Genesis Of A Church

CONTEXT FOR A CRUCI-FICTION:

It would be an understatement to say that the 1st century A.D. was a precipitous time for religion in the Occident. If we are to understand the circumstances in which Christianity emerged as a distinct Faith, it makes sense to begin with the incumbent power structures. Let’s look at the Roman Emperors who reigned at this pivotal juncture in world history. We will then be better equipped to assay the geo-political context within which the relevant scriptures were composed.

Roman Emperor Nero (who reigned for 14 years, from 54 to 68 A.D.) was the final ruler of the Julio-Claudian dynasty: the lineage that had been initiated by Julius Caesar c. 50 B.C. That dynasty was in power during the alleged life of JoN (when Tiberius was the anointed Caesar Augustus). Nero ruled primarily as a merciless despot–obsessed with decadence. It was during this period that Saul of Tarsus wrote his letters about the prophesied "Christ" of Abrahamic lore. Those letters were inspired by what he had heard about an auspicious Galilean figure named "Yeshua" (a.k.a. Jesus of Nazareth; hereafter denoted "JoN").

Nero's reign was followed by a tumultuous transition of power to the inauguration of the 27-year Flavian dynasty. From 69 A.D. to 96 A.D., the three Flavian rulers (renown military generals Vespasian and his son, Titus; followed by Domitian) accomplished many things–including the construction of the Colosseum (a monument to crowd-control and mass-distraction) and the quashing of a Jewish revolt in Palestine. The suppression of the Jews involved the razing of the Second Temple by Titus. This was the period in which the Synoptic Gospels were composed ("Mark", followed by Q, then the derivative versions, "Luke" and "Matthew".)

It is interesting that many of the earliest "saints" designated (ex post facto) in the Roman Catholic Church were FLAVIANS. For example, Flavia Domitilla (Titus' sister / niece) was eventually canonized. As it so happened, her son, Clement, was the man who would be appointed the chief presbyter in Rome (i.e. the third apostolic successor to Simon-Peter) of the nascent "Christian" church in Rome.

During the 1st century Flavian Dynasty, there were also Titus Flavius Clemens and Clement of Alexandria–both later canonized as saints by the Church; and both of whom–peculiarly–identified the iconography of the early church (fish and olive branches) with that of the Imperium. Note that Clement would be retroactively anointed "Pope" centuries later, when the Roman Catholic Church established the apostolic lineage under a Roman Emperor who, it turns out, considered himself to be a descendent of the Flavian line: Constantine.

Tellingly, it was during this Roman campaign against the Jewish revolt that Judaic icon Josephus Bar Mathias defected; and subsequently managed to curry favor with the Flavian leaders–putting himself in their good graces. By being a turncoat, Josephus was able to position himself as an influential figure within the Flavian regime's proxy in Palestine.

Starting in 37 B.C., the Herodian dynasty was inaugurated in Canaan (dubbed “Iudaea”; i.e. Judea) by Herod the Great. Herod was charged by Emperor Augustus with ruling over the Levantine province. This Judean dynasty remained in place until 92 A.D. (Judea would be re-christened “Palaestina Prima” by the Roman Imperium during the Bar Kokhba revolt of 132-136.)

It was the final Herodian Emperor, Agrippa II, that befriended this Romanized Jew–who had been by then been anointed “Flavius Josephus”: the imperial court’s official historian. Thus it was under the auspices of Agrippa II that Josephus (who had effectively become a Roman propagandist) composed his famed historical accounts. The material that was used in Josephus’ magnum opus (“Antiquities of the Jews”) was compiled in this capacity. (Josephus’ portrayal of the 66-73 war against the Jewish uprising was largely derived from Vespasian’s own chronicling of those events.)

So what was actually going on during this key period in history (sometimes referred to as the “Apostolic Age”)? In a nutshell: Contentious religious conflicts, questions of illegitimate occupation (especially in Palestine), and–of course–vicious power struggles. It was during this epoch of turmoil and tribulation that the Jews were eagerly awaiting their Messiah: the “savior” who would come to rescue and redeem them…and, presumably, inaugurate the new nation for Beth Israel. (See my essay, “The Land Of Purple”.) This longed-for Messianic warrior–dubbed “Kristos” in ancient Greek–would be able to defeat the Roman nemesis with the power of Yahweh behind him, just as David had overcome the Philistines a millennium earlier.

Unsurprisingly, the roiling Messianic fervor that suffused Palestine during the 1st century saw numerous self-proclaimed “Messiahs”, each anointing himself as THE ONE. Inevitably, any successful preacher (i.e. charismatic leader) would have been cast by acolytes (and thus would have been inclined to cast himself) in the idiom of the era–a phenomenon that was best illustrated by Apollonius of Tyana. Such a figure would have invariably expressed his ideas by couching them within this proxy-of-the-savior-god paradigm.

And so it went with the cult that formed around JoN. The followers of “The Way” were essentially an apocalyptic Jewish sect (an eschatological Faith), the Pauline strain of which embraced super-sessionism: a New Covenant–inclusive of Gentiles–that superseded the original (Mosaic) Covenant of the Hebrew Bible. (The Judaic

strain of Abrahamic lore would itself undergo a transition during Late Antiquity, ramifying into the Essenes, Sadducees, and Pharisees…eventually yielding the prevailing Mishnaic tradition.)

Because the Roman Emperors had the Jewish scriptures (and "alternative" histories) destroyed, the manuscripts that had fortuitously been hidden in the Qumran caves–on the western bank of the Dead Sea–are the only surviving (contemporaneous) records now available FROM WITHIN this 1st-century Messianic movement. These "Dead Sea Scrolls" were likely written by the Jewish sect known as the Essenes. Unsurprisingly, their contents do not comport with the "official" histories (i.e. those approved by the Roman authorities)–most notably the highly-biased writings of Josephus.

Josephus' account names the Flavian Dynasty as the long-awaited Messiah of the Jews. After all, the Roman Emperors were, by definition, divine (in Judaic terms, "sent by God" to offer salvation to the empires wayward subjects). Naturally, Josephus sought to cast the legitimation of the Roman imperium in the idiom of the day (that is: couch the course of events in terms that Judea's disaffected Jews would understand).

In this context, the letters written by Saul of Tarsus in the late 50's and 60's make perfect sense. As with the Roman Imperium, an entire mythology had to be created as a means of legitimizing the claims emanating from the (Roman) "powers that be". It is no wonder that the authorities incorporated key elements the savior-god motif into the explanation for their own existence…and then, eventually, appropriated the "Christ" mythology (as we'll see shortly).

The "son of god" motif had been employed since Julius Caesar anointed himself a deity; and it would continue to be used when Emperor Aurelian invoked "Sol Invictus" in 274 A.D. (thereby rendering himself the representative of the one true god). It would take until Emperor Constantine in the early 4th century before the Roman Imperium opted to entirely co-opt the burgeoning Christian mythos into its own propaganda.

The basis for this cooptation is illustrated by the Christ-like figure depicted in the Tomb of the Julii, located on the (pre-Catholic) Vatican Necropolis–a structure that was erected just prior to Constantine's reign. Sure enough, the figure was associated with Sol Invictus; and even employed Dionysian iconography as well as the "Good Shepherd" leitmotif (an even scenes from the Book of Jonah).

Predictably, the Roman Catholic church ended up being almost entirely comprised of rituals and iconography found in antecedent modes of imperial deification. (The notable emendation was that the crucifix was rendered the primary talisman.) This even went for nomenclature. After all, the title of the pagan high priest of Rome, the Pontifex Maximus [“greatest pontiff”] was used for the presbyter (i.e. bishop) of Rome.

Does the current iconography of “Christianity” go back to this early period? Hardly. The symbol of “The Way” was an “ikhthys” (fish); which later served as a Greek acronym for Iesou (Aramaic “Yeshua”; a.k.a. “Jesus”), Kristos (Christ), Theos, Yios (son), and Soter (savior). Even after Emperor Constantine adopted Christianity in 313, he used not a crucifix as his insignia, but the “labarum”: a vexillum (military standard) that used the two superimposed Roman letters (chi and rho): an insignia that had a long Hellenic (Ptolemaic / Greco-Roman) legacy.

It should also be noted that the standard shape of the device used for crucifixion was a cross, which happened to roughly correspond with the ankh of ancient Egypt (pre-dating 1500 B.C.)–a symbol that represented eternal life. Revealingly, the Codex Glazier (a manuscript of the New Testament from the late 4th century, written in Coptic) uses the ankh instead of the “conventional” cross used today.

Couple this with the extant savior-god myths (son of a god, born of a virgin, twelve apostles, executed and resurrected three days later, etc.), and it becomes apparent that the folklore which formed around Jesus of Nazareth was simply a hybridization of antecedent myths. (I explore this at length in my essays on “Mythemes”.)

Pursuant to the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, the Emperor could simply delegate (outsource?) the role of “representative of God on Earth” to the new-fangled pontiff…AS NEEDED. He could thereby placate Christians without needing to compromise his own power. Of course, upon the demise of the “old” Roman Empire in the 5th century, this arrangement would back-fire. By the time the Holy Roman Empire emerged c. 800, western Europe was simply a conglomerate of feuding kingdoms, the monarchs of which were–to varying degrees and in varying ways–beholden to the bishop of Rome, but persisted in their geo-political maneuvering for the next thousand years.

As is often the case, politics and theology were intertwined. Even when it came to doctrinal points, we find that events were about different factions jockeying for power. At each step, whatever rulers did was a function of their vested interests.

During the Flavian Dynasty of the late 1st century, the synoptic Gospels were composed by those who'd been tutored in the folklore surrounding JoN…and who were likely influenced by the Christology propounded in the letters (purportedly) written by Saul of Tarsus. Earnest proponents were swept up in (read: taken in by) the fashionable savior-god narratives that percolated throughout the empire at the time…especially in the Middle East (from Anatolia, through the Levant, into Egypt).

In the end, the Pauline version prevailed for reasons that were due more to utility than credibility. It is important to recognize that ALL circumstances are–by their very nature–simply accidents of history; and that–as with ANY contingency–context is everything. Even alleged REPORTS OF history are themselves PRODUCED BY history…and, more specifically, by mortal (fallible) men, each with his own dispositions, biases, and interests. Subsequently, the prevailing reports end up SHAPING history, thereby providing the warped lens through which we see events.

With this in mind, it is NOT with the deified Galilean Jew that we'll begin. For, while JoN is the primary figure in Christian lore, it is "Saint Peter" who is the point of departure for the Vatican qua Roman Catholic magisterium…that is, according to the Roman Catholic Church. The papacy is synonymous with the so-called "throne of Saint Peter", named after the Galilean fisherman, S[h]imon ben Jonah of Capernaum; who was born "Kepha" (rendered "Cephas" in Latin). He was eventually assigned the appellation, "Petros" (Anglicized to "Peter"), meaning "rock" (i.e. solid foundation). {12}

The original proselytes of the "The Way" included Cephas (Simon-Peter), Timothy of Lystra, Saul of Tarsus ("Paul"), John of Salamis ("Barnabas"), and James of Nazareth (JoN's brother)…along with minor figures like Titus of Antioch. These men argued about what, exactly, "The Way" WAS (how it was to be defined; and what its mission should be). Such disputation led to a major falling-out between Paul and Barnabas, and to the marginalization of JoN's brother (see Appendix 2). To simplify:

- There was the Antioch- / Corinth- / Ephesus-based (quasi-Hellenist) camp, promoting Gentile-inclusiveness and a slight departure from Judaic lore (Timothy and Paul; as well as the authors of "Luke").
- There was the Jerusalem-based camp, seeking to maintain Mosaic law as originally conceived; and promoting Hebrew exclusivity (Barnabas and James; as well as the authors of "Matthew").

Initially, Simon-Peter was in the latter camp; yet he eventually became associated with the (prevailing) Pauline version of the new Faith. Paul was, after all, much more adept at evangelism: orchestrating missionary campaigns and–yes–writing persuasive letters to local congregations (see A.N. Wilson's "Paul: The Mind Of An Apostle"). Here's the thing: At that early point in time, if THESE men could not agree on what the Truth was…that puts those of use living two millennia later in quite a pickle.

To reiterate: EVEN THEN, key figures disagreed with one another on key points. Each yielded a different verdict about what the correct view of "The Way" might be. Predictably, the more inclusive (Pauline) version triumphed, as THAT was the version that was able to bring more people (Gentiles) into the fold. The fact that Paul said nutty things did not detract from his proposal's formidable allure…as the nuttiness of many of his statements would not be fully grasped until mankind (finally) emerged from the Dark Ages.

Different followings recognized different texts and honored the decrees from the so-called "Council of Jerusalem" (c. 50) in different ways. (The primary issue at that council was the degree to which followers of this NEW testament should honor the rules of the Hebrew Bible.)

Recall that after the deaths of the original impresarios, further control over the liturgical evolution of the burgeoning creed was largely up for grabs. Unsurprisingly, during the second century, the prevailing story was the one that was most amenable to the maintenance of incumbent power structures. (History is told by the victors.) So it is no wonder that THAT was the version that "won".

We should note that Simon-Peter operated almost entirely out of Antioch. In fact, he never set foot in Rome. How can we be so sure? Years later, in his letters to his friends in Rome, Saul of Tarsus is careful to list all the key people relating to "The Way" who were in the capital city. Never once does he mention Cephas / Simon-Peter. To contend that Saint Peter sought to found a "Church of Rome" is, therefore, utterly groundless. {1} And to contend that Simon-Peter was a presbyter of Rome is historically inaccurate.

Even supposing that Simon-Peter intended to found a "church" (in the modern sense) is erroneous. Regarding the alleged statement–which would have been originally articulated in Aramaic–by JoN to Simon-Peter that "you are my rock and on you I will build my church", it should be noted that the word for a social group (as in

a club or other association) and church (qua congregation) in ancient Greek were the same: “ecclesia”. Thus the statement was referring to a foundation in the liturgical sense.

In other words: The “church” JoN referred to when speaking with Simon-Peter was THE PEOPLE, not a monolithic institution controlled by a cabal of high priests–dressed in fancy regalia–housed within a gigantic fortress on Vatican Hill in Rome.

Another key factor worth noting: The early (Pauline) Christian movement was convinced that the end of history was immanent; so its followers clearly did not have in mind “the church” as we now know it: as a hierarchal leviathan characterized by institutionalized dogmatism, highly-concentrated power, and top-down control. The authors of the Gospel accounts would not have imagined that their composition may have been heard by anyone beyond their community AS IT THEN EXISTED; as the specific audience for which the “Good News” was written was for peasants in the 1st century. Simon-Peter HIMSELF thought that the world would probably end in his lifetime…or, at most, within the next generation. He was quite convinced that the Messiah would return very soon, thereby precluding the need for founding any kind of new institution.

After all, Jesus HIMSELF clearly believed the End Days were immanent. To recognize that members of “The Way” expected the End Of Days (i.e. return of the Christ) to happen by the end of their generation, we need only read the letters penned by Saul of Tarsus himself. Prime examples are the first letter to the Thessalonians 4:13-18, the first letter to the Corinthians 7:29-31, the letter to the Romans 13:11-12, and the letter to the Philippians 1:6. (I discuss this matter at length in my essay: “Brink Porn”.)

Saul of Tarsus died in the 60’s. He certainly was not expecting his message to apply to a world two millennia later. Are we to believe that what leaders of The Way had in mind was the establishment of a monolithic institution to be operated by a cadre of popinjays for the next 2,000 years? (“The day is at hand!” does not mean “The day won’t happen for at least 2,000 more years; in the interregnum there will be endless misery, ignorance, violence, and pointless suffering.”)

As it turned out, those who actually knew JoN (who were personally acquainted with him, his ministry, and his final days) played almost no role in defining the movement JoN left behind. The only exceptions (James and Simon-Peter) ended up not playing a decisive role in the formation of proto-Christianity; as their version of the

movement (which was based in Jerusalem) was not the prevailing one. The Hellenic figure from Asia Minor, Saul of Tarsus (a man who'd never met JoN) is the one who dictated the terms of the newfangled creed. To wit: It was "Paul" who made JoN into the hoped-for Messiah / Kristos. {6}

To reiterate: EVEN AT ITS GENESIS, "The Way" had major disagreements about what the legacy of the Jewish preacher from Galilee. We can only imagine the myriad tangents that emerged subsequent to the originators of the movement (those who'd been in the best position to, as it were, "get it right") in the years and decades following JoN's death. The first expositors could not even concur on even the most elementary points–a striking fact that indicates a profound dubiousness in ANY of their accounts. Unsurprisingly, each author wanted to do his own thing with this captivating narrative. So each DID do his own thing.

