

Spring Meeting 2008

Report of the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins

Stephen J. Patterson, Chair

Explanation of voting

Black	not true (0–.25*)	
Grey	probably not true (.2501–.5)	
Pink	probably true (.5001–.75)	
Red	true (.7501–1)	*Weighted average

On March 7–8 the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins gathered to take one more look at nascent Christianity in Jesus' presumed home territory, the Galilee. In previous meetings the Seminar had considered the basic shape of the Galilean Jesus movement as an early form of Jewish Christianity (Spring 07), which would have included a number of women (Spring 07) and perhaps slaves (Fall 07), but centered around a group of displaced, low-level scribes who had taken the side of victims of the changing economic situation in the Galilee under Herod Antipas (Fall 07). But there were lingering questions. So the Seminar decided to devote one more session to Galilee.

The Seminar opened with the much-anticipated plenary address from one of this generation's leading authorities on Galilee, Sean Freyne of Trinity College in Dublin. In his paper, entitled "Tracking Galilean Jesus Followers," Freyne argued that much of what we read in Q, including its prophetic critique, the hope for Israel's restoration, its broadly-aimed sapiential strains, as well as its linguistic profile, might be better understood if we were to place it among the ethnically mixed villages of northern Galilee and southern Syria. Freyne takes as his point of departure the question of language, and where one might expect to find the level of competency in Greek to warrant such a document as Q, with its distinctly Jewish perspective. The answer may not be the villages of Lower Galilee, where the linguistic evidence for spoken Greek is slim, but rather in the ethnically mixed villages of the north, bordering on what we might think of as southern Syria, but which they would have considered part of a more expansive vision of the Land of Israel. Locating both the language and the theology of Q in this region becomes quite plausible if one imagines the group's migration north on analogy with the flight of James' followers from Jerusalem in the 60s, as reported by the historian Eusebius. The Q folk would have

Ballot 8 • Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins Was There a "Galilean" Christianity? Sean Freyne

Q1 That for purposes of discussing early Christian history and myth-making, 'Galilee' should not be confined to the political Galilee of the Roman period as described by Josephus, but should include what is often described loosely and vaguely as 'Southern Syria.'

Fellows	0.77 Red	56% R	22% P	19% G	03% B
Associates	0.83 Red	59% R	35% P	04% G	03% B

Q2 Q is to be located in Northern Galilee/Southern Syria.

Fellows	0.69 Pink	31% R	50% P	13% G	06% B
Associates	0.77 Red	44% R	44% P	08% G	03% B

looked back on their experience of failure among the villages of Lower Galilee and framed it within the Jewish tradition of national critique and restoration.

Freyne also made a case for locating Mark in these villages, drawing especially on the work of Gerd Theissen, who among other things relates the particularities of the Markan apocalypse (Mark 13) to the realities of Jewish life in the villages of southern Syria during and immediately following the Jewish-Roman War. Latinisms that were once key to placing Mark in Rome now can be seen as quite at home also in the Roman east, and Mark's neighborhood familiarity with local places—for example, the *villages* of Caesarea Philippi—seem to make this gospel at home there. Like Q, Mark embraces a version of Jewish restoration theology. But unlike Q's pronouncement of judgment on "this generation," Mark is written more with a view to reconciliation, where the way forward in the aftermath of the Jewish-Roman War "was to include Jews and Gentiles in the one house which was emerging elsewhere now that the temple was in ruins."

Finally Freyne sketched out a scenario in which Q and Mark might be seen as representing similar concerns, though stated in slightly, but significantly different time frames—Q a little before the war, Mark just after, when greater urgency, nearing panic, prevailed—and making use of different genres to reflect the peculiar strategies of each. The resulting tentative reconstruction of nascent Christianity as it moved north out of Galilee and Jerusalem into the villages of southern Syria, Damascus, Pella and the Transjordan, and eventually Antioch, sparked a lively discussion in which Freyne's ideas won large assent and set the stage for the next steps in the agenda of the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins (more on this later).

**Ballot 3 • Jesus Seminar on
Christian Origins
From Galilee? On the Provenance of Earliest
Christian Literature
Milton C. Moreland**

Q1 The difficult task of connecting early Christian texts to specific regions is a valid pursuit of modern scholarship on Christian origins.

Fellows	0.88 Red	65% R	35% P	00% G	00% B
Associates	0.95 Red	86% R	14% P	00% G	00% B

Q2 Early Christian gospel literature is community or group based, not simply inspired by an independent author.

