

Fall Meeting 2009

On the Voting Results for The Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins

Stephen J. Patterson, Chair

On October 16–17 the Jesus Seminar on Christian origins convened for an historic meeting. On the agenda was a review of one of the most influential books in the last century on the subject of Christian origins: *Trajectories Through Early Christianity*, published in 1971 by James M. Robinson and Helmut Koester. The ideas and approach of this volume influenced a generation of scholars who worked with Robinson and Koester at Claremont and Harvard, respectively, and shaped the discussion of Christian beginnings around the question of diversity in early Christian ideas and practice. Its central claim is that nascent Christianity did not begin as a single phenomenon, but as disparate groups of Jesus-followers, each with a distinctive way of articulating the significance of Jesus—some focused on the cross, some on his teachings, some on the miracles tradition. In it Robinson and Koester challenged the notion of a singular, apostolic form of Christianity extending back to the earliest followers of Jesus, the apostles themselves, and instead posited a more complex and diverse set of beginnings. The discussion of Christian origins has never been the same. Now, more than thirty-five years after its publication, the Jesus Seminar gathered with Robinson and Koester to discuss the lasting significance of *Trajectories*.

On hand for this discussion were four scholars who came from out of the Robinson-Koester sphere of influence: Marvin Meyer, John Kloppenborg, Daniel Schowalter, and Arthur Dewey. Kloppenborg and Dewey commented on the significance of *Trajectories* itself; Meyer and Schowalter addressed the lasting effects of *Trajectories* in the subsequent course followed by Robinson (into the Nag Hammadi codices) and Koester (into Greco-Roman archaeology). Over the course of three hours, the seminar reconsidered its debt to *Trajectories* and the course it set. In many ways the insights of Robinson and Koester are now regnant: that earliest Christianity was diverse, not static but fluid, and rooted in the complexity of real, local places. The premise of the Seminar that Christian beginnings can be explored place

by place, using all the relevant texts, regardless of canonical status, and drawing on the work of historians and archaeologists to create thick cultural descriptions of the world in which Christianity arose, derives in large measure from the work of Robinson and Koester. At the same time, we could see that *Trajectories* was really about texts and the ideas they contain, even as we struggle to de-center the text as a world unto itself, as though the followers of Jesus lived within texts, and not in actual ancient landscapes. We presuppose the diversity for which Robinson and Koester argued, but realize the need to push further into this question. The diversity of ideas and practices are now well known, but we have a long way to go to explore the more complex questions of identity and social formation in nascent Christian groups.

As the Seminar considered and celebrated the work of Robinson and Koester, we also continued to put it to the test in the study of one of the most startlingly complex and diverse venues of nascent Christian activity: Antioch. To set the stage for our conversations, we invited Magnus Zetterholm of Lund University in Sweden to join us. His

Ballot 7

The Formation of Christianity in Antioch Magnus Zetterholm

Q1 Before the split between Judaism and Christianity there was a split between some Jewish and some non-Jewish followers of Jesus.

Fellows	0.84 Red	63%R	30%P	04%G	04%B
Associates	0.87 Red	68%R	27%P	05%G	00%B

Q2 One major reason for the separation was the inability of the Jewish Jesus movement to create a convincing, unambiguous status for non-Jews as righteous ones within the Jewish community apart from proselyte conversion.

Fellows	0.71 Pink	24%R	65%P	12%G	00%B
Associates	0.71 Pink	27%R	60%P	13%G	00%B

Q3 In the Christian non-Jews' struggle for unambiguous identity as righteous ones, they employed Roman post-Judean war prejudice toward Jews.

Fellows	0.69 Pink	31%R	50%P	13%G	06%B
Associates	0.51 Pink	08%R	38%P	54%G	00%B

Q4 The idea of an original opposition between Judaism and Christianity is primarily a Christian ideological paradigm.

Fellows	0.88 Red	75%R	13%P	13%G	00%B
Associates	0.62 Pink	43%R	21%P	14%G	21%B

Q5 Most contemporary Christians should recognize that their theological concerns are very different from the intra-Jewish identity issues of the first century non-Jewish followers of Jesus.

Fellows	0.95 Red	90%R	05%P	05%G	00%B
Associates	0.87 Red	73%R	13%P	13%G	00%B

book, *The Formation of Christianity in Antioch*, is the most thorough treatment of this subject in recent memory. Zetterholm above all tries to situate the development of Christianity within a thick description of the history, culture, and politics of Antioch in the first century. Of particular interest to Zetterholm is the question of how Christianity, in that particular place, became a distinct religious community in the Hellenistic world, and no longer a sect of Judaism. He argues that the split between Judaism and Christianity happened first within Christianity itself, and

Ballot 3

What Was at Stake in Peter's 'Eating with Gentiles' at Antioch?