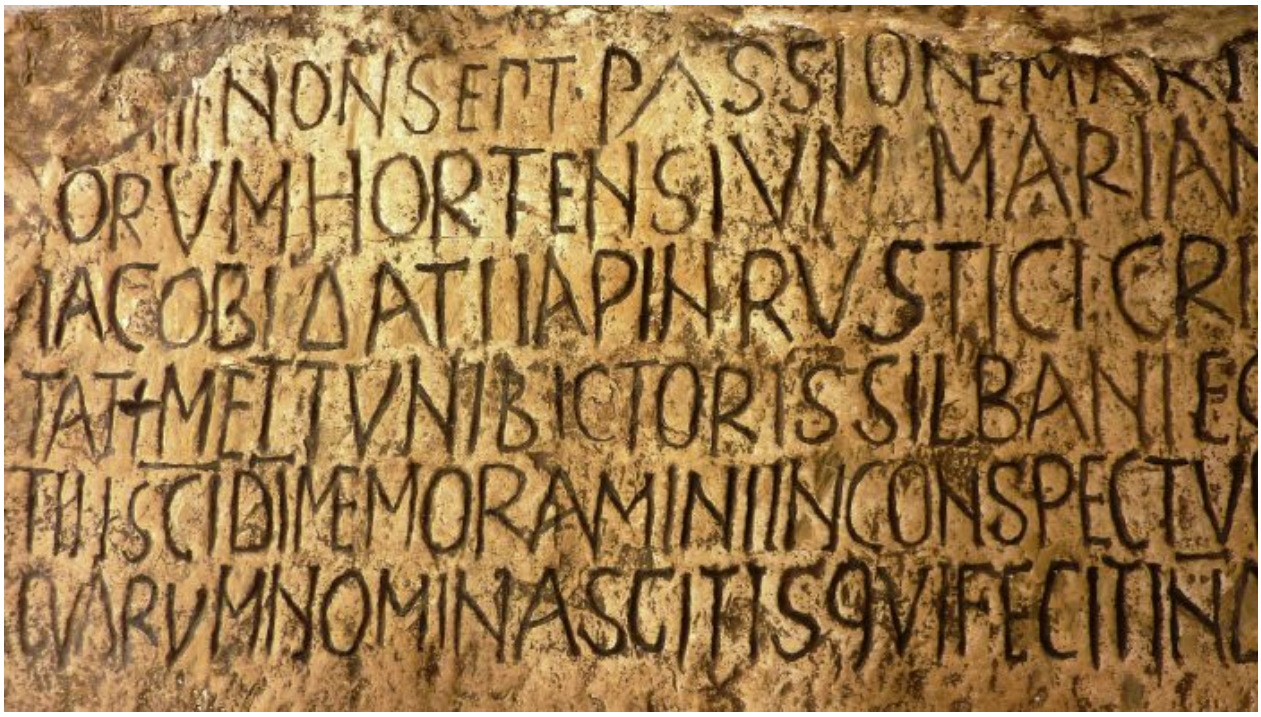
In the end, Saul of Tarsus' version "won". That, in turn, informed the revamping of the original Gospel ("Mark") performed by the authors of "Luke" and "Matthew". The Synoptic Gospels were cobbled together (from fragments known as "pericopes") in ways that met the needs of their immediate audience. These tracts would later be interpreted to suit the purposes of the emerging ecclesiastical institution, based in Rome. This process involved different people choosing between a large number of competing texts (there were more than twenty Gospels), each of which was selected on the basis of its conduciveness to the formation of an INSTITUTION.

Hence attempts were made to exclude (eliminate?) alternate versions. The key was to curtail any avenue for the formulation of doctrine that fell outside the approved institution. "You need X for redemption / atonement / absolution / salvation…but you can only get X by using THIS INSTITUTION as the intermediary."

Again, the Pauline letters offer indications of the true nature of the initial movement. Over the subsequent generations of writing and copying selected texts (as the years came and went without the hoped-for RETURN coming to pass), the institution we now call "the church" emerged…by default…replete with a hierarchy of ecclesiastic authority.

To reiterate: Members of The Way were entirely concerned with the world of the 1st-century Roman Empire. Their scope of concern did not go beyond the 1st century because Saul of Tarsus, Simon-Peter, and the rest were convinced that the End of Days was immanent. They therefore would have found it bizarre–nay, outlandish–

that an institution two millennia later was invoking Simon-Peter's name in the manner that the Vatican does. Both Simon-Peter and Saul of Tarsus would have surely been dumfounded by what we now call "Christianity".



BEFORE CONSTANTINE:

We might begin here by noting that "Christianity" is a very broad term–a term that neither Simon-Peter nor Saul of Tarsus ever used. They did not NEED to use such a term, because they were Jews operating within the context of a revamped Abrahamic Faith. Historically, the term "Christianity" has since come to encompass a myriad of things. The umbrella-term "Christian" subsumes the kernel movement that started the couple years leading up to and following JoN's death (in the late 20's)…from which there emerged various movements of neo-Judaism (the most notable of which was called, "The Way"). That would be followed by a potpourri of Pauline-based proto-Christianities…many of which which endured up through the 4th–and even into the 5th–century. As we'll see, it was not until then that the Roman Catholic Church would take form.

What came to be Roman Catholicism was loosely based on one of the many strains of proto-Christianity…which was, in turn, loosely based on one particular version of "The Way" (Paul's) with which Simon-Peter had some key disagreements. This garish irony is lost on those who exalt the throne of Saint Peter.

People misconstruing “church” as institution rather than congregation stems from the Greek term, “ekklesia”–which conflates Semitic terms like “moed”, “edah”, and “kahal” (gathering of believers) with the more modern notion of a church as an authoritarian, hierarchical power structure. The most infamous contortion of this hermeneutic is based upon the Gospel of Matthew, where JoN purportedly said that “on this rock, I will build my church” (16:18)…which simply meant: “On this theological foundation, I will grow my flock of followers (promulgate my message).” Taking this to mean a clarion call for (what is now known as) the Vatican is risible. Invoking the aforementioned passage from Matthew–to rationalize (what came to be) the Catholic Church–is based on a semiotic swindle.

Much of the 2nd century was a time of prosperity for the Roman Empire. From the ascension of of Trajan in 98–through Hadrian and Antoninus Pius–to the great Stoic philosopher, Marcus Aurelius (who was followed by his adept son, Commodus), the Empire flourished. This “Pax Romana” endured until the last decade of the century, when–after the death of Commodus–it experienced a short bout of political turmoil (after which Lucius Septimius Severus inaugurated the Severan Dynasty).

The emperors of this halcyon period had a sense of civic responsibility, and actively promoted Greek philosophy. (Also embraced were Mithra-ism and the Cybelene cults.) It was to the open-minded Emperor, Antoninus Pius that the Christian apologist from Judea, Justin Martyr, issued his pleas. (Antoninus Pius also maintained a friendship with the famed Judean rabbi, Judah ha-Nasi.) So it is no surprise that the rulers of the Empire did not find any appeal in the (still-embryonic) Christianity.

It was the prelate, Ignatius who–from Antioch–first promoted the notion that the bishop of Rome was to be “protos amongst the patriarchs”–that is: he was to be in relation to all other bishops analogous to how Simon-Peter had been to the original apostles. The 7 letters of Ignatius of Antioch (c. 107 AD) reveal the institutional / doctrinal metamorphosis the early church underwent during the generation following Saul of Tarsus.

Ignatius is purported to have had second-hand acquaintance with his subject. (He allegedly knew the apostle, Yohanan ben Zebedee of Beth Saida, who knew JoN first-hand.) Ignatius’ career illustrated some already accepted practices of clergy (i.e. bishops, presbyters, and deacons) in the late first and early 2nd century. Thus, as early as 107, the concept of liturgy and eucharist was accepted and understood. (On this matter, also reference the dialogue between Justin Martyr and the Jewish

figure named “Trypho” from the 2nd century.) By this point, the establishment of the Roman bishop as supreme potentate had become codified in ecclesiastical precedent.

Over the course of the 2nd century, men who influenced the selection of “approved” Christian texts included Marcion of Sinope in Paphlagonia, Ignatius of Antioch in Syria, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lugdunum in Gaul (purported student of Polycarp of Smyrna), and Clement of Alexandria in Egypt. Not coincidentally, these figures were the first to posit an apostolic lineage going back to Simon Peter–presumably as way of legitimizing their claims.

The late 2nd century was a pivotal time for the designation of the accepted canon. Starting with the Roman episcopate of Anicetus in 155 (and on through Soter, Eleuterus, and Victor), the presbyter of Rome came to increasingly resemble a cynosure. In other words, the seat became more a monarchical episcopate than the leader of a local congregation. This is in spite of the fact that Antioch had been the first epicenter of the gestating institution (which accounts for the integral role of Ignatius in formulating the ecclesiastical protocols).

In the late 2nd / early 3rd century, the Alog[o]i (alt. “Alogians”) of Anatolia held that the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation were fabrications, and so should not be included in the canon as legitimate scripture. It was known early on that such scripture was composed long after the earliest material; and so involved extensive confabulation.

Many Christologies were on offer during this time, each a ham-fisted attempt to rationalize the newfangled 3-in-1 theology:

- **Arianism:** Which states that Jesus was created by the Abrahamic deity, yet was not equal to him (as with the Anomoeans / Eunomians).
- **Marcionism:** Which states that Jesus was not human, and the Christian god was not the same as the god of the Hebrew Bible.
- **Eutychianism:** Which states that Jesus’ human nature was trumped by his divine nature.
- **Monothelitism:** Which states that Jesus had two natures but only one will: the divine will. Therefore his humanity was incomplete.
- **Docetism:** Which posits that Jesus qua historical figure was apparitional.
- **Sabellianism:** Which posits one persona with different aspects / modes (a patripassian / modalist conception of co-substantiality)

- **Gnosticism:** Which posits Jesus as an emanation (as articulated by Basilides of Alexandria)

There was theological hair-splitting over even the most semantic quandaries–as with the nit-picking between “mono-physitism” (as with the Chalcedonians) vs. “dyo-physitism” (as with the Nestorians) vs. “mia-physitism” (as with the Jacobites / Assyrians and Copts). All this boiled down to a rather frivolous debate about whether there were three personae that were of one nature / essence / substance (as with conventional Trinitarianism, based on homo-ousios)…or there was one persona with three natures / essences / substances (as with Monarchianism, based on hetero-ousios).

On which of these competing Christologies was the official theology to be based? Until the 4th century, this was an open question. Which was most reconcilable with accepted scripture? In reality, NONE were actually supported by anything in the Gospels because the Gospels–whether Gnostic or Canonical–never explicitly mentioned a trinity. (I explore this point at length in part II of my essay on “Mythemes”.) At the end of the day, it’s like asking how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. {7}

The disparate results reveal to us the extent to which the story was being rigged according to the sensibilities of each promulgator. As one might expect, all this quibbling between theological camps precipitated major conflicts; and power-brokers were obliged to be savvy in their alliances. At every juncture, the issue was: Who would wind up well-positioned within the emerging power structures? And how was RELIGION to be used to leverage that power? In 189, Irenaeus promoted the primacy of the Church of Rome in his “Against Heresies”. In this vain, he vociferously advocated for the inclusion of the Gospel of John (which was conducive to institutionalized dogmatism) while decrying all Gnostic Gospels (which were not conducive to institutionalized dogmatism).

The so-called “Muratorian canon” demonstrates that, by around 200, most establishment figures had coalesced around a definitive set of writings…give or take a few anti-legomena (disputed texts). By the time Zephyrinus was bishop of Rome, most of what is now considered the “New Testament” had been chosen–barring “The Book of Revelation”–which, at that time, was recognized for what it actually was: a zany, propagandistic screed by a mad-man from Patmos, Greece (named “John”). {4}

Until c. 235, the Roman Empire enjoyed a period of relative stability–that is: during the Severan Dynasty. During that time, the great scholar, Lucius Cassius Dio of Nicaea flourished; while the great pedagogue, Alexander of Aphrodisias taught at the Peripatetic school in Athens. The mid-3rd century proved to be a rather tumultuous time for the empire–characterized by chronic invasion and political instability. Yet intellectual activity persisted–as exemplified by Alexandrian figures like Diophantus, Pappus, Ammonius Saccas, Origen "the Pagan", and Plotinus.

Beginning in 270 (with the ascension of Emperor Aurelian), the Roman Empire experienced another stretch of prosperity. This continued on through the reign of Diocletian, who governed adeptly via a tetrarchic system until c. 305. Diocletian ruled with a strong hand, and is remembered for being especially harsh against Christians; as he saw them as somewhat of a nuisance. Though–for what it's worth–according to the Talmud, he once stated: "You must show respect even to the smallest and lowest of the Romans, because you can never know which one of us will rise to greatness."

But what sort of "Christianity" existed during those first centuries? The church as it eventually came to exist was not yet established (until the Council of Nicaea, almost three centuries after the death of JoN). So what happened during that intervening period? A discerning reader should be reminded that histories of the so-called "early church" (such as those by Roman historian Eusebius of Caesarea Maritima, or of Christian apologists like Tertullian and Irenaeus) need to be taken with a grain of salt.

Here's what we know: After Simon-Peter, there was a sequence of 28 figureheads (i.e. presbyters) who–unlike Peter–were actually in Rome. Each of these figures served as the de facto leader of the gestating proto-Christian movement until Melchiades / Miltiades (the first figure who could arguably be labeled "pope").

This sequence of figureheads started with Linus (67-79), who was allegedly a companion of not only Simon-Peter, but of Timothy, Titus, and Paul as well. (His position existed barely a decade after Saul of Tarsus had written most of his letters.) This was around the time that the original Gospel (Mark) was composed.

Linus was contemporaneous with [Ana]Cletus (who served from 79-92) and Clement (who served from 92-99). All three of these men were considered to be the heirs to Simon-Peter's ministry. Such designations transpired during a time when the following of JoN was still known as "The Way"…and before either the most embellished Gospel (John) OR the "Book of Revelation" were composed (c. 100).

During the two centuries of proto-Christianity leading up to the Council of Nicaea in 325, there came to be other (lower) clerics: bishops, presbyters, and deaconships of various forms…scattered in locations outside of Rome. This was done with an understanding that the bishop in Rome was the most prestigious ecclesiastical position–a sort of provisional "Apostolic Father" for the movement.

It is important to recall, though, that there were several other proto-Christian movements that had nothing to do with this predominant ecclesiastical order. Again, history is written by the victors; so we tend to only remember what those in power want us to remember.

Thus Valentinus of Rome, Origen of Alexandria, Arius of Alexandria, and any other figure who deviated from the approved dogmas had to be summarily rejected: denounced as heretical. Such men were demonized as a matter of course. Their positions were discredited for reasons that had nothing whatsoever to do with anything that JoN actually said.

In his only surviving letter (to a congregation in Corinth), Clement asserted the authority of the presbyters as rulers of the church. He did this on the grounds that Saul of Tarsus had intimated as much in HIS letters. (Clement may have also based this dubious assertion on some of what "Luke" had claimed in "Acts".) In other words, the declaration of clerical supremacy was made based entirely on Apostolic claims (and perhaps on self-interest), not on anything that Jesus of Nazareth himself had said (more than two generations earlier).

The primary purpose of Clement's letter was to ensure the maintenance of "order" and of obedience to anointed authorities (again: something that had nothing whatsoever to do with Jesus' message to his followers). Already, we can see the Jesus-oriented legacy veering away from anything that the actual Jesus had envisioned. (Be that as it may, there is no evidence for a monarchical episcopacy in Rome at such an early date. At that point, the latent authoritarian nature of the "church" was still gestating.)

Following Clement, there was a sequence of 25 Roman bishops: Evaristus (99-107), Alexander (107-116), Sixtus (116-125), Telesphorus (125-136), Hyginus (136-142), Pius (142-155), Anicetus (155-166), Soter (166-175), Eleuterus (175-189), Victor (189-199), Zephyrinus (199-217), Callixtus (217 – 222), Urban (222-230), Pontian (230-235), Anterus (235-236), Fabian (236-250), Cornelius (251-253), Lucius (253-254), Stephen (254-257), Sixtus II (257-258), Dionysus (259-268), Felix (269-274), Eutychian (275-283), Caius (283-296), and Marcellinus (296-304).

These episcopates were not pontificates in any but a loosely metaphorical way. For the two centuries between the death of Clement and the bishopric of Marcellinus, there was no institution that could be called the Roman Catholic Church.

Were the above 28 figures (from Linus to Marcellinus) “popes”? No (except, perhaps, in a post hoc manner). These men can be said to have been leaders of the early Pauline “Christian” movement–as each served as the bishop of Rome (under the aegis of the “throne of Saint Peter”). During that period, there was a church headquartered in the seat of the empire, with an ecclesiastical leader (constituting a preeminent “episcopate”). {2}

By the time Evaristus (a Hellenic Jew) had completed his tenure as presbyter of Rome, a formal clerical hierarchy had been put into place. Thereafter, Alexander and then Sixtus created an official system of liturgical / administrative protocols–thereby augmenting the ecclesiastic nature of the embryonic “church”. So by the time Telesphorus presided in Rome, the movement had little resemblance to anything that Simon-Peter had known (or intended).

Under the next presbyter of Rome, Hyginus, the movement established the “crime” of heresy and the practice of excommunication–indicating a further departure from the moral message of Jesus of Nazareth (and an augmenting emphasis on Pauline Christology). After all, such contrivances were amenable to institutional designs of self-aggrandizement. The question, then, is not “Why DID they do that?” but “Why WOULDN’T they have done that?”

That revealing development was followed by other tell-tale signs of metamorphosis. Next were the Roman episcopates of the first Pius and then of Anicetus–each of whom systematically enforced exclusive adherence to the “approved” proto-canonical scripture (as well as conformity to the new-fangled church doctrines). For example, the leadership began taking measures to marginalize / demean other proto-Christianities (e.g. Montanism, Valentinian-ism, and Gnosticism).

That takes us to one century after Simon-Peter's death. By this point, a comprehensive system of top-down control had been put firmly into place. This was a significant departure from the spirit of the original movement, The Way.

