

**DID THE APOSTLE PAUL  
HIJACK CHRISTIANITY?**

# The Issue

- ⦿ 30% of NT is about Paul or by Paul
- ⦿ The gospels and Paul's letters are different
- ⦿ Paul has had an enormous influence
- ⦿ Issues:
  - Did he enhance Jesus' intent?
  - Did he distort it?
  - Are gospels and other letters distorted by Paul



# Structure of Talk

- ◎ The Case For
  - Laurie Eddie's Argument
  - Other Common Arguments
- ◎ The Case Against
  - Response to Laurie
  - Response to Additional Arguments

# Did Paul Hijack Christianity?

- One of Laurie Eddie's claims in "The Origins of Christianity":
  - Paul, not Jesus, was the founder of Christianity as a new religion which developed away from both normal Judaism and the Nazarene variety of Judaism."  
(Maccoby, H. (1987). The Myth-Maker, Paul and the Invention of Christianity. . p. 16.)

# Summary of Laurie's Argument

- Christianity as we know it was created by Paul
- Jesus and his followers were regular Jews
- His preaching made him famous and he attracted followers from the common people
- His message was for Jews alone
- His message was to prepare for the coming Day of the Lord and also about the kingdom of God
- His message was a threat to Rome and so the Romans executed Jesus for sedition
- Pilate would not have allowed his body to be buried
- His body was dumped in the Hinnom Valley (also known as Gehenna)

# Summary of Laurie's Argument

- The Jerusalem church (whom Laurie called Nazarenes) believed that Jesus was the Messiah who would deliver Israel from Roman occupation
- Their belief in the resurrection was a hysterical reaction to explain away a crucified Messiah
- Belief in the resurrection was based on pagan deities such as Osiris, Attis etc
- Paul was from Tarsus, which was dominated by Greco-Roman religions
- Paul's conversion was a catharsis for persecuting Christians
- Paul's concepts were based on gnostic teachings
- Paul proclaimed Jesus as a divine figure – He claimed that Jesus was the son of God and even God

# Summary of Laurie's Argument

- Paul introduced atonement and salvation through faith
- He believed in a conflict between good and evil spiritual powers (dualism)
- Paul's message was abhorrent to the Jews, so he went to gentiles
- There was a struggle between the Nazarenes and Paul
- The Nazarenes were decimated by destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70
- Thus we are left with Paul's version of Christianity

# Additional Arguments

- Book of James
- Absence of Jesus' Narrative in Paul
- Differences in Ethics



# Book of James

- ⦿ Supposedly written by James the brother of Jesus
- ⦿ Contains no information about the life of Jesus
- ⦿ James only mentions Jesus twice
- ⦿ Mainly contains ethical teaching
- ⦿ Similar to the Sermon on the Mount
- ⦿ Was Jesus just a great teacher rather than son of God or Messiah?

# Absence of Narrative in Paul

- Very little in Paul's letters about Jesus' life or ministry
- Paul not knowledgeable nor interested in Jesus' life
- More interested in Jesus' theological significance and Christian belief and practice
- "Therefore from now on we recognize no one according to the flesh; even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him in this way no longer". (2 Corinthians 5:16)
- Was Paul interested in the actual historical Jesus or only interested in his theological significance?

# Ethics

- ⦿ Paul has negative view on homosexuality
- ⦿ Differentiated role for men and women
- ⦿ Paul's views currently unpopular
- ⦿ Views not explicitly mentioned by Jesus
- ⦿ Were these teachings of Paul his own additions that are inconsistent with Jesus?

# Counter Arguments

- ⦿ Response to Laurie
- ⦿ Respond to additional Arguments
- ⦿ Conclusion

# Response to Laurie

- ⦿ Points of Agreement
- ⦿ Sources
- ⦿ Pagan Influences
- ⦿ Gnosticism

# Points of Agreement

- Origins of Christianity are complex
- Jesus attracted followers from common people
- Preached about the kingdom of God
- Ministered predominantly to Jews
- Charged for sedition
- Predominantly a Jewish movement
- Jewish Christians initially part of Jewish Faith
- Christianity evolved after Jesus' crucifixion

# Sources

- ◎ Some references suspect:
  - Hyam Maccoby (1924-2004)
  - Gerald Massey (1828-1907)
  - Ernest William Barnes (1874-1953)
  - Thomas William Doane (1884)
  - Dorothy Murdock (Acharya S)
  - John Selby Spong