Fellows	0.75 Pink	52% R	24% P	20% G	04% B
Associates	0.85 Red	64% R	30% P	03% G	03% B

Q3 Early Christian texts reveal important details (implicitly and explicitly) about the social, economic, and political settings of the group responsible for its original composition and performance.

Fellows	0.80 Red	44% R	52% P	04% G	00% B
Associates	0.89 Red	70% R	27% P	03% G	00% B

Q4 The proposed ten criteria should be used as a starting point for the evaluation of the provenance of our relevant early Christian literature:

Fellows	0.70 Pink	32% R	50% P	14% G	05% B
Associates	0.75 Red	47% R	33% P	18% G	02% B

The Seminar has been working on the assumption that Q and perhaps Mark could be mined for information about Galilean proto-Christianity, but is this so? Are there good arguments that these texts were written in Galilee? Joanna Dewey took up the question of where Mark was written, a subject around which a vast and recent literature has grown. After surveying the arguments, Dewey concedes that a good case might be made for locating Mark in a number of places. All caveats aside, however, Dewey was relatively confident, and the Seminar gave its mild assent, that the “rural air of Mark militates against a major urban setting such as Rome, Antioch, or Damascus” (Pink), and that its “rural setting, social location, Jewishness, and positive valence on Galilee all suggest a Galilean provenance” (also Pink). Doubts surfaced in this discussion around the real meaning of the term “Jewishness” in the Galilee, a conversation that drew the Seminar back to earlier discussion about the precise makeup of the population there. But the most serious doubts were raised by Dewey herself, who raised once again the vexing question of language: if Mark (and Q) were written in Greek, then in an oral culture one must presume also an audience of Greek speak-

**Ballot 4 • Jesus Seminar on
Christian Origins
The Gospel of Mark: A Galilean Provenance?
Joanna Dewey**

Q1 While certainty or even high probability in regard to provenance is not attainable, and while arguments have an inevitable circularity, nonetheless the attempt to establish provenance is a useful scholarly task.

Fellows	0.72 Pink	26% R	63% P	11% G	00% B
Associates	0.76 Red	31% R	66% P	02% G	01% B

Q2 The external evidence pointing to Rome is conclusive.

Fellows	0.07 Black	00% R	04% P	15% G	81% B
Associates	0.03 Black	00% R	00% P	09% G	91% B

Q3 The rural air of Mark militates against a major urban setting such as Rome, Antioch, or Damascus.

Fellows	0.57 Pink	22% R	37% P	30% G	11% B
Associates	0.83 Red	56% R	39% P	04% G	01% B

Q4 The Gospel of Mark’s rural setting, social location, Jewishness, and positive valence on Galilee all suggest a Galilean provenance.

Fellows	0.56 Pink	04% R	63% P	30% G	04% B
Associates	0.66 Pink	08% R	83% P	08% G	01% B

Q5 For Mark to have been composed in Galilee there must have been a substantial number of rural Greek speakers to listen to the Gospel.

Fellows	0.74 Pink	41% R	44% P	11% G	04% B
Associates	0.82 Red	55% R	38% P	05% G	02% B

Q6 The Gospel of Mark was put in writing around 70 CE in the area north and/or east of Galilee.

Fellows	0.54 Pink	04% R	67% P	19% G	11% B
Associates	0.65 Pink	05% R	85% P	10% G	00% B

Q7 Q and the Gospel of Mark emerge out of basically the same oral environment.

Fellows	0.57 Pink	20% R	40% P	32% G	08% B
Associates	0.84 Red	61% R	32% P	05% G	02% B

ers ready to take in the performance of such a document. Her proposal, that Mark would have been put into writing in the area “to the north and east of Galilee” (Seminar: Pink), and that Q would likely have come out this area as well (Seminar: Pink), where there is a greater likelihood of finding villages of Greek-speaking inhabitants, thus reinforced what Freyne had argued earlier in the day.

In a related discussion, Milton Moreland raised in a more general way the method by which texts might be associated with a particular place or region—a procedure that will be critical as the Seminar considers particular

**Ballot 5 • Jesus Seminar on
Christian Origins
Reappraising the Galilean Economy
Jonathan L. Reed**

Q1 Galilee was experiencing rapid population growth in the first century CE.

Fellows	0.93 Red	79% R	21% P	00% G	00% B
Associates	0.96 Red	87% R	13% P	00% G	00% B

Q2 Galilee experienced an increase in economic activity in the first century CE.