After the above series of 28 Roman episcopates, matters became quite complicated. For over seven years (between April of 304 and July of 311), there seems to have been a glitch in the ecclesiastical machinery. Only two men were briefly "in office" during that period: a man named Marcellus (from July to late December 308) and a man named Eusebius (from mid-April to mid-August of either 309 or 310). Even as he ostensibly occupied the throne of Saint Peter, neither man really had any power, as both were promptly banished by Roman Emperor Maxentius (who was in power from 306 to 312, in tandem with Constantine and others).

This 7+ year discontinuity occurred during a complex time of imperial transition (read: cynosures jockeying for power during a period of political upheaval). Depending on how one defines "rule", Constantine's rule started in 306, 309, 310, or 312. The bottom line is: The empire was fragmented until 312 when Constantine was finally declared senior Augustus of the entire empire.

CONSTANTINE:

During the 13 years between 312 and the Council of Nicaea, Constantine had to contend with serious threats to his reign. He was thus forced to take drastic measures in order to maintain power.

Only after Constantine seized complete power can the institution now known as "The Vatican" (i.e. the Roman Catholic Church) be said to have come into existence–replete with an official doctrine and approved canon of texts. That is to say, Roman Catholicism was spawned during a time of aggressive power grabs and political maneuvering; and so was a byproduct thereof. So it is worth reviewing this tumultuous transitional period (roughly: 304 to 312).

Pursuant to the deaths of Diocletian (in 305, who had ruled in the east) and Constantius (in 306, who had ruled in the west), things became quite complicated. The dynamic of ad hoc "tetrarchy" ensued. This ad hoc arrangement was inherently problematic, as it precipitated a perpetual spree of power-grabs by aspiring rulers, each of whom was–predictably–vying for supremacy. Tetrarchy amounted to little other than a pageant of faux alliances followed by opportunistic back-stabbing–as avarice, not collaboration, defined the partitioned empire. Consequently, starting in 306, Constantine was in competition for absolute power with no less than SIX imperial figures:

- Severus (for 8 months, until March of 307), Maximian (until 310), and Maximian's son, Maxentius (until 312) in the west
- Galerius (until early 311) and Maximinus II (until 313) primarily in the east

Meanwhile, Licinius co-ruled in the east and west until 312 (that is: until he was cajoled by Constantine into endorsing the Edict of Milan, which legalized the formerly derided Christian Faith). Shortly after Constantine seized total power in the west, Licinius was forced to rule in a subordinate capacity exclusively in the east (until his defeat by Constantine in 324 at Chrysopolis). In any case, by 312, Constantine had become the primary Augustus of the Empire. Thus, pursuant to Licinius' ousting, Constantine had sole power over the entire Empire (from 324-337).

Following the aforementioned 7+ year interregnum in Rome's episcopate, the socio-political environment had undergone considerable changes. As we've seen, between Marcellinus' death in 304 and Melchiades becoming presbyter in 311,

significant imperial shuffling had transpired (in what was effectively an ecclesiastical vacuum). As power was constantly "up for grabs", **political maneuvering** was the name of the game for all contenders.

Thereafter, political sovereignty was determined almost entirely by an on-going charade of underhanded machinations and mendacious PR stunts. In a way, the timing of Melchiades' episcopate was fortuitous; as he happened to preside during a time that the Roman Emperor opted to give sanction to the Christian movement (with the Edict of Milan). It did so for the same reason is gave sanction to any other cult: pandering.

So what can we make of Constantine's religious beliefs over the course of this pivotal juncture–that is: during this propitious time of upheaval and transition? Archeology offers myriad clues. In his early reign, Constantine's coinage advertised Mars as his patron. Then…

- In 307, after he married Maximian's daughter, Fausta, he was inspired to adopt Hercules as his protector god.
- In 309, he became smitten with Sol Invictus: the godhead popularized by Emperor Aurelian forty years earlier.
- In 310, he claimed that Apollo had appeared to him in a vision, thus inspiring him to adopt Apollo. Tellingly, Constantine would employ the exact same shtick when (allegedly) seeing an apparition prior to the Battle of the Milvian Bridge in 312…which, as the story goes, prompted him to "convert" and fight under the chi-rho insignia.

Such theological promiscuity is telling.

Note that the Berber cleric, Melchiades was bishop of Rome from July 311 to January of 314. It was during his tenure that Constantine issued the Edict of Milan (February 313) that effectively legalized–though did not mandate–Christianity. (Roman Catholicism would become an officially-recognized religion in 325, when Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea.) With Licinius–the last remaining challenger–finally out of the way, it was time for Constantine–now the undisputed emperor of the entire empire–to consolidate power and create the conditions that would ensure his continued reign.

In sum: Constantine's rise to power was a meandering process, comprised of fits and starts, that occurred during a period of socio-political upheaval, when there was no bishop of Rome. Only around the time he had seized control over the entire empire

did the Roman bishopric resume (with Melchiades). Within a year and a half of Melchiades' inauguration, and within a year of Constantine becoming undisputed ruler, Christianity was suddenly made permissible by the Roman Imperium.

Constantine's consolidation of power would culminate during the tenure of the NEXT Roman presbyter, Sylvester (who served from January 314 to the last day of 335). It was during Sylvester's bishopric that the famed council at Nicaea was convened. And it was then that Constantine had the facility on Vatican Hill (i.e. the "Vatican") built. Why there? Well, we are told, it was the burial site of Simon-Peter. But–as we've seen–that is pure myth. In reality, the site had boasted a pagan temple celebrating a dying-then-resurrecting god-man (often identified as "Mithras"). It was a small step to simply re-identify said god-man as "Jesus": the Messianic figure discussed in the letters composed by Saul of Tarsus. {1}

It is worth reviewing why Constantine convened the landmark ecumenical council in Nicaea (now Iznik, Turkey) in 325. It was, in short, a cynical–though strategic–political move. The point was to homogenize the thinking of the citizenry, and thereby deter unrest (read: maintain order). Put another way: It was an efficient way to keep the rabble "in line" while keeping them placated.

(It is also likely Constantine's mother, Helena, with whom he was very close, bent his ear regarding her own Christian sympathies.)

No judgement of the council was made without regard to the interests of the Emperor. (We might say that Seneca hit the nail on the head when he noted: "Religion is regarded by the rabble as true, by the wise as false, and by the rulers as useful.") The contrast between the Roman Imperium of the post-Nicene era and that of the pre-Nicene era is largely one of augmented authoritarianism and ever-bloated bureaucracy–a bureaucracy, it might be added, that was disinclined to concern itself with anything that JoN actually taught.

The campaign was Machiavellian through and through–right down to the selection of texts to be considered "canonical". Any text pertaining to JoN that was NOT conducive to top-down authority, or which did not propound dogmas that were incompatible with the desired political order, was summarily eliminated. Ergo the rejection of the Gospels of, say, Judas, Mary, and Thomas–which were not conducive to institutionalized dogmatism; and were not amenable to a centralized ecclesiastical authority.

Prior to Constantine's embrace of the Faith, the degree to which any given story **resonated** with the audience largely determined who would join which sect…and who wouldn't. The more compelling the narrative was, the more apt people would be to lend it credence…and pass it along to their neighbors.

That was before the Council of Nicaea codified the new creed, and established an official canon based on decidedly different criteria. Thereafter, the theology was tailored to suit the interests of those in power. Over the course of the next century, subsequent ecumenical councils would be convened in order to ensure the official creed comported with the incumbent power structures. The decisions made by those in power had nothing whatsoever to do with anything JoN actually said. Nor, for that matter, was there any concern for evidence of what actually happened during JoN's ministry.

In due course, folklore was concocted to explain why Constantine (allegedly) converted to the new Faith; as the ACTUAL reasons did not accord with savvy PR. A palatable explanation needed to be confabulated. Hence the apocryphal tale of the Battle of the Milvian Bridge: the pivotal confrontation between Constantine and Maxentius in October of 312…the outcome of which determined who ruled the empire.

According to the tale, just prior to the clash, Constantine had a vision of the aforementioned chi-rho insignia. The "catch" is that it could be re-interpreted as the first two letters of "Kristos". Thereafter, the monogram would be dubbed the "chrismon". The iconography of a crucifix had yet to be adopted, as the creed was still working from its pagan roots.

As the story goes, the mysterious vision was accompanied by the message: "By this, conquer." It was at that moment, we're told, that the (pagan) emperor decided to embrace Christ. In other words, Constantine's conversion was due to the Abrahamic deity ensuring victory over his political opponent. This enticing bit of apocrypha was propagated primarily by the Palestinian bishop, Eusebius of Caesarea Maritima. As a superstitious populace was eager to believe in omens, the tall-tale sounded remotely plausible.

The next year (313), Constantine issued the Edict of Milan, legalizing Christianity throughout the empire. The reason for this transition is obvious: the alignment of the gestating Magisterium and the Roman imperium.

But this “just so story” is artificially-flavored hogwash. {10} Constantine CONTINUED to worship Sol Invictus after the propitious victory. Coins depicting him as the companion of Sol Invictus (with the caption, “Invictus Constantinus”) were minted as late as 313 (the year following the battle). Such coins continued to circulate until the year after the Council of Nicaea was convened (in 326)…long after his alleged “conversion” to Christianity. Even when he dedicated the new capital of Constantinople, he did so wearing the Apollonian sun-rayed Diadem. No Christian iconography was involved in the dedication.

When the triumphal arch next to Palatine Hill was modified in 315 to commemorate this storied battle, depictions of Sol Invictus were included. Instead, the arch was decorated with images of the goddess Victoria. Conspicuously absent from the arch were any use of Christian iconography. The renovated structure was christened with sacrifices made to Apollo, Diana, and Hercules.

What does all this (apparent) equivocation, prevarication, and vacillation mean? Was Constantine just dogmatically indecisive? Spiritually confused? No. The explanation is much more straight-forward. Constantine realized that wielding power was all about the manipulation of iconography. What we see here is simply the choreography of agit-prop. He came to appreciate the strategic use of idioms and symbols in getting one’s agenda to resonate with the masses.

In “The Closing Of The Western Mind”, Charles Freeman explains: “Whatever his religious concerns, Constantine’s major preoccupations remained military ones. Between 313 and 315 he campaigned with further success along the northern borders of the empire, but he was also set on further expansion of his power within” (p. 162-163). Needless to say, Constantine’s life was hardly one defined by the teachings of JoN.

So we might ask: After 315, was Constantine being disingenuous in his claims about fealty to the Christians’ deity? Of course, he was. Did he convert to Christianity? Officially: yes. Technically: not so much.

Bear in mind that the resurrected savior-god, Mithra[s] was an integral part of the Sol Invictus cult, so the trope of salvation through a deified figure was already well-established. In a sense, the antecedent cult was primed for a revamped savior-god motif. And so it went. (For more on the similarities of Mithra-ism to Christianity, see my essays on “Mythemes”.)

How else can we surmise that Constantine was “playing” the Empire’s Christian population? Even in the Edict of Milan itself, the Christian movement is referred to as a “cultum”–while accurate, not a moniker one would use when referring to one’s own Faith. And by 321, Constantine was still insisting that Christians should observe the venerable “Day of the Sun” (again, referencing the worship of Sol-Invictus).

Constantine’s abiding fealty to the solar-cult that Emperor Aurelian had established–even as he sought to placate the Christians–is indicative of a man playing both sides of the field. As Charles Freeman put it in his “Closing Of The Western Mind”: “Constantine was a shrewd political operator. It was a mark of [his] political genius and flexibility that he realized it was better to utilize a religion that already had a well-established structure of authority as a prop to the imperial regime rather than exclude it as a hindrance.” Thus “he used the victory at the Milvian Bridge as a platform from which to launch his new policy” (ibid.; p. 158).

This “just so story” worked like a charm, and ingratiated the Emperor with a restive polis. This is yet another instance of the Establishment providing the rabble with “necessary illusions”, as Reinhold Niebuhr put it. Noam Chomsky called this “manufacturing consent”. This is a Machiavellian version of “realpolitik” whereby dissimulation is employed to manipulate people to go along with the proposed program. (This is the sort of approach later propounded by the likes of Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss.)

An illustration of Constantine’s political savvy was his use of the Circus Maximus to keep the rabble placated (read: distracted). We might care to note that ensuring the rabble remain amused (by being served a regular dose of vacuous yet titillating spectacle) has proven to be an effective means of crowd control to this very day. If Constantine had tabloids and celebrity gossip rags and Reality TV and social-media at his disposal, there can be little doubt that he would have made use of them as well.

Freeman summarizes thus: “Those impressed by Constantine’s adoption of a Christian God might have hoped that he would have adopted Christian ethics. However, he appears to have shown no interest in the message of the Gospels. Rather, he attempts to use Christianity as a means of bringing order to society. In a letter issued to the peoples of the eastern empire in 324, Christianity is described as “the Law”, the basis of a regulated way of life under the auspices of a single god” (ibid.; p. 171). In other words, the imperium’s sanction of the burgeoning “Catholic”

church had nothing to do with sincere religiosity per se, and everything to do with politics. To fail to understand this elementary point is to fail to understand the origins of Catholicism.

After Emperor Constantine adopted the Pauline narrative (thereafter deemed the "Nicene" version of Christianity), the "up for grabs" nature of the canon ceased. That is to say: once the Council of Nicaea was convened in 325, the authorities had selected the "winning" narrative (again, barring "The Book Of Revelation", which was still seen as trash pulp).

It was only after the Council of Nicaea in 325 that the bishop of Rome was deemed more than, well, just the bishop of Rome–that is: more than just the head of an episcopate.

A shrewd military strategist, Constantine essentially co-opted the nascent "Christian" church for political reasons, thus conferring mutual benefit upon himself and the Roman bishopric. It was then that the episcopate of Rome–under Sylvester–truly became the Vicar Of Christ.

Suffice to say, Sylvester's tenure occurred at a very opportune time; as his was the first Roman episcopate to claim unity with the empire's political machine. By the same token, the Roman Emperor's appropriation of the prevailing populist religion enabled him to harness all the social cache germane to cult-leadership. {10} Considering the circumstances, the quid pro quo was plain to see.

Indeed, the collusion between the imperium and the magisterium was as clear as day for those who cared to look. Records show that Sylvester received many gifts from his close friend, the Roman Emperor; and that this latest occupant of the throne of Saint Peter was more than happy to oblige when it came to serving the throne of Caesar Augustus.

With the possible exception of his predecessor, Melchiades, it is disingenuous to say that any bishop of Rome prior to Sylvester was a "pope". Doing so requires an act of retroactive taxonomy. It should be noted that the honorific was not even used formally by the Vatican until the 11th century. Today, in an effort to legitimate itself, the Vatican opts to engage in spurious historiographic shenanigans; thereby linking the current pope to Clement…and thereby to Cephas (Simon-Peter)…and thereby to JoN…and thereby to the Creator of the Universe.

“Apostolic succession” was (is) just as much a farce as was the divine succession of Roman Emperors. Both successions were propounded for the exact same reasons: to provide a veneer of legitimacy to an authoritarian regime. It was a guileful way to rationalize the established order…which was to not EVER be questioned by the masses.

Until a few heterodox Renaissance thinkers upset the applecart, this perfidious scheme worked like a charm.

Considering all this, it should be plain to see: For the Vatican’s curia to now claim that each pontificate is continuing what Clement (let alone Simon-Peter) was doing is patently absurd. Vatican Hill as the throne of Cephas? Don’t be ridiculous. The Vatican is the product of human contrivance, not the enshrinement of some divine plan. Indeed, since Sylvester, the institution has undergone a significant metamorphosis–becoming ever more political, bureaucratic, and hierarchical. Eventually, the Vatican came to be more a vehicle for political power than a vehicle for carrying out the moral messages of JoN (see the Theophylacti, the Crescentii, the Tusculan popes, the Borgias, the Medici, et. al.)

Now we may behold the palaces, the golden chalices, the gem-encrusted vestments, the simony and nepotism, and the systemic corruption that characterize the Vatican. We might then realize that none of it has anything whatsoever to do with the movement led by JoN: “The Way”.

AFTER CONSTANTINE:

We now turn to the relationship between the presbyters of Rome and the Roman Emperors during the 67-years between the Edict of Milan in 313 and the Edict of Thessalonika in 380. The former marks the point at which Pauline Christianity was given the imprimatur of the Roman Imperium; though with the Arian treatment of Christology prevailing. The latter marks the point at which the Roman Catholicism was established as the Empire's official religion; and thus mandated for the masses. One might also think of this as the period between:

- The Council of Nicaea in 325: when an official canon was first designated (sans the Book of Revelation) {17}
- The Council of Constantinople in 381: when the approval of the full canon was firmly established (replete with the Book Of Revelation)

During the intervening time, the salient feud was between:

- **Conventional Trinitarianism:** most notably propounded by Athanasius of Alexandria
- **Arianism:** first formally articulated by Arius of Alexandria {16}

Thus to be pro-Athanasius was to be anti-Arian; to be pro-Arian was to be anti-Athanasius. These two positions would characterize the primary camps vying for doctrinal supremacy during this fraught period.

The former (in concert with Athanasius) was advocated by such figures as Ambrose of Milan, Hilary of Poitiers, Basil of Ankyra, Marcellus of Ankyra, Eustathius of Antioch, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Cyril of Alexandria.

The latter was advocated by such figures as Auxentius of Milan, Eusebius of Nikomedia, Lucian of Antioch, Acacius of Caesarea, Demophilus of Constantinople, George of Laodicea, Aëtius of Antioch, Eudoxius of Antioch, and Eunomius of Cyzicus. Later, it was embraced by the Visigoth King, Alaric; and by the Ostrogoth King, Theodoric The Great.