# Reaction to Maccoby's Book

- Laurie quotes extensively from “The Myth-Maker, Paul and the Invention of Christianity” by Hyam Maccoby
- Response generally negative:
  - “Maccoby's book is not good history, not even history at all.” (Jewish Quarterly Review 1988)
  - “Acts provides no evidence to substantiate this theory” (Skarsaune 2002)
  - “a regrettable reversion to older polemics” (James D.G. Dunn 2006)

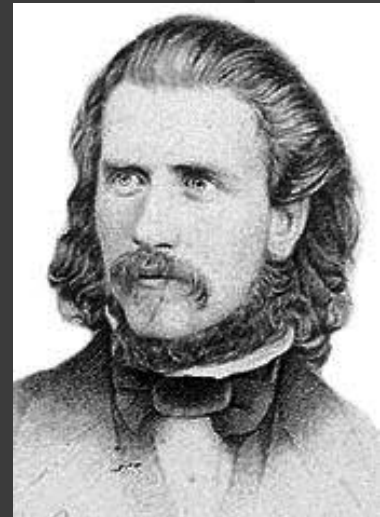


# Is Jesus based on Horus?

- ◎ Laurie claims Christ is a copy of Horus:
  - Christ is the Good Shepherd! So was Horus.
  - Christ is the Lamb of God! So was Horus.
  - Christ is the Bread of Life! So was Horus.
  - Christ is the Truth and the Life! So was Horus.
  - Christ is the Lord! So was Horus.

# Gerald Massey (1828-1907)

- ◉ Horus/Jesus parallels based on *The Historical Jesus and the Mythical Jesus*, by Massey
- ◉ Gerald Massey first proposed Horus/Jesus parallels
- ◉ Studied Egyptian records in the British Museum
- ◉ Taught himself to decipher the hieroglyphics
- ◉ Self-taught; no formal qualifications in Egyptology
- ◉ Works never considered significant in Egyptology
- ◉ Modern Egyptologists completely reject Massey's connections between Horus and Jesus
- ◉ All of the supposed claims of parallels are founded on claims from people who had no formal qualifications in Egyptology



# The Rise of Christianity (1947)

- By Ernest William Barnes (1874-1953)
- Heavily criticized by fellow bishops
- Does not represent majority views

# Use of sources

- ⦿ Any argument can be supported cherry picking non-peer reviewed sources
- ⦿ Peer reviewed sources have a higher level of trust
- ⦿ Any assertions from other sources should be supported by independent argument

# Gnosticism

- ⦿ Laurie claims that Paul's theology was based on Gnosticism.
- ⦿ The essentials of Gnosticism are:
  - Secret knowledge is only available to the enlightened ones
  - Material is evil and spiritual is good
  - The most high being is spiritual
  - A lesser being created the (evil) material world

# Is Gnosticism Early?

- At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century some scholars claimed Gnosticism was prevalent in the 1<sup>st</sup> century
- Modern scholarship now claims that Gnosticism emerged in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century
- There are no Gnostic documents that predate Christianity

# Gnosticism & Early Christianity

- ⦿ Why were gnostic documents (eg the Nag Hammadi documents) rejected?
- ⦿ It was because
  - They were not from apostolic sources
  - They were written too late to be of historical value
  - They were not consistent with the apostolic documents, ie the gospels, Paul's letters and the remainder of the NT.

# Response to Other Arguments

- ⦿ Structure of NT
- ⦿ Gospels
- ⦿ Paul's Letters
- ⦿ Other Letters
- ⦿ Are the gospels influenced by Paul?



