to become great among you much be your servant (literally, “*slave*”), and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” Glancy argued that indeed it does undermine the basic hierarchic assumptions behind slavery, and the Fellows concurred (red), salvaging a treasured assumption on the basis of very thin evidence.

Bibliography

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