Discord between the Magisterium and the Imperium would mostly occur during this period: the time between the death of Pope Sylvester (who had Arian sympathies) and the ascension of Emperor Theodosius (who had Athanasian sympathies).

As Athanasius' version of Christianity championed the primacy of the Roman bishopric, it was inevitable that it would–eventually–curry favor with the Imperium. The Arian theology was not conducive to the consolidation of power. It held that JoN was subordinate to (rather than the embodiment of) the Abrahamic deity. Ironically, this was a view that was clearly MORE in keeping with what JoN actually says in the Gospels (canonical and non-). The problem with this was that it mitigated the deification of JoN–thereby compromising the power of the Church (qua political institution). Consequently, the Arian "take" undermined the ability of the Roman Church to wield power DIRECTLY on behalf of God. After all, if JoN was "only" a proxy, and not ONE WITH the godhead, then the Church had less rational for its hidebound sacerdotalism

In order to appreciate the misalignment between church and state that existed following the Constantine-Sylvester regime, it is necessary to understand the Athanasian agenda. During most of this critical period, the feud between the Roman presbyters and the presiding Emperors was severe enough that–after having been

exiled by Emperor Constantine–Athanasius was exiled four more times: twice by Emperor Constantius II (for a total of almost 14 years between 339 and 362), then by Emperor Julian, then by Emperor Valens (the last Arian Emperor). Effectively, until 375, "Nicene" Christianity was de-facto Arianism. (!)

Going into the Council of Nicaea, selection of the canonical texts was heavily influenced by the Metropolitan "See" of Palestine (and Bishop of Caesarea from 314-339), Eusebius of Nikomedia, who was Arian. (Tellingly, Eusebius was the bishop who baptized Emperor Constantine.) But by the time Roman Catholicism was made the Empire's official religion in 380, Arianism had been expunged.

Though Athanasius' preferred version of the creed would prevail (thereby defining the Roman Catholic theology forever more), the irony is that Emperor Constantine's and Pope Sylvester's sympathies had been with the Arian version of Christianity (and decidedly against Athanasius). This fact poses a problem for Catholic apologists. For what is now the Roman Catholic Church–essentially (if not officially) initiated as it was by Constantine–embraces the version of which Constantine-Sylvester did not approve.

In fact, after the Council of Nicaea, Constantine banished Athanasius to Trier (from 335-337) while embracing the Nicene verdict. Notably, the canon designated at Nicaea OMITTED "The Book Of Revelation"…to Athanasius' chagrin. And Athanasius even became persona non grata during this time, being deposed and excommunicated in 335, pursuant to the first Synod of Tyre.

Of course, Athanasius would have the last laugh. Let's review:

First, the pontiffs: The Arian pope, Sylvester died on the last day of 335–with less than 17 months remaining in Emperor Constantine's reign. Following Sylvester, there were three major pontificates:

- Julius (337-352)
- Liberius (352-366)
- Damasus (366-384)

(After Sylvester's death, Marcus' pontificate lasted for only 9 months, in 336; and was inconsequential.)

It is important to note that all three of these pontiffs were pro-Athanasius / anti-Arian (unlike Emperor Constantine and Pope Sylvester). That is to say: Their position did not align with the (Arian) sympathies of the Emperors who reigned during the 38 years following Constantine.

During the co-rule of Constans in the West and Constantius II in the East, Pope Julius convened the Council of Serdica (Dacia) in an attempt to resolve the issue; but to no avail. The synod yielded a stalemate even though it was presided over by the pro-Athanasian Bishop of Cordoba, [h]Osius.

Pope Liberius' sympathies for Athanasius did not sit well with the abiding Arian sympathies of the Roman Imperium. Liberius' position greatly displeased Constantius II, eventually entailing–among other things–the installment of anti-pope Felix…and, later, the rise of anti-pope Ursicinus.

In his so-called "Easter Letter" of 367, Athanasius began his crusade to get the ramblings of John of Patmos ("The Book Of Revelation") into the official canon. With the Edict of Thessalonika having been issued in 380, the stage was set for Athanasius' vision to be fully realized. In retrospect, the motives for making "Christianity" the official State religion–at that particular time–are obvious. Also obvious are the motives a ruler would have for choosing the particular creed that was chosen.

Though he died in 373, Athanasius' crusade would prove successful at the first Council of Constantinople–convened by Theodosius in 381. Athanasius' machinations (posthumously) yielded yet more fruit at the Council of Rome (convened by Pope Damasus in 382), then at the Synod of Hippo Regius in 393…by which time the ramblings of John of Patmos were afforded the full esteem of holy scripture.

Another of the primary anti-Arian power-brokers was Ambrose of Milan (an ascetic who's magnum opus was entitled "The Goodness of Death"). Ambrose ascended to the bishopric of Milan after Pope Damasus excommunicated Auxentius of Milan for being pro-Arian. (Auxentius had played a big role in the pro-Arian Council of Rimini.) Ambrose is known for having stated: "To discuss the nature and position of the earth does not help us in our hopes for a life to come." Tertullian responded to this in a letter: "For us, curiosity is no longer necessary." It comes as no surprise, then, that in 391, the Library of Alexandria (a center of intellectual pursuit and free / critical inquiry) was razed by Christian zealots.

It was Ambrose whom Theodosius appointed to preside over the Council at Aquileia in 381, thereby vanquishing most elements of Arianism from the Empire's episcopates (most notably: Palladius of Ratiara and Secundianus of Singidunum.) As could be expected, since Emperor Valentinian II (the last of the Arian emperors) was anti-Athanasius, there was chronic dispute between him and Ambrose. As it so happened, that dispute would represent the last of the discord between Imperium and Magisterium. Thereafter, the interests of the political and religious rulers would be brought into alignment so as to unify worldly authority. No greater betrayal of JoN could have been conceived. But that was okay; because it was never really about JoN.

Pursuant to the events that took place in the late 370's and early 380's, the theological disjuncture between the Imperium and Magisterium would be ameliorated. By the time Siricius became pope (in late 384), the conventionally Trinitarian (non-Arian) version of the catechism was fully established; its proponents firmly installed in the halls of power. Siricius' pontificate would endure for the last sixteen years of the 4th century.

As it turns out, Siricius primary agenda was ensuring that the church was seen as the necessary intermediary between god and the laity. He thus put sacerdotalism into overdrive. It comes as no surprise, then, that he was the first pope to issue "decretals" (a.k.a. "bulls"), as he fashioned himself VICAR of the Christ. He was also the first pope to adamantly assert the Bishop of Rome's identity as the Pontifex Maximus–thereby paving the way for Roman Catholic dominion across Europe. The institutionalization of intercession-ism was complete.

Now, the emperors: After Constantine died in 337, the Imperium was ruled as follows. The triad of Constantine II, Constans, and Constantius II initially divided sovereignty. However, the first would die by 340 and the second by 350, leaving pro-Arian Constantius II the sole ruler until he died 361. Just as Constantine had been, Constantius II was antagonistic to Athanasius, putting him at logger-heads with the (pro-Athanasius) Roman bishopric.

In 355, Emperor Constantius II convened the Synod of Milan, in which the feud between the pro-Arian Imperium and the pro-Athanasius presbyters (notably: Dionysius of Milan, Eusebius of Vercelli, and Lucifer of Cagliari) came to the fore. In 357-359, the three Councils of Sirmium promoted pro-Arian doctrine (at the pleasure of Constantius II).

After Constantius II, the pro-Arian Emperor Julian ruled for two years. That was followed by Jovian (for one year), Valentinian (for one month), and then Valens (364-378). Valens was the last Arian Emperor who's Arian sympathies would go unchallenged. {21} When he was killed in a devastating loss to the Goths in a battle at Hadrian-opolis in Thrace c. 378, he was replaced by Theodosius.

Theodosius was, it might be argued, the last Roman emperor to hold the entire empire together. By the time Theodosius ascended to the throne, it was clear that the Imperium could most benefit from Athanasius' version of Christianity. It is no wonder that Theodosius' sympathies lay with Athanasius; and he was determined to ensure that THAT version of Christianity would be cast in stone.

The rest, as they say, was history.

To understand the environment in which Nicene Christianity gestated, it is important to appreciate how contentious–and protracted–this doctrinal feud was. As is often the case when religion intersects with politics, ideologues were jockeying for position in the halls of power. The entire process was a crucible of influence-peddling, and–it is safe to surmise–had little to do with any concern for Truth.

The disputation became so heated that clerics working on behalf of the (Nicene) establishment undertook aggressive smear campaigns–replete with laughably over-the-top invective–against heterodox thinkers. In the early 370's, Epiphanius of Salamis composed the "Panarion", which leveled scurrilous accusations at any denomination that was not Nicene (orthodox). He used lurid descriptions of heterodox thinkers that were so outlandish as to elicit a chuckle from modern readers. (They eat fetuses and drink semen for the Eucharist; others drink menstrual blood after having wild orgies!) Clearly, such tracts are not to be taken as impartial descriptions. Yet they are instructive in that they show us how vituperative such partisanship was at the time.

Other squabbles seem to have been over minor doctrinal matters–as was the case with the "Meletian" schism. (For more on the ramification of Christianity into divergent sects over the centuries, see Appendix 3.)

378 was a pivotal year, as a new imperial triad came to power: Gratian (until 383) and his brother, Valentinian II (until 392)…along with Theodosius (until 395; the last 3 years as sole ruler of the Empire). Would-be usurpers like Magnus Maximus tried

yet failed to challenge their authority. This triad is the regime that would decisively end the Arian influence once and for all–thereby solidifying Athanasius' vision, which remains to the present day. {5}

These last developments would (finally) align the Imperium with the Magisterium; but not in the manner envisioned by those who'd initially endorsed Christianity. Indeed, in the late 4th century, the "powers that be" ruled in favor of a version of Nicene Christianity of which Constantine and Sylvester would NOT have approved. That is the version that endures…even as it had been eschewed during the Council of Nicaea. This irony is lost on Roman Catholics today. {19}

But who was Athanasius? He is best described as an conniving, self-serving, religious fanatic…who happened to be obsessed with promoting "The Book Of Revelation" and the "Letter To The Hebrews". After having participated in the Council of Nicaea in 325 (where his agenda was foiled), he served as the bishop of Alexandria for 45 years (328-373). It was in Alexandria that he earned his infamous reputation as a no-holds-barred, scheming prelate. In his so-called "Easter Letter" of 367, Athanasius began his campaign to get the phantasmagorical ramblings of John of Patmos into the official canon. With the Edict of Thessalonika in 380, Athanasius' vision would be fully (posthumously) realized.

Though he died in 373, Athanasius' crusade would prove successful at the first Council of Constantinople; which was convened by (Athanasian) Emperor Theodosius in 381. Athanasius' machinations further yielded fruit at the Council of Rome; which was convened by Pope Damasus in 382…and then at the Synod of Hippo Regius in 393…by which time the Book of Revelation (originally a tract of anti-Roman propaganda) was afforded the full esteem of holy scripture. {18} This is yet another irony lost on Roman Catholics today.

In 380, the Imperial triad (Emperor Theodosius in conjunction with brothers Gratian and Valentinian II) issued the "Cunctos Populos" (a.k.a. the "Edict of Thessalonika"). The edict ordered all subjects of the Roman Empire to become adherents of the Nicene version of Christianity–thereby rendering "Roman Catholicism" the official State religion of the Empire. This measure outlawed Arianism, Gnosticism, and any other version of Christianity.

Pursuant to the Edict of Thessalonika (which effectively rendered the Roman Empire a totalitarian theocracy), the authorities strictly enforced the anointed CNV–often by undertaking draconian measures. All the while, they took great care to eliminate all

competing narratives from history (most notably, Arianism and Gnosticism). After the chosen Christian narrative had been appropriated by the Empire, the Pauline story was rendered THEIR story.

Also in 380, the second ecumenical council was held. The "Council of Constantinople" was convened under the long-reigning Pope Damasus during a period of intense division and institutional feuds. This further entrenched what was deemed the "approved" canon of texts…which, it became increasingly clear, were to be used by the authorities as context for wielding power over the hoi polloi.

Ergo the eventual inclusion of (and emphasis on) preposterous tracts like "The Book of Revelation"–added to the official canon at the insistence of the notoriously mendacious Athanasius of Alexandria…in spite of the fact that it had been originally been penned as ANTI-Roman propaganda. The metaphor could be taken as a literal prognostication of Judgement Day; and so came in handy for crowd-control. (The fire and brimstone proffered by a literal reading of the "Book of Revelation" reminds us that totalitarian regimes control people with FEAR.)

The decision to unequivocally include "The Book of Revelation" in the official canon was later validated at the first Council of Carthage in 397 (under the guidance of another fanatic, Augustine of Hippo). The result of all this: The modern-day "New Testament".

We might recall that JoN purportedly stated that the Kingdom of God "is not of this world" (John 18:36). What he did NOT say was "The Roman Empire will soon embrace my vision. And the authorities will be justified in enforcing it with draconian measures." Clearly, neither the Imperium nor the Magisterium embraced JoN's vision (as articulated in the Gospel accounts). That the Church now pretends that it did is risible. What the powers-that-be DID do was concoct their own creed to suit their own purposes; and did so by coopting extant folklore about a Jewish carpenter from Galilee.

When referring to Faith vis a vis the Roman Emperor, JoN is said to have stated unequivocally: "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's" (Mark 12:17 and Matthew 22:21). If he'd meant to notify everyone that the Imperium was to become Christian, then he would not have said what he said. {20}

As we've seen, the Empire became Christian in the 4th century. To suppose that such a development realized the aspirations of "The Way" is nothing short of absurd. Surely, if Nicene Christianity is what JoN had had in mind, he would have declared that the Emperor would eventually adopt his teachings. What he **did** say was markedly different from this.

By the end of the 4th century, the pro-Athanasius camp was retroactively christened the "Nicene" camp…as if that had been the only approved version all along. Effectively, Christianity had been appropriated to render the Roman Empire a totalitarian theocracy, a precedent that would carry over in fragmented form during the millennium-long "Holy Roman Empire". "The Way" was transformed from a humble, communal movement into a theocratic leviathan–replete with top-down authority and the merging of Faith and politics…in direct contradiction to the enjoinders found in the Gospel account. JoN's legacy had been appropriated to serve power.

Thereafter, the stifling of independent / critical thinking was standard operating procedure for the Church. The religion labeled "Christianity" had become despotic through and through. Ecclesiastical activity was all about keeping ORDER. "Faith" had come to mean nothing more than acquiescence to the dictates of the Magisterium, with the military might of the Imperium to back it up. Consequently, the Church would make concerted efforts to quash any/all democratic tendencies and ideas. It was the perfect recipe for ushering in the Dark Ages. (For more on this point, see Catherine Nixey's "The Darkening Age".)

And what of the revisionism that transpired? The archeological record provides us with some clues. In 330, Constantine erected a massive column (originally, with a statue of himself on top, which depicted him in the manner of Apollo–replete with sun crown), decorated with pagan symbols. It became the center of the Forum of Constantine in Byzantium-cum-Constantinople (what is now Cemberlitas Square in Istanbul). It was modified by Byzantine Emperor, Manuel Komnenos in the 12th century. Why? Because it was too overtly pagan; and so contradicted the contrived historiography of Constantine's conversion. The statue of Constantine was replaced by a giant crucifix. (Even that was short-lived, as Frankish Crusaders destroyed the structure in 1203.)

Other renovations attest to the abrupt transformation of iconography. In 393, Theodosius revamped Constantine's Forum Tauri [Forum of the Bull] (what is now Beyazit Square in Istanbul), modifying it to accord with the (newly designated) official religion. (That was later transplanted by a statue of Anastasius Dicorus c. 506, in the lead-up to the hyper-theocratic Justinian era.)

In the 4th and 5th centuries, the Vatican's modus operandi was unapologetically antithetical to fostering anything that remotely resembled deliberative / participatory democracy. Notions of Res Publica and social justice were inimical to the Vatican's agenda…just as it was inimical to the Roman Emperors. The symbiosis between church and state was complete…and would endure for the next 14 centuries.

As with the Imperium, the Magisterium's mantra was: Keep the rabble in line; maintain order. The primary directive of each pontiff was straight-forward: Ensure everyone accepts whatever is (authoritatively) decreed by the Church: the catechism, the doctrine, the approved texts, etc. The imposition of authority (i.e. orthodoxy enforced from above) was driven by the chronic suspicion of (and contempt for) science. Scientific inquiry, scientific argument, scientific method: all such things had to be eradicated at all costs. The religious establishment was thus compelled to crush all forms of reasoned thinking (read: independent thought) in the name of piety. Ergo the inauguration of the Dark Ages.

With the chief presbyter in Rome re-conceptualized as THE apostolic Father, the Roman Emperor could then simply delegate (outsource?) the role of "representative of God on Earth" to the new-fangled pontiff…as needed. He could thereby placate Christian subjects without compromising his own power. Of course, upon the demise of the "old" Roman Empire in the 5th century, this arrangement would back-fire. Devolving into a dogmatic quagmire, the empire sunk into the Dark Ages…and eventually disintegrated, leaving behind only the Byzantine Empire in the East.

As Tim Ferris put it: "The old institutions of learning and philosophy, most them already in decline, collapsed under the rising winds of change."