# Structure of New Testament

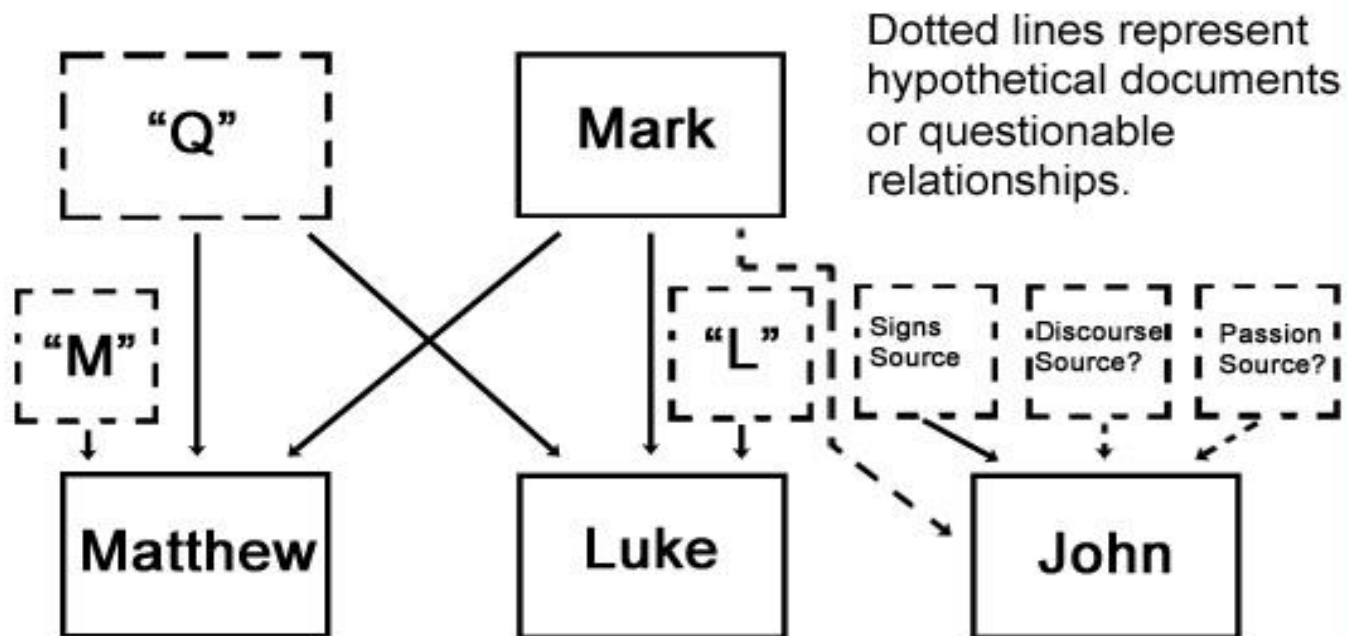
- ◎ Structure
  - 4 gospels
  - Acts
  - 13 letters from Paul
  - 8 letters from other authors
  - Book of Revelation
- ◎ The 4 gospels contain narrative information about Jesus birth, ministry, teaching, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension.
- ◎ Acts describes narrative about life of church after Jesus' ascension for next 30 years. Last half is devoted to Paul's activities.

# Gospels

- ⦿ Sources
- ⦿ Dating
- ⦿ Dependence on Paul

# Sources for the 4 Gospels

## Gospel Source Theories



# Source Theory

- ⦿ Matthew, Mark and Luke - synoptic gospels
- ⦿ Synoptic = “see together”
- ⦿ Share common material
- ⦿ Sometimes exact agreement
- ⦿ Common view:
  - Matthew & Luke used some of Mark
  - Matthew & Luke common material - not in Mark (Q)
  - Q is very early - predates Paul’s letters
  - Matthew & Luke had independent sources (M & L)
  - John probably independent of synoptic gospels

# Gospel Dating

- ⦿ Laurie proposed late dating for gospels
- ⦿ Assumed all 4 gospels written after 70 AD
- ⦿ Supposedly time for Paul's version of Christianity to be incorporated into the gospels
- ⦿ Stephen Spence will speak on the NT dating later this year
- ⦿ Good reasons for believing that Mark and Luke were written much earlier than Laurie suggested

# Completion of Acts

- ◎ Sequence of books:
  - Mark
  - Luke
  - Acts
- ◎ Acts finishes abruptly in 62 AD
- ◎ *For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 28: 30-32)*

# What happened after Acts?

Event	Approximate Date
Paul's trial	After 62 AD
Neronian persecutions	64 AD
Paul, Peter & James executed	Mid 60s
Jewish Wars	66-70 AD
Destruction of Jerusalem	70 AD

- Why didn't Luke mention these things?
- Seems that Acts written in 62 AD
- Luke' gospel probably written prior to 60 AD
- Mark written even earlier

# Are gospels dependent on Paul?

- ◎ Luke is influenced by Paul
  - Luke accompanied Paul
  - Irenaeus claims “Luke, Paul's associate, also set down in a book the gospel that Paul used to preach.”
  - Luke’s account of the Last Supper is very similar to Paul’s account in 1 Corinthians 11.
- ◎ Mark:
  - Probably written concurrently with Paul’s letters
  - Written from separate locations
  - Take several years for Paul to affect Mark
  - Seem completely independent
- ◎ Matthew and John also seem independent of Paul
- ◎ Conclusion: Gospels affected little by Paul



# Paul's Letters

- ⦿ Tensions with Jerusalem Church
- ⦿ Paul's Knowledge of Jesus
- ⦿ Did Paul seek to skew Christianity?