Fellows	0.95 Red	86% R	14% P	00% G	00% B
Associates	0.91 Red	73% R	26% P	01% G	00% B

Q3 Galilee experienced an increase in per capita income and improved quality of life in the first century CE.

Fellows	0.43 Gray	07% R	14% P	79% G	00% B
Associates	0.34 Gray	03% R	08% P	76% G	13% B

Q4 In terms of morbidity and mortality, those living in the Galilean cities were better off than rural peasants.

Fellows	0.35 Gray	04% R	04% P	86% G	07% B
Associates	0.25 Gray	00% R	05% P	66% G	29% B

Q5 Social stratification was accentuated in first-century Galilee and was most pronounced in its cities.

Fellows	0.89 Red	72% R	21% P	07% G	00% B
Associates	0.89 Red	72% R	25% P	02% G	01% B

Q6 The Galilean cities were viewed with suspicion by villagers, rural peasants, and Jesus.

Fellows	0.78 Red	41% R	52% P	07% G	00% B
Associates	0.84 Red	57% R	38% P	05% G	00% B

sites in turn. Moreland's discussion was framed in part to test the Fellow's response to Richard Bauckham's theory that the gospels were not written for specific communities in a single locale, but conceived more generally to be circulated widely among all early Christians. Generally the Fellows followed Moreland's recommendation in rejecting Bauckham's novel idea (Pink). But the ensuing discussion of Moreland's proposed criteria for locating texts in particular places was tentative. In the end, Fellows agreed (Pink) that the following categories could provide an adequate starting point for future discussions: (1) chronology; (2) language and scribal competence; (3) demographics; (4) the presence of an early Jesus/Christ group; (5) socio-economic-political factors; (6) independent literary references; (7) references to sites, personal names, regional events, and geographical details; (8) references to specific socio-economic-political conditions; (9) theological affini-

ties; (10) "sociobiographical memory," "indigenous logic" and/or "social map."

On day 2 of the Seminar the Fellows turned their attention once again to the work of Jonathan Reed, whose study of the economic conditions under Herod Antipas has informed many earlier discussions of the Jesus movement in Galilee. But in his paper for this session Reed had decided to revisit some of his convictions about the Galilean economy and test them against the current state of research on the material culture in four areas. First, Reed still maintains that the first century witnessed a very dramatic rise in the population of the Galilee, doubling or perhaps even tripling between the years 50 BCE and 50 CE (the Fellows were convinced: Red). But as to the cause of this rapid growth, he is less certain: was it Herod's program of urbanization, or the natural course of events in a relatively peaceful time? Second, on the subject of urbanization and public architecture, it must be admitted that the considerable developments in Tiberius and Sepphoris still did not measure up to the much grander projects undertaken in Jerusalem or Caesarea. Still, the presence of these consumer cities would have pressed the limits of local food production, and the cost of Antipas' building projects still would have placed a considerable burden on local populations. Third, it turns out that the actual evidence for monetization and international trade is lacking in early Roman Galilee. This may necessitate a major shift in our understanding of the economics of empire and its impact on local populations. Still, the very existence of Caesarea Maritima, a port city built by Herod on the Mediterranean coast, makes little sense if there was no export of goods from out of the Galilean hinterlands. This is evidence that needs more analysis. Finally, the question of social stratification under Antipas can now be refined in view of recent studies of village architecture in Galilee. Most village dwellings turn out to be modest, but competent, and in the villages of Gamla and Yodefat one even finds more elaborate residences with multiple rooms and fresco. Thus, there is no evidence that village life dramatically deteriorated under Antipas, or that village life grew poorer while urban life waxed wealthy. But the social stratification in villages might itself be a telling piece of evidence.

The evidence leaves us with some unanswered questions. To begin answering them Reed suggested we look especially at demographic studies of Antiquity. His preliminary report raised many eyebrows. "Mean life expectancy was somewhere between 20 and 30 years;" 50% of all people died before age 5; malaria, cholera, and dysentery ran unchecked, producing dramatic seasonal mortality; "we must imagine a much younger world;" mortality rates were much higher in densely crowded cities. Urbanization did not cause population growth, but rather resulted from

**Ballot 6 • Jesus Seminar on
Christian Origins
Jesus Among Her Children
Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre**

Q1 Q presents the exorcisms of Jesus alongside the activities of other Jewish exorcists in an effort to place them all on the side of God's *basileia*.