In 415, Hypatia, daughter of the last known associate of the library of Alexandria, was murdered by a Christian mob. An eyewitness reported: "They stripped her stark naked. They razed the skin and rent the flesh of her body with sharp shell, until the

breath departed from her body. They quartered her body. They brought her quarters unto a place called Cinaron and burned them to ashes." All for what? For having the audacity to engage in free inquiry.

It's safe to say that by this point, Christianity had COMPLETELY departed from the teachings of JoN. The lesson of not casting the first stone had been successfully excised from the doctrine by the powers that be. The sine qua non of fealty was compliance and conformity. Compassion had been rendered anathema. That the Church's agenda is remotely in keeping with the salient moral messages of–nor the intentions of–JoN is belied by its the historical record.

Even in the 5th century, the Church continued to experience heated disagreements about the proper Christology–as exemplified by the Council of Ephesus in 431 and the Council of Chalcedon twenty years later. This continued through the 6th century (with the SECOND Council of Constantinople) and the 7th century (with the THIRD Council of Constantinople) and the 8th century (with the SECOND Council of Nicaea).

Plato's Academy in Athens was closed by Emperor Justinian in 529. Why? Any thinking conducted outside the church's strict parameters was forbidden. Christian dominion had become a totalitarian theocracy, whereby the aggressive prosecution of heresy was pursued, and compassion / forbearance ("judge not lest you be judged") was rendered anathema.

By the time the Holy Roman Empire emerged c. 800, western Europe was simply a conglomerate of kingdoms, the monarchs of which were–to varying degrees and in varying ways–beholden to the Bishop of Rome (a.k.a. the "Papa" of the Church). The tale was now wagging the dog. A movement that had begun as a socialist commune had now mutated into a fascistic regime. And, irony of all ironies, a movement that had originally championed a Palestinian Jew was now hostile to Beth Israel. In 1555, Pope Paul IV issued a bull entitled "Cum Nimis Absurdum" which proclaimed: "God has condemned [the Jews] to eternal slavery because of their guilt. [The Jews] show such ingratitude to the Christians as to render them insult for their grace and presume to mastery instead of subjection which beseems them." It comes as now surprise, then, that in 1942, when the Nazis issued the Wannsee declaration, it had the imprimatur of the Catholic Church…which continued to commemorate Hitler's birthday until the end of the Second World War.

The primacy of the Vatican had been established, usurping local political powers as the ultimate basis for sovereignty. In the advent of the establishment of the Holy Roman Empire, such ecclesiastic supremacy would last a millennium…until the Enlightenment inaugurated a new epoch, and bold revolutionaries introduced the world to democracy.

METAMORPHOSIS OF SCRIPTURE:

Today, we are well aware of the omissions, additions, and embellishments (sometimes calculated, sometimes unwitting) that inevitably occur whenever a emotionally-charged story is orally-transmitted…**even over the course of just a few days**. We may extrapolate the extent of such modification to, say, a few weeks…then to a few months…then to a few years…then to a few DECADES.

For the early stages of Jesus-oriented folklore, this extrapolation must be performed in the context of a primitive setting…amongst highly superstitious, mostly illiterate people…where nothing was written down for DECADES. We must also factor in the tricks of memory at play whenever there is a staunch, vested interest involved in the transmission process. Only then may we attempt to ascertain the degree to

which fidelity was compromised over the course of those first few decades. (Recall that people didn't start writing down the folklore ABOUT the crucifixion until the 70's.) Bottom line: The metamorphosis from c. 30 A.D. to c. 70 A.D. would be quite profound.

Keep in mind: Any peasant who was older than a child at the time of the crucifixion had almost certainly died by the time "Mark" was finally cobbled together…unless he lived to be well over 50 years old. But even in such a rare case, the memory of childhood events of such a person would be, to put it mildly, suspect.

What, exactly, would an old man in 1st-century Canaan have recalled after having been influenced by myriad social forces over the course of most of his life? Undoubtedly, such a man would have imbibed whatever folklore happened to be prevalent his immediate environs. By old age, no matter how honest he might have been, the man's memory could not help but have been a product of the particular circumstances in which he lived. At work was a decades-long process of which he himself would not have been fully cognizant.

The conditions at the time included rampant dogmatism, privation, and desperation. The material was being circulated amonst highly impressionable peasants, who were dealing with a smorgasbord of competing savior-god narratives–each one vying for everyone's attention. Under these conditions, we must assume that the Jesus story underwent EXTENSIVE metamorphosis…especially after so much time had elapsed before the details of the story were finally written down. As is the case with natural selection (in the memetic context), the vast majority of those mutations were dead-ends–and are thus lost forever. Only the mutations that proved "fit" ended up surviving for posterity.

The extent of the alterations in the first four decades may be surmised by SUBSEQUENT alterations. The profound changes that occurred between "Mark" and "John" (the latter composed after c. 100) Later still, we can see what other modifications were introduced. Every step of the way, people were re-telling the story in the ways that THEY WANTED to re-tell it. That's why there were at least TWENTY different Gospel accounts, at least SIX different versions of "Acts", and no less than EIGHT different "Revelations" (Apocalypses)…not to mention various "Pauline" letters that were clearly not written by Saul of Tarsus. (For an adumbration of these rejected texts, see Bart Ehrman's "Lost Scriptures".)

The stark juxtaposition between “Mark” and “John” is very revealing. The composition of these two Gospels were separated by a generation. The obvious embellishments that occurred during the intervening time (about three decades) could not be more blatant. Such changes are illustrative of what had surely been going on in the four decades **LEADING UP TO** “Mark”.

In other words, “Mark” gives us a snap-shot of the story about 40 years after the alleged events. “John” gives us a snap-shot about 70 years after the alleged events. We can SEE the changes that transpired between those two snap-shots. We can therefore extrapolate backwards to ascertain the degree of change that likely transpired between the alleged events and the first snap-shot.

Bottom line: Scripture underwent a metamorphosis from its earliest days. The most flagrant example of this is the insertion of the resurrection into the Gospel account. The oldest copies of the New Testament available (codices Vaticanus and Sinaiticus from the 4th century) do not have anything past verse 8 in the last chapter of the original Gospel (Mark). Mark 16:9-20 was not added until the beginning of the 5th century. And even then, some manuscripts (e.g. the codex Bezae) continue without this addendum.

The original ending of “Mark” is rather un-impressive (which, of course, posed as a problem). It is no wonder it was elaborated upon. Initially, the end of the Jesus story involved a young man sitting in Jesus’ tomb, telling three Hebrew women (Mary of Magdela; JoN’s mother, Mary; and Salome): “Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.” This is followed by a final sentence: “And afterward, Jesus himself sent out through [those around Peter] from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.” The End.

That was the entire ORIGINAL story about JoN–a Jew who spoke in parables and allegedly performed miracles…just like countless OTHER stories about OTHER Jews in Palestine who preached and exhibited feats of magic.

Read the original ending of “Mark” again. Metaphorical? Obviously. Mention of JoN as god incarnate? Nope. Mention of a resurrection? Nope. All we find is a semi-provocative denouement–just a typical re-statement of extent Jewish lore. That’s it. {8} JoN’s message of salvation was “sent out through” Peter and those around Peter. Splendid. But nothing earth-shattering.) And certainly not much for an

institution to work with. Hence the need for some narrative “sprucing up” if the movement was going to attract followers. Resurrections are far more compelling than anti-climactic executions.

By the time “John” was composed, almost three generations had come and gone since the death of its protagonist…and the story had undergone a significant metamorphosis. Unsurprisingly, “John” is the Gospel most quoted by Christian apologists today. Why is that? As it so happens, the latest Gospel is the most embellished. And the most embellished Gospel is the one that is most conducive to institutionalization. Moreover, THAT particular version makes the boldest claims. Simply append the “Nobody comes to the Father except through me” line, and PRESTO: Any institution has a perfect sales-pitch for demanding obedience. Never mind that the LATEST (most embellished) account is invariably the LEAST ACCURATE account. It is the most USEFUL; and THAT is all that matters as far as Christianity would be concerned. {9}

The addition of a resurrection is only the most flagrant instance of embellishment. There were various other modifications that were done later on…for any number of reasons. Here are some notable examples of re-phrasings between Mark and subsequent Gospels:

- In Mark 9:5, Jesus is addressed as “rabbi” by Peter; but then in Matthew 17:4, Peter refers to him as “Lord” during the same interlude.
- Mark noted that JoN was crucified on the day AFTER Passover. The latest of the canonical Gospels (that of “John”) is very explicit that JoN was crucified on the day leading up to Passover.
- In Mark 8:29, Peter refers to Jesus as “the Messiah” (promised in the Hebrew Bible)…which makes sense, as Jesus refers to himself as the “son of man” referred to in Daniel. However, in Matthew 16:16, “son of the living God” was inserted.
- Compare Mark 3:31 to Matthew 12:46, where the latter inserts “my Father” into Jesus’ mouth when he refers to the godhead.
- In Mark 4:38, the disciples refer to Jesus as “teacher”; but in Matthew 8:25, they refer to him as “Lord” during the same interlude.
- John omits the scene in the Garden of Gesthamene–in which Jesus beseeches God to “save me from this hour”.

(For more examples of such alterations, see Bart Ehrman's "Misquoting Jesus" and "Jesus Before the Gospels". For an account of the haggling over what the FINAL VERSION of the story would be, see his "Lost Christianities".)

Similar modifications were introduced so as to abet the institutionalization of the creed. The anonymous "Letter to Hebrews", a late addition to the New Testament canon, helped inject the priesthood into a Christianity. The (even later) addition of the notorious "Book Of Revelation" (penned in pure symbolism by a fanatical anti-Roman propagandist named "John" from the Greek island of Patmos) imbued the ideology with an ample dose of fire and brimstone–thereby giving the church rational for viciously persecuting "heretics". (Heaven was a cosmic carrot; hell then served as a cosmic stick.) Such amendments helped consolidate the new church (i.e. the institutional power of the clerisy), and served as extremely effective "crowd control" measures.

The gospels are not–nor were they intended to be–historical documentation of JoN's life. NONE of the New Testament is a log of eyewitness accounts of JoN's words and deeds–recorded by people who knew him…or even by anyone who was actually there. In other words, the Gospels were not meant to be taken literally. Rather, they are sacred testimonies of "Faith". They were cobbled together by devoted groups of adherents generations after the events they describe. This was done based on things people had heard (i.e. the most compelling kerygma in the marketplace of kerygma)…and, subsequently, based on what those people WANTED to believe. And on and on and on…until people actually started writing things down. (And even then, the story CONTINUED to change, as people saw fit to embellish and edit in order to suit their purposes.) NONE of the composers were disinterested parties.

All those who sought to promulgate the sanctified folklore had a staunch, vested interest in the story being a certain way. To say there was a flagrant conflict of interest in this promulgation process would be an understatement. Those who didn't have a stake in the movement had no incentive to investigate / record what "really happened". Only those who had invested themselves in the designated FAITH served as stewards of the lore. Invariably, those who offered the most compelling narrative (the Pauline version) were the ones that prevailed. The prevailing narrative was the prevailing narrative due to memetic logic; and had little to do with historical fidelity. Back then, historical fidelity was ENTIRELY BESIDE THE POINT…as had already been demonstrated with the Torah. To treat the New

Testament, then, as literal history is to entirely miss the point of what the texts contained within the New Testament canon actually were and how the New Testament came to be what it now is.

And what of the late date of the Gospel accounts? Note that there are allusions to the recent destruction of the (second) Jewish temple in the canonical "Gospels"–an event that did not occur until 70 A.D. Hence even the earliest Gospel (that of "Mark") was composed after c. 70–four decades after the alleged execution of Jesus of Nazareth.

What we now refer to as the "Gospels" were still being referred to as "memoirs of the apostles" by Justin Martyr in the mid-2nd century. It was not until c. 180 that Irenaeus of Lugdunum (Lyons) referred to the "tetra-morph" (what would eventually be designated the four canonical "Gospels") in his magnum opus, "Against Heresies". {3}

As we saw, both the latest canonical Gospel (that of "John") and the "Book of Revelation" were added to the official canon at the behest of the scheming bishop, Athanasius of Alexandria. During the 4th century, the egregiously misguided, bull-headed cleric wielded prodigious influence. Tragically, his machinations a significant role in defining the official canon…and thus establishing the rigidly exclusive orthodoxy that would define the Roman Catholic Church thereafter.

The earliest copies of the New Testament are from the 4th century–each in "uncial" Koine Greek: the codex Vaticanus and codex Sinaiticus. {11} Also in the 4th century, the Arian, [w]Ulfila[s] purportedly created a Gothic version of the Bible–though the oldest surviving copy is the codex Argenteus [Silver], commissioned by the Ostrogoths in the 6th century.

Then, in the 5th century, there were:

- **Three more Greek renditions:** the codex Alexandrinus, codex Ephraemi Rescriptus, and codex Bezae Cantabrigensis
- **A Vitas Itala (Old Italic) rendition:** the codex Veronensis
- **A Coptic rendition:** the codex Glazier
- **A Syriac rendition:** the Peshitta

As the story goes, a Latin rendition was finally created in the late 4th century, when Pope Damasus purportedly charged his chief scribe (Jerome of Stridon) to do a translation of antecedent copies. This account is likely apocryphal, as there is no

evidence for a Latin Vulgate until c. 716 (the codex Amiatinus from Northumbria, England). But, incredibly, the Vulgate was not considered the official version of the Bible until the mid-16th century–pursuant to the Council of Trent. {13}

In 1407, a Latin Bible (now housed at Malmesbury Abbey in England) was drafted by Belgian scribe, Gerard Brils. Then, in 1512, Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam revamped extant Latin manuscripts, rendering the "Novum Testamentum Omne". In his letters (no. 273 and 337), Erasmus stated his reasons for doing so. In "collating a large number of ancient manuscripts", there is "one thing that the facts cry out, which can be clear–as they say–even to a blind man: Often through the translator's clumsiness or inattention, the Greek has been wrongly rendered. Often the true and genuine reading has been corrupted by ignorant scribes, which we see happen every day, or altered by scribes who are half-taught and half-asleep." So he brought it upon himself to go back and re-do everything from Greek manuscripts (THEMSELVES suspect) that happened to be available to him at the time.

In 1527, the Tuscan Dominican friar, Sante Pagnini of Lucca did yet another Latin version. His was the first New Testament to use verse numbers. But even then, the Vulgate continued to be re-done again and again…until Pope Sixtus V finally designated an official version in 1590. However, immediately after his death, the Vatican curia (at the behest of the Jesuits) voided that edition, and had all copies thereof destroyed. Pope Clement VIII then designated yet ANOTHER official version in 1592 (which is the one that was used until 1979).

The timing of the Clementine Bible makes sense, as it followed shortly after the establishment of the "Tridentine Mass": the Latinized liturgy that was initially formulated at the Council of Trent. (Reference the papal bull of Pius V; as articulated in the Roman Missal of 1570.) That precedent for the Roman Rite would be honored until 1970, pursuant to Vatican II (whereupon it was modified yet again).

The 16th century was a precipitous time for the Roman Catholic Church, as it was forced to respond to the unrest caused by the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther had translated the New Testament into German in 1522; and William Tyndale had translated the entire Bible into English in 1525. {14}

The Church also had to contend with the earth-shattering insights of the verging Scientific Revolution. In the 1530's, Copernicus had debunked the geocentric model of the universe (on which all three major Abrahamic religions had based their cosmogony). Such profound disruption to conventional wisdom upset many a

sacred apple-cart. It is for this reason that the “Supreme Sacred Congregation” of the Roman Inquisition was established (in 1542) as a draconian enforcement arm of the Vatican. The Inquisition would serve as the spearhead of the Church’s revanchist (counter-Reformation) efforts. {15}

In assaying the development of Latinized liturgy, we might keep in mind that JoN and his immediate disciples did not speak Latin…or even its scriptural antecedent, Koine Greek. They spoke Aramaic. So what we now have is translations of translations of translations of what might have been said (said, that is, according to hearsay that was generations removed from the actual events).

Accounts of any folklore in the era before printing is invariably spurious. At each juncture, the narrative is adjusted according to the circumstances in which the teller finds himself, and the interests those he’s serving happen to have. Here’s the catch: The transformation OF the narrative is never specified WITHIN the narrative. (Narratives can’t serve as their own meta-narratives.) So, in a way, to take the story TOO seriously is to refrain from acknowledging that which created the story in the first place. After all, according to the story, the story is perfectly true.

The same goes for pictorial modifications. JoN was soon assigned a distinctly Frankish (alt. Anglo-Saxon) pedigree…in roughly the same way that Abraham’s progeny would be assigned a distinctly Ishmaelite pedigree by the early Mohammedans. As ever, religion is all about branding. When appealing to certain audiences, semiotic adjustments are inevitable. Thinking of JoN as a Palestinian Jew was not ideal for Europeans seeking to make the “Christ” their own.

Originally, JoN was depicted as a miracle-worker, and was thought of in terms of the ancient “Krio-phoros” idiom: a shepherd. Eventually, he was rendered god incarnate–lifting the resurrected savior-god motif from antecedent traditions like Mithra-ism…and/or the Ptolemaic cult of Serapis…and/or the various Dionysian cults of the Greco-Roman world. Meanwhile, the “son of god” / “son of man” idiom was also appropriated from Judaism.

And so it went: “The Way” as it originally existed was expunged from the historical record. JoN’s following died because it didn’t serve those in power (i.e. those WITH power). So it was eventually transplanted by something else–something that served the persecutors / oppressors rather than the persecuted / oppressed.