# Early Christianity in Jerusalem

- ◉ Jerusalem church saw Jesus as fulfilment of Jewish hopes
- ◉ Saw themselves as having continuity with the Jewish faith
- ◉ Other Jews regarded them as a Jewish sect
- ◉ Continued to worship in the Jewish temple
- ◉ Early church consisted only of Jews
- ◉ Early evangelism only targeted Jews

# Tensions with Jerusalem Church

- Hellenistic Christians scattered
- Preached gospel to Samaritans and then to gentiles. Extremely radical.
- Paul followed this trend
- Paul's tensions with Jerusalem Church:
  - Should gentile converts become Jews?
  - Should gentiles follow Jewish practice?
  - Should gentiles be circumcised?
  - Is faith in Christ enough for salvation?
- Divinity of Jesus not an issue

# What did Paul know about Jesus?

- ⦿ Does Paul say little about Jesus ministry?
- ⦿ Paul shows familiarity with Jesus, eg
  - Born of a woman (Galatians 4:4-5)
  - Jesus' ethics in sermon on mount (Rom 12)
  - Kingdom of God (only Paul)
  - Thief in the night (1 Thess 5)
  - Last supper (1 Cor 11)
  - The fact of the crucifixion
  - Pontius Pilate (1 Tim 6:13 disputed?)
  - Resurrection
- ⦿ Hard to be definitive

# Did Paul seek to skew Christianity?

- ⦿ Each one of you is saying, “I am of Paul,” and “I of Apollos,” and “I of Cephas,” and “I of Christ.” Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 1(Cor 11-13)
- ⦿ What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. (1 Cor 3:5)
- ⦿ Paul saw himself as another servant of Christ

# Other Letters

- ⦿ 8 letters from other authors
  - Hebrews
  - James
  - Peter
  - John
  - Jude
- ⦿ All Jews

# Features of Letters

- ⦿ Contain no narrative information about Jesus
- ⦿ That was not their purpose
- ⦿ Purpose to address issues regarding theological understanding and Christian practice
- ⦿ Presumed prior knowledge about Jesus
- ⦿ Similar to Paul's letters
- ⦿ Independent of Paul
- ⦿ Paul did not pull Christianity into a significantly different direction

# Did other Letter Writers know Jesus?

- ⦿ Other letters contain no narrative information about Jesus
- ⦿ Imply no knowledge or interest?
- ⦿ Johns letters
  - No narrative
  - No knowledge or interest?
  - Also wrote Gospel of John
  - Knew Jesus and was interested
- ⦿ Silence does not necessarily mean lack of knowledge nor interest



# Book of Hebrews

- Not written by Paul
- Written prior to Jewish wars (temple still standing)
- Independent of Paul
- Claims a very high view of Jesus
  - In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. (Hebrews 1:1-3)
- Divinity of Jesus not invented by Paul

# Conclusion

- Paul's Former Life
- Was Paul influenced by paganism?
- Did he know about the earthly Jesus?
- What is the relationship between the gospels and the letters?
- Did Paul invent Christianity?

# Paul's Former Life

- Paul was formerly a zealous Pharisee
- Student of the OT and Jewish traditions
- He persecuted the Church
- No evidence of feelings of guilt
- Paul had not seen Jesus in the flesh
- He knew about Jesus and this new Jewish sect

# Pagan Influences?

- Paul was very much a Jew
- Saw Jesus through Jewish eyes
- Arguments based on OT
- Highly educated man
- Aware of Greek philosophy
- He would not seek inspiration from pagan sources

# Paul's Knowledge of Jesus

- No direct first-hand knowledge of Jesus' life
- Claims knowledge through revelation
- Significant contact with the apostles and with members of Jesus' family but his information was 2<sup>nd</sup> hand
- We have to rely on the testimony of other NT witnesses for this information

# Gospels and Letters

- Gospels written within the context of Jesus life
- Proclaim progressive revelation of Jesus
- Letters disclose the significance of Jesus life
- Gospels probably written concurrently with Paul's letters
- Written from different locations
- Gospels and Paul's letters are largely independent
- Luke was closely associated with Paul
- He conducted an independent investigation
- Got most of his information from other sources

# The Roman Empire



# Did Paul Invent Christianity?

- It is impossible that a single person could exert monolithic control of such a diverse movement
- If Paul deviated from other movements within early Christianity then it should be clearly visible within the NT collection; but it is not
- We can read the whole of the NT
- 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians could not do this
- We have a bird's eye view that was never available to any person within the 1<sup>st</sup> century
- The short answer is “No”