Fellows	0.85 Red	65% R	29% P	03% G	03% B
Associates	0.92 Red	81% R	17% P	01% G	01% B

Q2 Q 11:14–26 presents a sustained critique of divisiveness among groups on the side of God's *basileia*.

Fellows	0.78 Red	52% R	39% P	03% G	06% B
Associates	0.90 Red	76% R	20% P	03% G	01% B

Q3 Q 11:14–26 presents a controversy story concerned with social-political cohesion rather than asserting the uniqueness of Jesus.

Fellows	0.76 Red	48% R	39% P	06% G	06% B
Associates	0.90 Red	71% R	26% P	02% G	00% B

Q4 Q 11:14–26 presents a controversy story concerned with social-political cohesion rather than community self-defense.

Fellows	0.77 Red	48% R	39% P	10% G	03% B
Associates	0.87 Red	66% R	32% P	01% G	01% B

Q5 Q 11:14–26 functions to focus community identity around the work of the *basileia* of God.

Fellows	0.87 Red	69% R	24% P	07% G	00% B
Associates	0.95 Red	87% R	12% P	01% G	00% B

Q6 As a whole, Q presents Jesus as an authoritative but not unique representative of the *basileia* of God.

Fellows	0.30 Gray	10% R	13% P	35% G	42% B
Associates	0.23 Black	08% R	03% P	39% G	49% B

Q7 As a whole, Q represents the traditions of a *basileia* of God movement.

Fellows	0.86 Red	66% R	31% P	00% G	03% B
Associates	0.94 Red	83% R	14% P	02% G	00% B

it, and tended to act as a check on further growth. This casts the rapid population growth and the urbanization of the Galilee in a much different light, and gives new reasons why villagers might have viewed cities with a certain amount of suspicion (the Seminar concurred: Red). In any event, Reed's report indicates that our understanding of life on the ground in Jesus' Galilee is still a work in progress, and is likely to remain so for some time.

In its final session the Seminar turned its attention to the work of new Seminar Fellow Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre from Drew University. In her Harvard dissertation, *Jesus Among Her Children* (Harvard, 2005),

Johnson-DeBaufre argued that, in the initial stages of the Jesus movement—or better, the *basileia* (kingdom) movement, Jesus may not have played such a preeminent role. Could it be that scholars are encouraged by the tradition to see Jesus as the focal point of every story, and his identity as messiah, Son of God, etc., as the central concern of every conflict? The Seminar considered chapter 5 of Johnson-DeBaufre's book, a closely argued analysis of Q 11:14–26, the Beelzebul pericope. She argued that this tradition does not reflect an argument with enemies of the Jesus movement over the real status and identity of Jesus, but an appeal for solidarity among everyone who values the “communal vision of the *basileia* of God” (p. 132). Key in her argument is the interpretation of Q 11:19–20:

¹⁹And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they shall be your judges. ²⁰But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the *basileia* of God has come upon you.

Johnson-DeBaufre notices that verse 19 does not cast “your sons” in the role of enemies, but is an appeal to see Jesus as one of them, and in verse 20 to recognize that they are all on the side of God and the *basileia* of God. The Seminar found this analysis persuasive, voting Red on the proposition: “Q presents the exorcisms of Jesus alongside the activities of other Jewish exorcists in an effort to place them all on the side of God's *basileia*.” Further, “Q 11:14–26 presents a controversy story concerned with socio-political cohesion rather than asserting the uniqueness of Jesus” (Red).

The Seminar was thus willing to follow Johnson-DeBaufre in her analysis of this passage, but it was not yet ready to shift its view of Q as a whole. On the proposition, “As a whole, Q presents Jesus as an authoritative but not unique representative of the *basileia* of God,” the Seminar voted Gray—a vote that probably reflects more the partial view of the case laid before us than the potential for the idea. And it is an important idea. In the discussion James M. Robinson made a strong case for its endorsement. If it can be shown exegetically, we must entertain the possibility that in the early *basileia* movement, Jesus was one among many, and not necessarily the preeminent figure he would become in the tradition. One wonders what role the untimely martyrdom of Jesus contributed to his preeminent status, as history has shown to be the case in so many other instances.

This wraps up our work on the Jesus movement in Galilee for now. In a final session the Fellows voted overwhelmingly to follow the trail blazed by Sean Freyne's address to the Seminar and move our focus north, to Syria, and track the Jesus movement as it migrated into the villages of northern Galilee, southern Syria, and eventually the cities of Roman Syria itself: Damascus, Antioch, and Tyre and Sidon. **4R**