Mark D. Nanos

Q2 Paul says that in Jerusalem James upheld also that Christ-following Gentiles were not to become proselytes (Gal 2:1–10), but to continue to represent members from the other nations turning to the One God who stand as equals alongside of Israelites. Paul presumes James' continued agreement in the way that Paul argues with Peter about "the truth of the gospel" in Antioch, accusing him of "hypocrisy" but not "apostasy" or "heresy." (I.e., Peter and James did not teach proselyte conversion, but Peter's behavior implied that it was necessary to gain indisputable standing as equals.)

Fellows	0.68 Pink	41%R	23%P	36%G	00%B
Associates	0.87 Red	64%R	33%P	03%G	00%B

Q4 The "ones from circumcision" whom Peter "feared" were advocates of proselyte conversion for the Gentiles at the Christ-following group's meals, rather than advocates for a change of menu. (I.e., this can be translated to communicate the point as "the ones for [advocating] circumcision." Note: they are not identified as the "ones from the kosher menu committee.")

Fellows	0.85 Red	64%R	27%P	09%G	00%B
Associates	0.87 Red	65%R	32%P	03%G	00%B

Q7 This mixing of Jews and Gentiles at these meals symbolized the ideals of the messianic banquet of the awaited age beginning among them in the present age. (I.e., the mixed meal, although served according to Jewish dietary standards, symbolized the inclusion of members from the nations at the messianic banquet eating as equal members of the people of God alongside of Israelites.)

Fellows	0.71 Pink	41%R	32%P	27%G	00%B
Associates	0.88 Red	70%R	24%P	06%G	00%B

Q8 The meetings at which these meals were being shared by Jewish and Gentile Christ-followers were taking place within subgroups of the Jewish communities of Antioch. (I.e., they were not "church" gatherings considered by definition separate from Jewish communal gatherings [synagogues].)

Fellows	0.81 Red	62%R	24%P	10%G	05%B
Associates	0.85 Red	55%R	45%P	00%G	00%B

Q10 When Paul refers to these Gentiles being compelled to "judaize," this refers to them concluding that they must become proselytes (circumcised) if they are to be treated as equal members, not merely to adopting some Jewish behavioral norms, e.g., eating Jewishly. (Note: the catalyst for Peter's withdrawal is said to be "the ones from circumcision," not "the ones from the kosher menu committee.")

Fellows	0.89 Red	68%R	32%P	00%G	00%B
Associates	0.88 Red	65%R	35%P	00%G	00%B

Q12 The "truth of the gospel" to which Paul appeals here is the proposition about ethnic diversity, not about adopting Gentile (un-Jewish)-based behavioral norms. (I.e., that Gentile Christ-followers are equal in standing with Jewish Christ-followers, not the proposition that observance of Jewish conventions such as food laws and circumcision were obsolete.)

Fellows	0.83 Red	60%R	30%P	10%G	00%B
Associates	0.89 Red	74%R	21%P	06%G	00%B

that a prime illustration of this parting and its causes is the incident at Antioch recounted by Paul in Galatians 2:11–14. Zetterholm's argument is that Paul considered uncircumcised Gentiles to be part of the Jews' covenant with God, while James and his followers believed that Jesus-following Gentiles might be saved as Gentiles, but they were not to be seen as Jews and part of the Jewish covenant. So, in Antioch the Jesus-followers fell into two camps early on: one Jewish and the other Gentile. This would prove crucial years later, following the Jewish War, when Jews became the object of scorn in cities of the Roman East, like Antioch. Now Gentile Christians would distance themselves from Jewish Christians and at the same time lay claim to the Jewish tradition as its legitimate heir.

Zetterholm's work is premised on the "new Paul," a view of the apostle that sees him as little interested in rejecting Judaism and more focused on the inclusion of Gentiles in the Jesus movement. It is a view that was tested in Mark Nanos' paper on the conflict between Paul and James in Antioch. Like Zetterholm, Nanos believes that this conflict was over the status of Gentiles, not the validity of the Jewish Law. In fact, Nanos reasonably argued that we should understand the Antioch incident as an event in the life of the Jewish synagogues of Antioch, not a Christian "church."