Throughout it's 17-century history, the Roman Catholic Church has made a veritable art-form out of ignoring everything that JoN actually said. Through elaborate artifice, it has mastered the art of concocting an ersatz legacy for itself, then fabricating divine Providence in order to justify its own existence. We should remind ourselves that its prodigious power has come by fiat, not by merit. If we juxtapose the Vatican's checkered track-record against the statements made by JoN in the synoptic Gospels, we find almost zero parity.

"The Way" was no more.

Footnotes:

{1 The Roman chronicler, Eusebius of Caesarea Maritima (a contemporary of Emperor Constantine), wrote that "Saint Peter" eventually "came to Rome and was crucified with his head downwards." He attributed this to a statement made by Origen, who died c. 254. There is zero evidence for this claim, and–of course–oodles of incentive for a proto-Christian theologian to concoct the tale.

Simon-Peter's burial in Rome is little other than a convenient urban legend propagated by those with a vested interest in upholding a self-serving historiography. There is no public record of the execution of a Cephas / Simon-Peter in Rome during Nero's reign. In his "Annals", Tacitus (56-117) describes the persecution of Christians in Rome at that time and does not so much as even mention "Peter".

There are only two other places that this particular story is (obliquely) mentioned. First: In a single place in just one of Tertullian's many writings ("Scorpiace", c. after 200). Second: By Dionysius of Corinth, who comments–in passing–that the burial place of Peter was said to be Rome. Dionysius made the comment in a letter to the Church of Rome in the late 2nd century, thanking the Romans for their financial help.

Based on this urban legend (and others) surrounding Simon-Peter and Saul of Tarsus, "Vatican Hill" soon became a designated place of pilgrimage and commemoration. For example, in a document entitled "The Passion of Peter & Paul" (from the late 5th century), the story of the crucifixion of Peter in Rome is recounted. Such a document is question-begging, as it is based on the pre-existing lore.

The fact of the matter remains that EVEN IF Simon-Peter ever made it to Rome, it was solely to be tried and executed (not to proselytize), thereby imbuing Rome with no significance outside of, perhaps, being a place of martyrdom for one of the apostles. Indeed, Rome's ONLY significance was political, not spiritual. That fact alone reveals much about the priorities of the early "Vatican".}

{2 While the man christened as the Bishop of Rome was designated by a cabal of prelates, other presbyters throughout Christendom were typically elected by the laity. The selection of the Bishop of Rome is purportedly guided by the hand of god–a supposition that is brought into question by dubious outcomes. I explore this matter in Appendix 1.}

{3 The term, "Gospel" (a word derived from the Old English "god-spell", meaning "glad tidings") is actually used in place of the original term in ancient Greek, commonly transliterated as "evangelion" (meaning "good message"). In reference to the Jewish Messiah, "evangelion" was first used by Saul of Tarsus in his first letter to the Corinthians (15:1). It is now pejoratively referred to as "Good News". In Classical Antiquity, the term was often used to refer to "good news of a triumph" (esp. a military victory).}

{4 The "Book Of Revelation" was penned by a neurotic anti-Roman propagandist named "John" from the Greek island of Patmos. The screed–written entirely in symbolism–could be appropriated to serve as fire and brimstone…if taken literally. This came in handy, as it was effective at keeping the laity "in line". The

anonymously-written Letter To The Hebrews had tremendous ecclesiastical value as well; for it could be used to rationalize sacerdotalism…and thus the existence of the "Magisterium" (read: Vatican bureaucracy).}

{5 This key transition would happen during the pontificate of the Arian-sympathizing Damasus (who would remain pontiff until 384). Damasus came of age during the Roman legitimation of (Arian) Christianity. He would pursue his career amongst the Roman presbyters; and thus in a palpably anti-Arian context. So it is little surprise that he presided over the Council of Rome in 382–ironically fulfilling Athanasius' mission of including "The Book Of Revelation" in the canon.}

{6 Myriad Abrahamic figures claimed to be the promised Messiah during that time. The claim was commonplace…and myriad groups claimed to have found THE ONE. That such claims formed around JoN is unsurprising. In fact, it would have been rather remarkable if such claims HADN'T formed around this famed Nazarene.}

{7 For a meticulous explication of the various Christian texts in the Faith's earliest days, see Bart Ehrman's "Lost Christianities". The emerging Trinitarian model required some sort of rationalization–a way of making sense of itself (lest it forfeit the illusion of credence amongst the laity). For centuries, there would be a protracted feud for which various councils were convened–from the Council of Chalcedon in 451 to the Second Council of Constantinople in 553. The notion that everything had been figured out from the beginning is, therefore, preposterous. The catechism that prevailed was just a concatenation of historical accidents…over the course many centuries.}

{8 The Codex Vaticanus is the oldest copy of the New Testament available. Tellingly, it does not have anything past verse 8 in the last chapter of Mark. The bit about a resurrection (Mark 16:9-20) was not added until c. 400. This provocative addendum was likely inspired by the ascension of Elijah to heaven in the Hebrew Bible.}

{9 The writers of "John" even ripped off the "I am the Truth, the Life, and the Way" line written in the Tao Te Ching–a tract composed five centuries earlier. Catchy memes are catchy memes, whether in ancient China or ancient Rome.}

{10 Constantine was not the only figure about which apocryphal tales were created by the Vatican. Inevitably, various legends were formed around the strategic relationship between Constantine and Sylvester (and about the "deals" made between them), replete with a slew of forged documents…including stories of

Sylvester slaying a dragon. (!) It was inevitable hat Sylvester would become the subject of tall-tales used by Roman Catholic revisionists for self-serving purposes. The so-called “Donation of Constantine” of the late 8th century (invoked to accord political authority to the Vatican, thereby legitimizing theocracy) is only the most infamous. Before that were the “Symmachean” documents (c. 500), in which Sylvester cures Constantine of leprosy.}

{11 Note that while there are no manuscripts of the Gospels before the 4th century, a manuscript of the Pauline letters exists. Known as “papyrus 46”, it is from c. 200 (+/- 25 years).}

{12 In 1953, two Franciscan monks discovered hundreds of 1st century ossuaries stored in a cave on the Mount of Olives near Jerusalem. These artifacts mark the earliest traces of the Hebrew community known as “The Way”. “Shimon Bar Yonah” (Simon, Son of Jonah) was inscribed on one of the ossuaries (as it so happens, next to ossuaries labeled “Jesus”, “Joseph”, “Mary”, “Judas”, and “Matthew”). What are we to make of such things? The same as we are to make of any remains found on Vatican Hill, beneath the current St. Peter’s basilica.}

{13 In the intervening time, we know that there were various Latin versions of the Bible. In 1178, Petrus Comestor of Troyes rendered an Old French translation from Latin antecedents. (That would serve as the basis for Guyart de Moulins’ French rendition in the early 14th century.) Peter Valdes, founder of the Waldensians, also commissioned an Old French translation from Latin antecedent in the 1170’s.}

{14 The Benedictine monk, Bede of Northumbria had translated parts of the Bible into Old English in the 7th century; and Aldred of Chester did another in the 10th century. John Wycliffe then did a translation into Middle English in the late 14th century. However, those versions were quickly suppressed; and did not end up having a significant impact.}

{15 This odious “Holy Office” exists to the present day–though in diluted form. It was shrewdly rebranded: the Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith.}

{16 Theologically, Arian Christianity hedged the Trinitarian view, holding that the Son was subordinate to the godhead; and thus was not ONE WITH the godhead. This seemed to compromise on the deification of JoN, and so was seen as less amenable to unconditional worship. Arianism might be thought of as a precursor to the Eastern Orthodox church–as it was prized by the “eastern bishops”, who were reticent to endorse the primacy of Rome’s bishop. Though Arian theology was not

exactly the prototype of Eastern Orthodoxy, Arianism certainly influenced–in part–the theology that prevailed in the East / Orient. This is to be held in contradistinction with the theology of the Western (i.e. Roman Catholic) church, which was categorically anti-Arian.}

{17 It might be noted that, among other decisions made during the council, Eusebius (who was effectively the event's chairman) announced that the Earth was to be considered less than 32 centuries old. In other words, the world began in the 29th century B.C., during the early Sumerian city-states of the Bronze Age…which certainly would have come as a surprise to the Sumerians who lived prior to that.}

{18 The final decision to include "The Book of Revelation" in the official canon was validated at the first Council of Carthage in 397 (under the guidance of another fanatic, Augustine of Hippo), during the pontificate of Siricius.}

{19 The pro-Athenasius camp was also touted as "THE orthodox" camp, and euphemistically referred to as the "Nicene" version…even though the outcome of the Council of Nicaea was effectively split (ergo the on-going ideological feud for the ensuing two generations). The prevailing camp included major clerical figures (evangelizers) like Jerome, Hilary of Poitiers, Eusebius of Vercelli, Ambrose of Milan, and–of course–Augustine of Hippo.}

{20 The establishment of the Vatican involved the inauguration of a totalitarian theocracy (or, rather, vice versa). This meant the elimination of any separation of church and state that had existed in the Roman Empire up to that point, thereby–ironically–contravening Mark 12:17 and Matthew 22:21 (two Gospels to which the Vatican has rarely paid attention since its inception): "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's." Since then, the Catholic Church has devoted the majority of its existence to preventing the separation of church and state.}

{21 Valentinian's son, Valentinian II, who reigned the Western Empire out of Milan from 375 to 387, and then out of Vienne in Gaul from 388-392, adopted the Arian sympathies of his mother, Empress Justina. He was faced with major push-back from the likes of Ambrose.}

APPENDIX 1: A Note On Divine Mis-Fires

The Vatican demonstrates what happens when power is highly-concentrated and left unaccountable. Ironically, one thing that the ancient institution tends NOT to show is what Jesus of Nazareth would have done. But this is no mystery; it is entirely predictable…once we view this not as part of "god's plan", but rather as the predictable (if unfortunate) "shit that happens" when ANY institution of this nature exists. In this respect, there is nothing special about the Vatican.

A single metric indicates the dubiousness of the claim that divine ordinance is at play when an Apostolic Father is selected: duration of tenure. Note the ten popes who lasted for less than a month:

- Sisinnius (20 days in 708)
- Stephen (3 days in 752)
- Boniface VI (15 days in 896)
- Theodore II (19 days in 897)
- Damasus II (23 days in 1048)
- Celestine IV (16 days in 1241)
- Pius III (26 days in 1503)
- Marcellus II (21 days in 1555)
- Urban VII (12 days in 1590)
- Leo XI (26 days in 1605)

Meanwhile, Benedict V (in 964) and John Paul I (in 1978) each lasted for only 33 days.* Pope Innocent IX lasted just 62 days (in 1591)…after his predecessor had lasted less than a year…and HIS predecessor was the guy who died after just 12 days (see above). **What was god thinking?** Well, we mere mortals aren't supposed to know that; or even question it. Yet we can say this: If divine intervention is involved with the filling of such an important position, **this doesn't make much sense**.

Think of it this way: It is very peculiar that a cosmic-level decision would be made to put a man at the head of the Church…only to nullify that decision **within the month**. This nullification, it turns out, is often effected via death…which, we can only assume, was god's will. Are we to suppose, then, that the Creator of the Universe was simply indecisive? Does god change his mind? ("Wait. THAT'S not the guy I wanted.")

This does not make sense if we are to presume that the selection process is in any way related to Providence. But it makes PERFECT sense if we assume that the Vatican is just another man-made institution–replete with all the flaws and foibles of any other institution (omniscient super-being not included).

Contrast these oddly brief tenures with the pair of pontificates that lasted the 57+ years between 1846-1903: Pius IX and Leo VIII. (Just prior to that, Gregory XVI had lasted over 15 years.) And a pair of pontificates lasted the 48+ years between 1775-1823: Pius VI and Pius VII…though they were separated by a half-year of stalemate.

Stalemate? Wait a minute. Protracted impasses aren't supposed to occur when god's hand is guiding the process. Would he really want his vicar to be put "on hold" for that long? When the Holy See has a hiatus, is that fine? What of the papal schism of 1378 to 1417? Over the course of about four decades, there were three lineages with claims upon the throne of Saint Peter…plus a fourth claimant.

- Urban VI followed by Boniface IX followed by Innocent VII followed by Gregory XII (in Rome)
- Clement VII followed by Benedict the XIII followed by Benedict XIV (in Avignon)
- Alexander V followed by John XXIII (in Pisa)

Each pontifical lineage laid claim during the same period. For six years, there were actually three pontificates at once. In the end, the church went with…NONE of these four alternatives. Instead, Pope Martin V was selected. It was a comedy worthy of a Shakespearian script.

That this predicament arose is unsurprising. During that era, vying for the papacy had become a contest of shrewd political maneuvering, underhanded power-grabs, and simony amongst the most wealthy / powerful families. The key was to mobilize support, not by "proving" oneself in any noble sense, but by making deals, exchanging favors, and forging strategic alliances.

As has always been the case, the denizens of the halls of power tended to seize their lofty stations via shady means. For centuries, the selection of each pope was based on suspicious criteria.

Alas, none of this is surprising. In the final analysis, all of that just sounds like the quirky record any other idiosyncratic, man-made institution. The long history of the papacy illustrates what people can do when given lots of power. There's nothing strange about ANY of the Vatican's scandalous history…once we see it for what it actually is.

In sum: Divinely-inspired selection seems to be rather erratic. Some popes last for DAYS, others last for DECADES. Some have been corrupt; some have been murderous sociopaths. Some were installed by powerful Italian families for financial / political reasons. Others didn't really DO ANYTHING. In any case, subterfuge and avarice were typically involved in the process; and NONE of it had anything whatsoever to do with Jesus of Nazareth.

{* Note that the 33 days of John Paul I was followed by a pontificate that endured for 26 1/2 years (that of John Paul II). Should we assume that god liked the second choice better? What's REALLY going on here?}

APPENDIX 2: Barnabas?

A rigged historiography is a tempting thing in which to indulge. It requires tremendous discipline to resist this temptation. We should not impose our own notions of how we WANT things to have been onto our reading of history. Rather, we should let the past speak for itself. {A}

When it comes to historical revisionism in the service of Islam, desperate measures have sometimes been undertaken so as to give the official version a veneer of legitimacy. When it comes to the preferred account of "what really happened", revisionists will countenance confabulations of the past in order to justify their views of the present.

For Islamic apologists, perhaps the most incriminating gambit was the composition of the so-called "Gospel of Barnabas" c. 1600. The eponym of this Gospel was based on a quasi-historical: Joses of Cyprus. Joses was later rechristened "Bar Nabya" (Aramaic for "son of the prophet"), which was later Romanized as "Barnabas".

The fraudulent tract describes the protagonist's cohort, Saul of Tarsus (later Romanized as "Paul") as "the deceived". This pejorative is a dead giveaway that the tale was fabricated. For according to the Pauline letters, Paul and Barnabas were inveterate ALLIES. It makes no sense that a tract by Barnabas would have been

devoted to denouncing his closest spiritual companion. Ideologically, though, such aspersions make perfect sense, as discrediting Paul would be pivotal to undermining the Christology that he established.

We might recall that Paul's ministry post-dated the death of JoN by at least fifteen years; and the first of his letters by at least two decades. {B} Paul hailed from Tarsus, an Anatolian city in which a bevy of savior gods ["theoi soteres"] were worshipped–most notably: Heracles (Romanized as "Hercules"). Mithraic cults would have also been active in Tarsus. In these cults, it was supposed that blood was shed so as to redeem mankind; and thus give mankind eternal life. In fact, one of the most prominent sacred rites in the worship of Mithras would have been the drinking of sacrificial blood; or, alternately, a chalice of wine, which represented the blood. (For more on this, see my essays on "Mythemes".)

After having met each other in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas preached together in Antioch (present-day Antakya), Iconium (present-day Konya), and on the island of Cyprus–beginning c. 47, and into the 50's. Barnabas was executed in Salamis (on Cyprus) c. 61. Paul would have thereafter spent time proselytizing in Palestine (esp. Damascus), and possibly even in northern Hijaz. {C}

At the time of Barnabas' death, Paul would have been living in Corinth (in the Peloponnese). Paul allegedly started writing his letters c. 52…until his execution c. 67. (Note, though, that the primary source for an account of Paul's ministry, Luke's "Acts of the Apostles", was not written until c. 90.) Considering their ardent affinities and this timeline, it makes no sense that Barnabas would have penned a diatribe denouncing his fellow evangelist. {D}

Note that the only reference to an ACTUAL Gospel by "Barnabas" was the so-called "Decretum Gelasianum" from the early 6th century–so named because it was attributed to Pope Gelasius (as a decretal he purportedly issued during his pontificate). In that document, the Gospel-in-question was denounced as apocryphal. Copies of said Gospel (i.e. the ACTUAL Gospel) no longer exist.

In the fraudulent version of the Gospel, the Islamic version of JoN is presented, whereby the fabled Nazarene is non-divine and explicitly referred to as (merely) a "prophet". Moreover, the prophecy of the pending arrival of a "paraclete" (ref. John 16:7-14) is made to seem like a prophecy of Mohammed of Mecca (as the Seal of the Abrahamic prophets). Comically, the tract reveals its spurious nature by being too

“on the nose” with its dispensation. For it not only mentions Mohammed by name (as the coming “paraclete”), it even includes a rendering of the Shahadah: the Muslim profession of Faith. (!)