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

Ballot 4
Peter's Antiochene Apostasy
Brigitte Kahl

Q1 The meal in Antioch to which Paul was committed was supposed to follow strictly monotheistic table manners—that is, it was lacking in those ritualized gestures of reverence for God Caesar and any other of the established civic deities.

Fellows	0.76 Red	45%R	41%P	09%G	05%B
Associates	0.91 Red	73%R	27%P	00%G	00%B

Q2 The primary reason for the revocation of mixed table community of Jews and gentiles in the capital of Roman Syria was not its heterodoxy with regard to Jewish purity law.

Fellows	0.76 Red	48%R	38%P	10%G	05%B
Associates	0.88 Red	68%R	29%P	00%G	03%B

Q3 The primary reason for the revocation of mixed table community of Jews and gentiles in the capital of Roman Syria was that it had, or could have become, a public offense.

Fellows	0.71 Pink	38%R	43%P	14%G	05%B
Associates	0.85 Red	63%R	32%P	03%G	03%B

Q4 Paul did not criticize Peter in Antioch for “Judaizing,” but for “Gentilizing.”

Fellows	0.63 Pink	30%R	35%P	30%G	05%B
Associates	0.84 Red	63%R	26%P	11%G	00%B

Q5 The table community of Jews and Gentiles at Antioch embodied for Paul the new messianic order of all the nations together pledging their allegiance to the One God of Israel.

Fellows	0.87 Red	62%R	38%P	00%G	00%B
Associates	0.87 Red	67%R	31%P	00%G	03%B

Paul would have been making his case for the inclusion of Gentiles not to some fully differentiated Antiochene “church,” but to the Jewish community, of which the Jesus-followers were still a subset. When put to a vote, the fellows affirmed this view (.81/red). They also agreed with Nanos that Paul’s determination to include Gentiles as Gentiles reflected his view that the end of history had come, and that it was therefore time for the Gentiles to be gathered in to worship the one true God (.71/pink). Again, Paul was not leaving Judaism for Christianity; he was bringing the Gentiles into the Jewish fold. The resulting community would need to be ethnically mixed if it was to reflect properly the final reign of God. When Paul speaks of “the truth of the gospel” in Galatians 2:14, it is this ethnic diversity to which he is referring (.83/red).

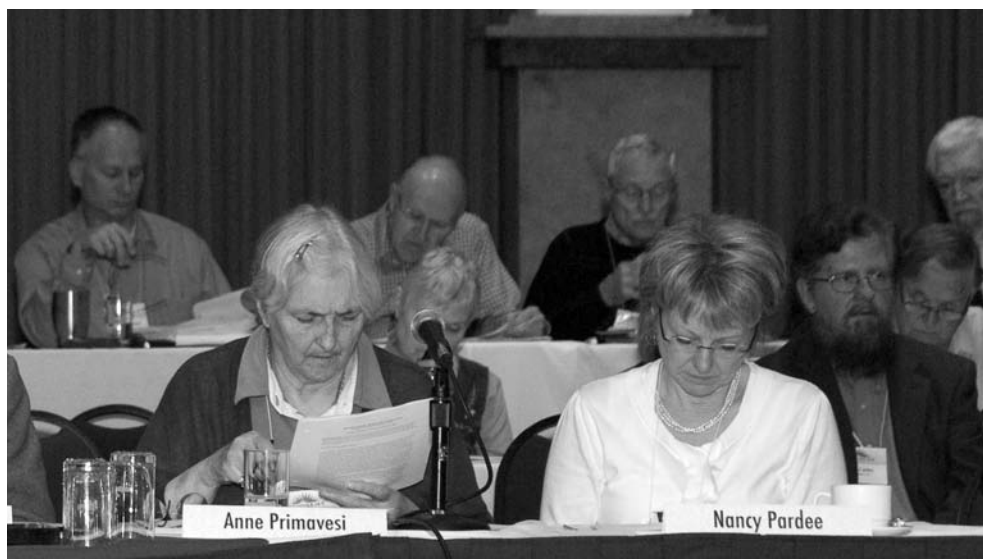
In another take on the Antioch affair, Brigitte Kahl helped the Seminar to see how narrow our usual thinking about Paul’s conflict with James has been. Even Zetterholm and Nanos see the conflict as mostly theological in nature. But Kahl argued that the mixed Jewish/Gentile table fellowship Paul was proposing would have had profoundly politi-



Ellie Elliott (left) and Brigitte Kahl

cal implications as well. If the meal had been conducted along Jewish lines, she noted, it would have included no customary prayers on behalf of the emperor. Antiochenes were used to Jews omitting this customary show of fidelity to the empire, as their loyalties were understood to be demonstrated vicariously through the temple in Jerusalem. But to include Gentiles in such meals, and to encourage *them* to pledge loyalty to the one true Lord (and *not* to Caesar), would have been explosive. Trying for a modern analogy to the situation Kahl was describing, Nanos suggested that it was a little like draft dodgers joining Amish communities in the 1960s. Perhaps so. In any event, the fellows generally affirmed Kahl’s theses (.71/pink), opening the way to exploring further the relationship between Paul’s communities and the Roman Empire.

In a final paper the seminar turned once again to the *Didache* for a description of at least one variety of nascent Christianity in Antioch in the first century. Nancy Pardee, whose doctoral research at the University of Chicago was on the *Didache*, provided the paper. Like many others, Pardee believes that the *Didache* is a multi-staged work, reflecting the evolution of a community over many years. And like many others, she associates the “two ways” material in chapters 1-6 with the earliest layer of the text. But unlike most, she argues that this was already the text of a nascent Christian group, Jewish in its orientation, but open to the inclusion of Gentiles on the basis of their acceptance of the love command, to love both God and neighbor. The fellows were inclined (.71/pink) to agree. But in *Didache* 6:3 a new provision is added to this original material, prohibiting the eating of meat sacrificed to idols. This, she argued, would have raised the bar a little on Gentile converts to the movement, reflecting perhaps the so-called “apostolic decree” to



Magus Zetterholm, Lund, Sweden

Ballot 6

Visualizing the Christian Community at Antioch

Nancy Pardee

Q1 The Didache exhibits strong evidence of more than one redactional stage.

Fellows	0.86 Red	68%R	26%P	00%G	05%B
Associates	0.91 Red	74%R	26%P	00%G	00%B

Q2 The eschatological conclusion is likely to have been originally joined to Didache 1–6.

Fellows	0.74 Pink	44%R	33%P	22%G	00%B
Associates	0.73 Pink	32%R	59%P	05%G	05%B

Q3 The interpolated section is independent of the finished gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Fellows	0.61 Pink	18%R	47%P	35%G	00%B
Associates	0.72 Pink	21%R	74%P	05%G	00%B

Q4 The yoke of the Lord refers to the instruction of the Two Ways.

Fellows	0.54 Pink	11%R	44%P	39%G	06%B
Associates	0.76 Red	38%R	52%P	10%G	00%B

Q5 The references to the “gospel” in the Didache refer to the Gospel of Matthew.

Fellows	0.50 Gray	06%R	61%P	11%G	22%B
Associates	0.70 Pink	19%R	71%P	10%G	00%B

Q6 The references to the “gospel” in the Didache all come from the same stage of composition.

Fellows	0.44 Gray	00%R	50%P	33%G	17%B
Associates	0.57 Pink	10%R	55%P	30%G	05%B

Q7 The earliest form of the Didache shows that the Christian communities of Antioch held a fervent belief in the imminence of the Parousia.

Fellows	0.70 Pink	26%R	58%P	16%G	00%B
Associates	0.85 Red	64%R	32%P	00%G	05%B

Q8 The earliest stage of the Didache reflects a Jewish-Christian community that accepted gentile converts on the basis of love of God and neighbor alone without adherence to the Law of Moses.

Fellows	0.70 Pink	32%R	53%P	11%G	05%B
Associates	0.83 Red	61%R	30%P	04%G	04%B

Q9 The redactional instruction in Did. 6.3 that prohibits the consumption of meat sacrificed to idols while only encouraging adherence to other Jewish dietary laws reflects a compromise between the original Torah-free stance of the gentile mission in Antioch attested by the earliest form of the Didache and the demands of the Apostolic Decree.

Fellows	0.76 Red	39%R	50%P	11%G	00%B
Associates	0.84 Red	57%R	39%P	04%G	00%B

which reference is made in Acts 15:22-29, in which Gentiles are admitted to the movement, but on the condition that they abstain from “what has been sacrificed to idols” (Acts 15:29). The fellows agreed (.76/red). If Pardee is right,

then the *Didache* might give us another glimpse of the beginnings of the Jesus movement in Antioch, when Paul was still an influential figure there, but also a chronicle, if you will, of its migration away from a Pauline stance and its embrace of the direction being set by James and others in Jerusalem.

After three sessions, we are still just scratching the surface of Antioch and the varieties of Jesus-followers one might have found there. But the Seminar will do just one more session on Antioch, and then move on. **4R**