Moreover, the tract is suspiciously adamant in its repudiation of Trinitarianism. This would have been a peculiar point of contention given that the text was reputedly composed in the mid-1st century (i.e. before Trinitarianism had even become a doctrine to be disavowed). This “Gospel of Barnabas” goes so far as to suggest that it was Judas Iscariot who was crucified, not JoN; and that JoN was–per standard Islamic doctrine–raised up to heaven instead of suffering the Passion: an account that is perfectly in keeping with Koran 4:157-158. {E}

The artifice becomes all the more obvious when we read in 42:2 that “Jesus confessed and stated the truth: ‘I am not al-Masih’.” Revealingly, the author used the CA term for “Messiah” here–an anachronism, as the Semitic lexeme during Barnabas’ lifetime would have been “Mashiach”. {F} The contrivance involved is exposed by such post-hoc nomenclature.

Later we read that JoN exclaimed: “Cursed be every one who shall insert into my sayings that I am the son of god” (53:6)…as if it were already a major misconception DURING JoN’s ministry–to wit: one that JoN himself felt he needed to dispel. Again, the anachronistic rhetoric is a dead give-away.

Also notable in this ersatz Gospel are myriad mistranslations of Koine Greek that reflect those of the Latin Vulgate Bible–which was composed by Jerome of Stridon [Pannonia] in the late 4th century. For example, in referencing the forbidden fruit (from the Tree of Knowledge in Eden), “apple” and “evil” are conflated by being rendered with the same Latin lexeme: “malum”. Hence the text must post-date c. 400.

What else seems to be taken from accounts of Barnabas and inserted into Islamic lore? Note the tale of Paul and Barnabas visiting “Lystra” (in Lycaonia, Anatolia), which the Koran vaguely refers to as “Ya-Sin”. The tale is about two messengers who visit a city and are stoned by the locals (36:13-21 in the Koran; chapter 14 in the Book of Acts).

Incidentally, it was the Epistle of Barnabas that was likely the source of the “Good Shepherd” leitmotif (i.e. the “Shepherd of Hermas”)–a piece of lore that served as the basis for Docetism. In that short-lived creed, it was supposed that JoN was merely an apparition; and that the “Passion” (crucifixion) was an illusion.

Forgery in the service of an ideology was commonplace throughout the Middle Ages. (I mention the fabricated “treaty of Umar II” from c. 720 in Endnote *133.) The same machinations could be found in Christendom. The “Corpus Areopagiticum” was a series of mystical writings from the 6th century intended to reconcile Neo-Platonism with Christian theology (falsely attributed to “Dionysius the Areopagite”, an Athenian disciple of Saul of Tarsus). The “Donation of Constantine” was a tract from the 15th century used by the Vatican to legitimize the pontificate’s arrogation of political power to itself. It enumerates decretals falsely attributed to Roman Emperor Constantine well over a thousand years earlier. The letter of Publius Lentulus is another example–forged during the Renaissance. (I enumerate other forged texts in my essay on “The History Of Sacred Texts”.)

Hoaxes can even be in the form of artifacts–as with the so-called “shroud of Turin”. The purported cloth in which JoN was wrapped when he was entombed was revealed by carbon dating to be from the 13th century.

The Gospel of Barnabas is part of a long history of shams–from the Protocols of the Elders of Zion to the diaries of Jack the Ripper. This particular document is testament to the fact that religious apologists will go to great lengths to legitimize their version of history. The “catch”, of course, is that this could have happened with ANY ancient text. What is and isn’t considered apocryphal has more to do with the designs of the powers-that-be than with what REALLY IS–and is not–apocryphal.

* * *

{A For other examples of rigged historiography, tailored to serve an ideological purpose, see my essay on “The Forgotten Diaspora”, “The Land Of Purple”, ‘City Of The Beloved”, “America’s National Origin Myth”, and “The Obsolescence Of The 2nd Amendment”.}

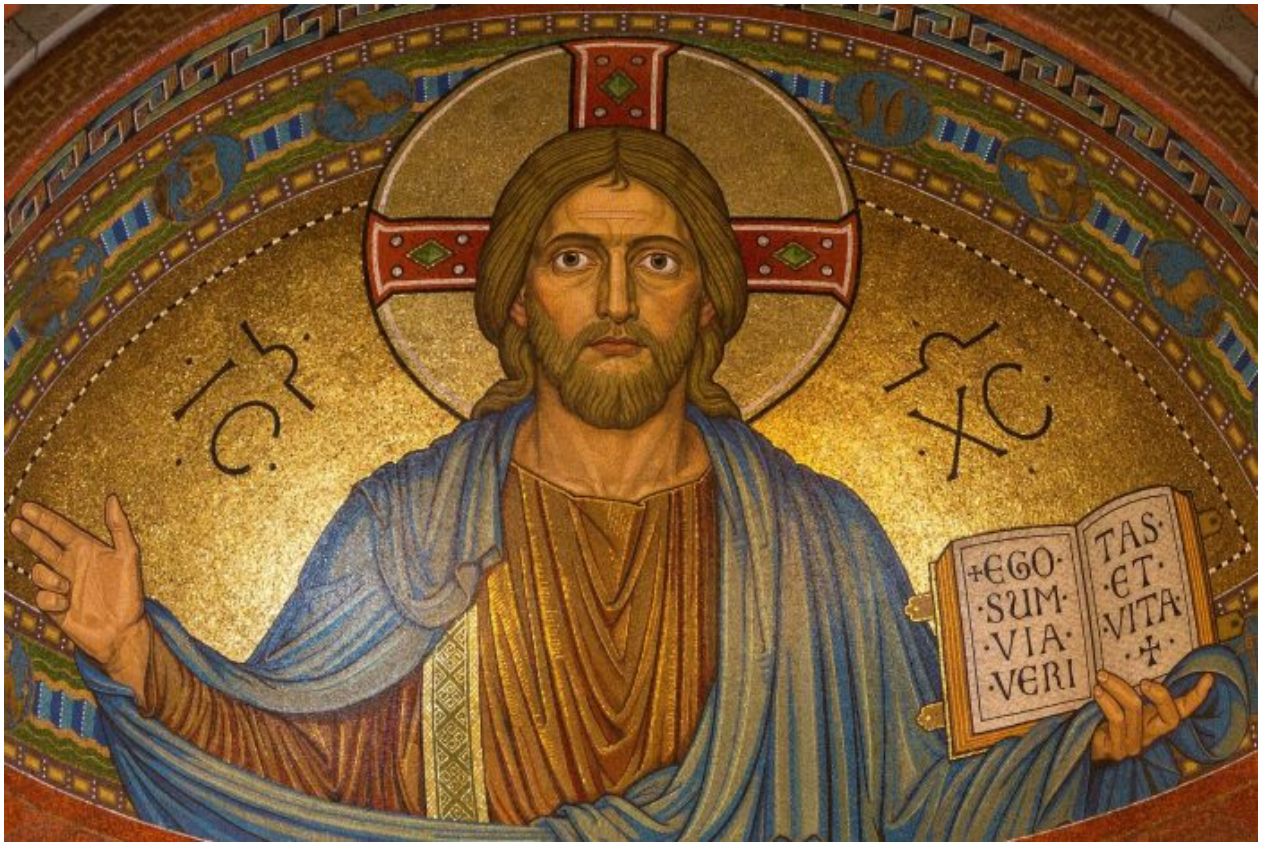
{B As the story goes (at least, as presented in Luke’s “Acts of the Apostles”), Paul converted after having seen a vision of JoN on the road to Damascus at some point in the late 30’s. Though he never met JoN, Paul claims to have been acquainted with JoN’s brother, James.}

{C During this later phase, Paul’s primary companion would have been Luke, the putative author of the synoptic gospel (and–ostensibly–the author of the “Acts Of The Apostles”). The two men concurred that Gentiles should be brought into the fold, and conducted their evangelism accordingly.}

{D Saul of Tarsus has been the subject of many apocryphal tales–some of which are little known to the Occident, yet that proliferated in Oriental regions. One of the most notable was the romantic tale of Saul and a woman known as Thekla of Ikonion (conventionally referred to as the “Acts of Paul and Thecla”) found in the “Acts of Paul”. It also crops up in the first and third letters from Paul to the Corinthians. The “Acts of Paul” was circulated in Coptic, Ethiopic, Syriac, Greek, and Armenian…and eventually in Latin. It was denounced by Tertullian for its advocacy of a woman’s right to preach and to perform baptisms.}

{E Another source of the faux-crucifixion account was in the Gospel of Basilides, where it was supposed that Simon of Cyrene was really the one crucified on Cavalry (after he deliberated posed as JoN in order to die in his place). Basilides of Alexandria lived in the 2nd century. His account became popular amongst Docetists.}

{F In Islamic lore, there is confusion about the Abrahamic concept of Messiah. The Koran adamantly repudiates the Christology of Pauline Christianity (that is: of the Nicene creed), wherein JoN is esteemed as the son of god (and thus the savior of mankind). It rejects the treatment as “Kristos” (the Christ); yet it fashions JoN [“Isa” in CA] as the “Masih” [the CA rendering of Messiah]. This does not make sense, as “Kristos” is merely the Koine Greek rendering of the older (Semitic) form of Messiah: “Mashia[c]h”, which simply means “anointed one” (that is: one anointed by god). In Islamic eschatology, the idea is that JoN WILL EVENTUALLY serve as a Messianic figure…come the End Times, when he will battle the Dajjal (anti-Christ).*61 JoN’s return is foretold in 4:159. The catch, though, is that “Christ” and “Messiah” are synonyms: the former the Hellenic version of the latter (Aramaic) term. (The moniker, “Messia[c]h” / “Kristos” was even applied to the Persian king, Cyrus the Great in the opening verse of Isaiah 45!) The Mohammedans mistakenly thought of the “Christ” label as way of asserting JoN’s divinity; whereas they accurately thought of the older Hebrew moniker as pre-Christological. The misconception persists to the present day: Most Christians assume “Christ” signifies divine being (i.e. the incarnation of god) per the prevailing Pauline Christology. In reality, he is simply designated as “the anointed one”. The irony is that both Christians and Muslims erroneously assume that referring to JoN in this manner necessarily entails treating him as a savior-god.}



Appendix 3: Fragmentation Of A Creed

During Christianity's embryonic stage, the brother of Jesus of Nazareth (JoN), James of Jerusalem (alt. "James the Just") served as the touchstone for the **Ebionite** and **Elkasaite** sects. These likely bore the closest resemblance to the original movement (the Way); which is to say that the tenets of these two movements were most in keeping with the teachings of JoN.

During the early stages of the Christianity's development, it is worth noting some of the prominent heterodox Egyptian proselytes:

- Cerinthus [possibly of Alexandria]
- Basilides of Alexandria
- Carpocrates of Alexandria
- Origen Adamantius of Alexandria
- Valentinus of Alexandria
- Pachomius of Thebes

Open dissent within the church dates back to Novatian of Rome, who lived in the 3rd century. Such men operated in the midst of more orthodox figureheads like Anatolian bishop, Ignatius of Antioch, Polycarp of Smyrna, and–later–the famed Berber bishop, Augustine of Hippo.

The **Ebionites** [the poor] are those who most closely hewed to the Mosaic tradition. Their movement was effectively a kind of neo-Judaism (like the Essenes), with the added feature of prioritizing the ministry of JoN. But that was only the beginning. There was a panoply of heterodox figures / movements over the centuries–from Classical Antiquity to the modern era. Here are FIFTY:

- Anatolian monk, Serapion of Antioch: promulgator of the **Docetist** sect (which held that JoN was more apparition than homo sapiens)
- Anatolian monk, Julian of Halicarnassus: founder of the (anti-Chalcedonian) **Aphtharto-docetae** sect
- Samaritan mystic, Simon “Magus”: founder of the **Simonian** sect
- Galatian theologian, Marcion of Sinope / Pontus: founder of the **Marcionite** sect (who, in stark Juxtaposition to the Ebionites, completely divorced the new Faith from Judaic lore; in keeping with the position expressed in Justin Martyr’s “Dialogue With Trypho” and two “Apologies”).
- Phrygian theologian, Montanus: founder the **Montanist** sect
- Syriac monk, Nestorius of Germanikeia: founder of the **Nestorian** sect
- Syriac monk, Saul of Samosata (not to be confused with Saul of Tarsus): founder of the **Paulician** [alt. “Paulian”] sect
- Syriac monk, Moroun of Taurus / Cyrrhus [a.k.a. “Maron”]: founder of the **Maronite** sect
- Syriac monk, Jacob bar Addai of Constantina (a.k.a. “Jacob Baradaeus”): founder of the **Jacobin** sect of the Syriac Orthodox church
- Syriac / Parthian (gnostic) scholar, Bar Daisan of Edessa (a.k.a. “Bardesanes”): founder of the **Bardaisanite** sect *
- Syriac theologian, Theodore of Antioch (Mopsuestia)
- Syriac theologian, Theodoret of Cyrrhus
- Syriac theologian, Ibas of Edessa
- Syriac monk, Alcibiades of Apameia: founder of the **Elkesaite** sect
- Syriac theologian, Nicolas of Antioch: founder of the **Nicolaite** sect
- Syriac theologian, Apollinaris of Laodicea: founder of the **Apollinarian** sect
- Syriac theologian, Aëtius of Antioch: founder of the **Anomoean** sect (so named, as it was associated with Eunomius of Cyzicus)

- Roman theologian, Cerinthus of Asiana: icon of neo-Platonic **Gnosticism**
- Roman presbyter, Hippolytus of Rome: founder of the **Ophite** sect
- Roman theologian, Pelagius of Britannia: founder of the **Pelagian** sect
- Egyptian sage, Marcus of Memphis (followed by Roman bishop, Priscillian of Avila / Hispania): founder of the (Manichaean-Gnostic) **Priscillian** sect
- Berber / Numidian theologian, Donatus of Carthage [“Casae Nigrae”]: founder of the **Donatist** sect
- Berber / Coptic theologian, Arius of Cyrenaica [Libya]: founder of the **Arian** sect **
- Bulgarian / Thracian theologian, Bogomil of Macedonia: founder of a dualist **neo-Gnostic** sect
- Lombard monk, Arnold of Brescia: leader of the **Commune of Rome**
- Italian monk, Fra Dolcino of Novara: founder of the **Dulcinian** sect (inspired by Francis of Assisi and Joachim of Fiore)
- French theologian, Bernard of Clairvaux: the **Cistercian** sect (a.k.a. the “Bernardines”)
- French theologian, Peter Waldo of Lyons: founder of the (Vaudois) **Waldensian** sect
- French (Beguine) mystic, Marguerite Porete of Hainaut: touchstone for the (anti-clerical) **Free Spirit** movement
- Spanish theologian, Miguel Serveto of Aragon: protestant reformer
- Czech preacher, Petr Chelcicky of Bohemia: founder of **Unitas Fratrum**; bellwether for **Ana-Baptism**
- Czech theologian, Jan Hus of Bohemia: founder of the **Hussite** sect; bellwether for the Christian Reformation **
- Saxon (German) preacher, Nikolaus Ludwig, count of Zinzendorf: founder of “Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine” (a.k.a. the **Moravian** church)
- Silesian (German) theologian, Kaspar Schwenkfeld of Ossig: inspiration for Christian Protestantism (i.e. the Reformation)
- German theologian, Martin Luther of Saxony: catalyst for Christian Protestantism (i.e. the Reformation); founder of the **Lutheran** denomination
- Dutch theologian, Jakob Hermanszoon (a.k.a. “Arminius”): founder of the **Arminian** sect (a.k.a. the “Remonstrants”)
- Italian theologian, Fausto Paolo Sozzini of Siena: founder of the **Socinian** sect of the Polish Reform Church.
- Indian bishop, “Valiya” Mar Thoma[s] of Kerala: founder of the **Malankara** denomination
- Scottish minister, John Knox: founder of the **Presbyterian** denomination

- English theologian, John Wycliffe: reformer who inspired the **Lollard** movement
- English minister, John Smyth of Nottinghamshire: founder of the **Baptist** denomination
- English minister, John Wesley of Lincolnshire: founder of the **Methodist** denomination
- English minister, George Fox of Leicestershire: founder of the Society of Friends (a.k.a. **Quakerism**)
- English activist, Gerrard Winstanley: founder of the **Diggers** (an offshoot of which were the so-called “Levellers”)

During Classical Antiquity, there also existed the **Alogian**, **Eustathian**, **Naassene**, **Chaldaean**, and **Mandaean** [alt. Sabian] sects. Some syncretism occurred between Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic demonimations–as with the “Melkite” (**Chalcedonian**) church. A millennium later (during the Renaissance), there emerged several medieval sects–notably: the (Albigensian) **Cathars**. ***

The Italian (Roman) monk, Benedetto of Norcia (a.k.a. “Benedict of Nursia”) founded the **Benedictine** Order c. 516. Other Orders more or less operated within the bounds of Roman Catholic orthodoxy. Three of the most prominent:

- German monk, Bruno of Cologne founded the **Carthusian** Order c. 1084.
- Italian monk, Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone of Assisi (a.k.a. “Francesco” / “Francis”) founded the **Franciscan** Order c. 1209.
- Castilian monk, Dominic of Caleruega / Osma (a.k.a. “Domingo Felix de Guzman”) founded the **Dominican** Order c. 1215.

The **Jesuit** Order (a.k.a. the Society of Jesus) was founded c. 1540 by Castilian monk, Ignatius of Loyola and Navarrese monk, Francis of Xavier–both of whom were part of the Basque community. There were eventually myriad Jesuit figureheads–some of whom were apparatchiks to the Vatican, many of whom were iconoclasts. The more heterodox thinkers distinguished themselves by bucking traditional protocols (as well as Vatican authority), embracing a more liberalized–and far more intellectual–version of the Faith. Most notable was the Peruvian (Dominican) theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez Merino of Lima, who pioneered Liberation Theology in the 20th century; thereby flouting the Roman Catholic Church by harking back to the original teachings of JoN.

One did not have to be the founder of a sect in order to be an icon of heterodox thinking. This was illustrated by Reformist luminaries like Anicius Manlius Severinus Boëthius (Roman), Huldrych Zwingli (Swiss), Giordano Bruno (Italian), Jan Hus (Bohemian), and John Wycliffe (English). Meanwhile, instances of charismatic leaders spearheading fundamentalist sects–from the Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons to Pentecostals and Seventh Day Adventists–are enumerated in my essay: "The History Of Exalted Figures".

After the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, there were two main schisms:

- Between the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodox Church (of Greece and eastern Europe) c. 1054; the latter of which was adopted by the Byzantine Empire.
- Between the Roman Catholic Church and north-European Protestantism in the 16th century; the latter of which accounted for virtually every non-Catholic denomination in the Occident (Lutheranism in Germany, Anglicanism in England, Presbyterianism in Scotland, Mennonites in Tyrol / Friesland / Switzerland, and all the rest).

Additional fragmentation occurred. The Coptic Church of Egypt and the Syriac "Church Of The East" (esp. Nestorianism) went their own ways from the very beginning. Meanwhile, the Maronite Church was a peculiar hybridization of Papism and the Syriac tradition. Miaphysite Christology was espoused by the Oriental Orthodox Church–which remained within the Nicene ambit yet rejected the Chalcedonian precedent embraced by the majority of Christendom starting in 451. Also of note were the Egyptian "cenobitic" monks like Antony of Thebes (a.k.a. "Anthony the Great") and Amun of Sketis (a.k.a. "Ammonius")…leading to the legacy of the "Desert Fathers".

(For more on the ramification of Christianity, see Bart Ehrman's "Lost Christianities".)

We might note that the Jewish tradition also underwent ramification. During the Hasmonean period, there were the **Maccabees** (who ruled Judea) and **Tobiads** (a.k.a. "Hellenistai"; i.e. Hellenized Jews, who were named after the Ammonite figure, Tobiou Paides; a.k.a. "Tobiah" / "Tobias"). All the while, there were heterodox sects like the **Essenes** and the **Nazarenes**. That was in addition to the more

orthodox denominations: the **Sadducees** and **Pharisees**. **** Within Beth Israel, such sectarianism continued on through the Renaissance. Three well-known examples:

- Syrian rabbi, Yitzhak ben Shlomo Lurya of Safed (a.k.a. “Isaac Luria”) founded his own school of Kabbalah in the 16th century.
- Anatolian rabbi, Sabbatai Zevi of Smyrna founded the Sabbatean movement in the 17th century.
- Ashkenazi rabbi, Israel ben Eliezer of Volhynia (a.k.a. “Baal Shem Tov”) founded Hassidic Judaism in the 18th century.

In sum: The metamorphosis of a creed is rarely a clean-cut, straight line back to its (purported) origins. In propounding the spurious claim that a doctrine was “as is” from the get-go, one is forced to posit a fanciful past. A sacred history is effectively a “just so story”, crafted post hoc to legitimate present claims. As with any instance of institutionalized dogmatism, sanctified narrative elides what was invariably a meandering genealogy, comprised of a sequence of historical accidents. Once one is sufficiently inoculated against Reality, such farce can pass as history. Received wisdom takes on a life of its own; and memetic inertia does the rest.

{* Bar Daisan was variously affiliated with the (Palestinian) Aramaeans and (Persian) Parthians; and later influenced the prophet, Mani of Ctesiphon.}

{** Arianism, which held that JoN was a created being, not the literal incarnation of the Abrahamic deity, was likely the primary adversary to Nicene Christianity, which adopted a more strictly Pauline Christology and used a catechism that was maximally conducive to institutionalization. Various off-shoots of Arian-ism arose–most notably: Anomoean-ism (alt. “Aëtian-ism”), a (Eunomian) hetero-ousian variation on the Arian sect that held that the godhead and JoN were of different substance.}

{*** Though all of the above men were figureheads in one way or another; none of them were demagogues–which is why I do not include the Geneva-based French-Swiss demagogue, Jehan Cauvin (a.k.a. “John Calvin”); as he was far more a cult leader than a reformer. His tyranny led to the emergence of the Huguenots and other Calvinist sects.}

{**** Reactionary thinking has infused Judaism from the Pharisee High Priests to German rabbi, Moses Schreiber [Sofer]: bellwether for Haredi [ultra-Orthodox] Judaism. By contrast, reformers like Lazarus Ben-David and David Friedländer managed to secularize Judaism at the height of the Enlightenment.}

APPENDIX 4:

The Book Of Revelation

The Book of Revelation is—essentially—a series of phantasmagoric musings attributed to a (Christianized / Hellenized) Jewish hermit, who composed the tract while exiled on the Greek island of Patmos. His nom de plume was “Ioannes” (Romanized to “John”). Not much is known about him…other than that he had a penchant for graphic imagery and an ax to grind with the Roman Empire. (Note the need to vilify the Roman god, Apollo in 9:11.) As he was neither Greek nor Roman, he would have probably composed the tract in Aramaic.

Fast forward to the 4th century. In order for the tract to accord with the new order (which, after all, WAS the Roman Empire), a bit of legerdemain was required. The trick was to pretend that the object of opprobrium was, instead, Babylon: the dastardly foe of the Old Testament. The anti-Kristos (foe of Christ) thus went from Rome (as explicated by, say, Irenaeus) to some ephemeral nemesis lurking just around the corner (in keeping with, say, the "deceiver" referenced in the Johannine Epistles). The former was an oppressive Roman regime; the latter was—effectively—anyone who was against the official (Roman Catholic) creed. Preposterously, it was those in power who were thenceforth portrayed as the ones under siege.

The persecuted thus became the persecutor.

For the intended readership, the idea was to harken back to the foreboding eschaton outlined in the apocalyptic—and equally metaphorical—Book of Daniel; and to do so while inveighing against the forces of darkness that were (purportedly) arrayed against Christendom. Hence the target was, thenceforth, anyone who had the audacity to question the Roman Imperium's sovereignty. Pursuant to the Council of Nicaea, fire and brimstone was exactly what the Magisterium needed to keep the rabble in line. So they seized upon the alarmism that suffused the Book of Revelation, and ran with it. By evincing trepidation in the target audience, supplicants would be more prone to obeisance.

It is easy to forget the REAL context of this apocalyptic tract; as its original theme was elided the moment it was endorsed by the powers that be. For those hankering for a final reckoning, this (re-vamped) narrative was made all the more compelling by the tract's montage of outlandish spectacle. However, there were still some wrinkles that needed to be ironed out.

Getting this clandestine modification to seem plausible required ignoring the fact that the tract did not accord with the Gospels. At certain points, John of Patmos contradicted the message propounded by Jesus of Nazareth (JoN)—most flagrantly in 20:4. Apparently, not only could GOD judge mankind, but anyone who is a king on Earth could do so too. Never mind that it countermanded Matthew 7:1-3; such a declaration was an implicit endorsement of authoritarianism.

Perfect. Just pretend that's what JoN really meant all along. As it happened, the (re-purposed) "Book Of Revelation" was well-suited to serve a (pro-Roman) propagandistic role. Because the screed could readily be put in the service of an authoritarian agenda, Athanasius of Alexandria vociferously promoted it. Perish the

thought that the book's fabled author was a (Christianized) Jew who's bone to pick was with the Roman imperium's treatment of Palestine's Jewish population (spec. since the debacle of 70 A.D.) If taken literally, it could be used to scare the bejeezus out of EVERYONE.

Little was it acknowledged that the (actual) author was vehemently anti-Gentile. (This irony seems to have been lost on Athanasius and his followers.) The fact that THIS book—of all books—is the focal point of Millenarian Christian proselytization today illustrates how disconnected the ideology from anything that remotely resembled the ministry of JoN and his early followers (known, at the time, as "The Way") has become.

And what of premonitions of an "anti-Christ"? The numeral 616 (alternately referred to as the "psephisato" and "charagma") represented Emperor Nero; not, as later supposed, a nefarious cynosure who would rise to power at some point in the future. (The original numeral found in 13:18 was attested in the Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus. It was transplanted with 666 by Irenaeus in the 2nd century; which was then validated by Jerome in the 4th century.)

Regarding the trope, "whore of Babylon", verse 5 of chapter 17 employs the moniker: "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and of Abominations on the Earth". From whence did this dreaded woman hail? Verse 9 refers to the seven hills for which Rome was renown. Verse 18 then specifies that the woman is actually "the great city which reigns over the kings of the Earth". Clearly, this was referring to Rome; which the author considered a kind of Babylon redux. In verse 18, a red "therion" (roughly translated as "beast") is ridden by a harlot, who reigns over all the kings of the earth.

Regarding the numeral associated with the dreaded "therion", any attempt to engage in "gematria" is a fool's errand (read: a complete wast of time). This leviathan symbolized a hegemonic kingdom or empire, in keeping with the idiom's use in chapter 7 in the Book of Daniel (in which there were four beasts—representing the Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans).

In the opening verse of chapter 13, we are told that this "beast" from the sea had ten diadems on each of its ten horns. Such cartoonish hyperbole signified prodigious power. Here, the sea indicated primordial chaos, which was often associated with some sort of serpent. To take ANY of this literally is to disregard

what was already a well-established semiotic convention going back to the Assyrians. The Abrahamic idiom of a BEAST seems to have been directly lifted from the Ugaritic “Baal Cycle”, composed during the Bronze Age. *

To fully understand the metaphorical nature of the exposition in the Book of Revelation, it is necessary to recognize its antecedents. John of Patmos was clearly inspired by extant Jewish lore—especially the eschatological reveries in the Book of Daniel. (The Books of Isaiah and Ezekiel were also influential; and even the Book of Enoch may have played a role.) Note that Judaic “Apocalypse” literature had been quite popular throughout Classical Antiquity. (“Apocalypse” is the Greek term for “Revelation”.) The material typically involved a grand cosmic battle…and some sort of Messianic figure who overcame pagan oppressors and ushered in an eternal kingdom of god.

Stylistically, Apocalypse literature was characterized by fabulous metaphor, and was designed to be as provocative as possible. The Book of Revelation is no different. For a tract that only takes a half-hour to read, the author was able to fit a large amount of audacious claims. (If the Book of Daniel and the Illuminati Trilogy had a child, it would probably look like the Book of Revelation.) From people with the “seal of god” emblazoned upon their foreheads to an array of celestial pyrotechnics, the book seems to strive at every turn to maximize its own preposterousness. So it’s worth considering some of the content. What follows are some highlights:

Passages like 2:26-29, 3:11-12/21, and 20:2-7 offer a sumptuous montage of heady statements intended to disguise the anti-Roman nature of the message. It is no wonder, then, that the text is festooned with a potpourri of hallucinatory images and bizarre symbolism. The fact remains: almost NONE of it was meant to be taken literally. (Can one really “speak like a dragon”?) When we see JoN riding on a cloud, holding a sickle, with a golden crown on his head, and a sword coming out of his mouth, we might suspect that we’ve gone through the looking glass.

Amidst all the mayhem, there is a constant trepidation about “sorcerers”…followed by good tidings of an angel wrapped in a cloud with a rainbow over his head. “The holy one, the true one,” we are told, “has the key of David.” What might this mean? Perhaps a precursor to the “mafteah” of Solomon (made famous by the grimoire, the “Clavicula Salomonis” in the 15th century)? Nobody is quite sure. The Messiah then declares, “I have the keys of Death and of Hades” (presumably after taking the sword out of his mouth). Such passages mean anything the reader wants them to mean.

Also populating John's hallucinatory prognostications: Lots of trumpets, a menagerie of hybrid animals, and a slew of arbitrary numbers (12 and 10 and 7 and 4 and 1/3). ** There are also oddly specific tabulations (a list of 29 trade goods; 12,000 people in each tribe; 200 million soldiers; and 7,000 people killed), as well as durations of time that are all approximately the same (3 1/2 years; 42 months; and 1,260 days). And remember, all 12 x 12,000 = 144,000 people who are admitted to the heavenly realm must be VIRGINS. (There is an odd fixation on fornication throughout the book; perhaps because the author was himself celibate.)

As expected, there is a climactic battle waged at Megiddo in Samaria (Palestine). And don't forget the plagues, the locusts, the blood moon, and the bottomless pit of fire. Meanwhile, the city of Jerusalem is a cube made entirely of gold that comes down to Earth out of heaven…surrounded by gigantic jasper ramparts.

And, of course, there were the four infamous horses (each with its own horseman), accounting for the first four of the seven seals (seals that existed on some sort of celestial scroll):

- A white horse, representing conquest
- A black horse, representing compensation for life's labors
- A bright red horse, representing violence (stemming from tribal conflict)
- A pale green horse, representing death

Splendid. What about a blue stallion, representing pestilence or famine? Or perhaps an orange mare representing badminton and eating truffles? What of a steed for life? A steed for love? Nope. Such things were evidently not part of the plan.

It is likely that there is no purple horse because that particular color symbolized worldly kingdoms, and was therefore associated with Rome. Of course, if the author had been writing in advocacy of the Roman Empire (as the Nicene revisionists insisted), he would have been MORE apt to include Tyrian purple in his color palate, and been obliged to incorporate something symbolizing the Vatican into semiotic scheme. Alas.

Later, the white horse makes another appearance, this time with a rider called "Faith and Time"; and then "The Word of God"; and then "King of Kings and Lord of Lords". Presumably, this rider is the Messiah…making an appearance in his highly anticipated "second coming". It is here that JoN has a sword coming out of his mouth…and is leading "armies of heaven" (all of them on their own white horses, of

course). Apparently, John of Patmos was riffing off of Matthew 10:34-36. (Casting JoN as a WARRIOR seeking CONQUEST was a bit of a stretch, but the author was pissed.)

One might wonder: When, exactly, will all this pandemonium come to pass? According to 10:6, once the author penned the words (in the closing years of the 1st century), "There will be no more delay." No more delay? "The time is near," we're told in the epilogue (written as a kind of benediction). "I am coming soon," the Messiah notifies the world (again, after having taken the sword out of his mouth). What's going on here? Perhaps John of Patmos didn't consider two millennia a "delay". But that can't be it. For the author was certain that the Roman Empire ("those who pierced" JoN) would still be around to ACTUALLY SEE the Second Coming.

Memo to Christians: the Roman Empire no longer exists.

It's worth emphasizing that this tract was more an expression of wishful thinking–by an aggrieved author–than it was an articulation of prophecy. It was a jeremiad, not a mantic premonition.

To reiterate: A narrative adjustment was required if the contentious tract was to serve its new purpose. Instead of the (formerly pagan) Roman Empire, it would be dissidents within Christendom who were cast as the ultimate villain. (No longer was imperious ROME the nemesis; it's those pesky HERETICS that we all need to worry about! But fear not; they'll get what's coming to them.) And so it went: Rather than the "whore of Babylon" (Rome); the designated enemy was rendered Babylon itself. Christian Rome was now to be seen as the proxy for righteousness; and anyone who dissented was deemed to be in cahoots with insidious forces. This is PRECISELY the message that Athanasius and the new impresarios of the re-branded Roman order were looking for.

As is often the case with metaphor-laden exposition, apologists are keen to import their own meaning into the text; and then pretend it was there all along. Regrettably, when symbolism is taken to such heights, it opens the door to endless exegetical shenanigans. Those who are now besotted by enthralling Millenarian premonitions insist that this eccentric text means precisely what their agenda demands it should mean. It seems they expect their audience to be just as credulous as they are. John of Patmos—whoever he was—would be rolling in his unmarked grave.

{* The serpent leitmotif actually dates back to the Sumerians. The Akkadian / Assyrian “Tamtu” (rendered “Th-M-T” in Ugaritic) involved the infamous “Tiamat”, as featured in the “Enuma Elish”. This lexeme was rendered “Tehom[at]” in Hebrew—referring to a dark abyss, which was—sure enough—associated with primordial waters and a serpent. (Also note: the Babylonians believed in An-Zu / Imdugud: a giant, fire-breathing, lion-headed eagle.) The Greek term, “therion” is often understood more as a BEAST; as it was a take-off on the mammalian nature of the four creatures that had been featured in chapter 7 of the Book of Daniel: a winged lion (representing the Babylonians), a bear (representing the Persians / Medians), a winged panther with four heads (representing the four Hellenic kingdoms: Seleucid, Ptolemaic, Thracian / Anatolian, and Macedonian), and the most horrifying of all: a ten-horned predator with preternatural claws and teeth (representing the Romans). Like the more serpentine “Tiamat”, they all emerge from the sea. Such cartoonish chimeras were intended to be menacing. Were they actual monsters? No. They symbolized various worldly nemeses. Note that elaborations on the Book of Daniel were not uncommon—as with, say, “Bel and the Dragon”.}

{** SEVEN seems to play the most significant role. There were seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. The Lion of Judah is—oddly—depicted as a seven-horned lamb with seven eyes. And there were messages for churches at seven key cities: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyateira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. (Strangely absent from the list were Hierapolis, Antioch, Damascus, and Alexandria.) Reading too much into this or that number sets oneself up for endless eisegesis. One’s time would be just as well spent reading tea leaves.}