

Spring Meeting 2009

On the Voting Results for The Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins

Stephen J. Patterson, Chair

On March 20–21 the Jesus Seminar on Christian Origins met in Santa Rosa to continue exploring the origins of Christianity in Syria. Scholars of the New Testament are generally not well-versed in the history of this region, despite the fact that all four of the canonical gospels may well have been written there, and the earliest accounts of early Christian community life derive from events that transpired in its largest city, Antioch. Most of us are more than a little fuzzy on the details of early Christian history in Syria once we move beyond the first century. Syria is perhaps the best illustration of how our traditional focus on texts has led us to overlook important aspects of *place* in the formation of early Christianity.

To help us better understand the history of Christianity in Syria the Seminar invited one of the subject matter's real authorities, Susan Ashbrook Harvey, the Willard Prescott and Annie McClelland Smith Professor of Religious Studies at Brown University. Harvey offered the Fellows a sweeping tour of Syrian Christianity, from its beginnings in early centers like Antioch, to its flowering in great diversity in the fourth and later centuries. There are strong themes that run through the long arc of this development, especially the idea of bodily health and wholeness as a correlate of salvation. Early Syriac Christianity is embodied Christianity: healing of the soul is related to the healing of the body, and this is understood as being healed of bodily mortality. Later Syrian Christians would look to the wandering mendicant, who heals the body and cares for the poor, as the apostolic ideal. Syria, where so much began, remains to most historians of Christian origins a mysterious and unexplored place.

Ballot 2 House Church & Domus Ecclesiae L. Michael White

Q1 The Dura-Europos Christian building (or Domus Ecclesiae) reflects an intermediate stage of architectural and liturgical formalization consistent with the 3rd century.

Fellows	0.97 Red	91% R	09% P	00% G	00% B
Associates	0.98 Red	95%	05%	00%	00%

Q2 The Dura evidence seems to reflect one stream of Greek-speaking Syrian Christianity with possible Anatolian-Antiochene connections in the tradition of Tatian.

Fellows	0.86 Red	59% R	41% P	00% G	00% B
Associates	0.83 Red	71%	10%	14%	05%

Q3 The Dura evidence shows no direct connection to the Q-Matthew-Didache trajectory, nor to the Q-Thomas trajectory.

Fellows	0.67 Pink	19% R	62% P	19% G	00% B
Associates	0.73 Pink	40%	45%	10%	05%

Explanation of voting

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

One of the texts of chief importance in understanding the emergence of Christianity in Syria is the *Didache*, or the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*. Clayton Jefford, of St. Meinrad School of Theology, who has written extensively on the *Didache*, offered the Seminar a paper working through most of the basic issues associated with this text in Syria. Is it indeed a Syrian text? (Yes, probably from Antioch). Is it dependent on Matthew? (No, but it is closely related to Matthew). Does it contain old materials? (Yes, some of its teachings are among the oldest materials we possess.) As we go forward the *Didache* will be one of our most valuable sources for describing the origins of Christianity in Syria.

Syria also is the home of the oldest extant Christian church, a “house church,” or *domus ecclesiae*. The *domus ecclesiae*, according to L. Michael White, the Ronald Nelson Smith Professor in Classics and Christian Origins at the University of Texas, occupies an intermediate stage between the small gatherings in private homes that seems to have characterized earliest Christian community life, and later, more formal buildings for public worship. The *domus ecclesiae* was a house whose interior was remodeled to serve as a place of worship. In 1931 such a house

Ballot 3
The Didache in Syria
Clayton Jefford

- Q1 The Didache arose in a series of adaptations that reflect parallel stages in the development of Matthew.
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|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fellows | 0.59 Pink | 00% R | 81% P | 15% G | 04% B |
| Associates | 0.65 Pink | 16% | 63% | 21% | 00% |
- Q2 The earliest stage of the Didache is commensurate with the earliest stage of Matthew, perhaps in the late 70s or early 80s.
- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fellows | 0.58 Pink | 08% R | 65% P | 19% G | 08% B |
| Associates | 0.74 Pink | 32% | 58% | 11% | 00% |
- Q3 The final date of the Didache is sometime in the late first century, shortly after the completion of Matthew but early enough that the authority of apostles, prophets, and teachers was still recognized.
- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fellows | 0.69 Pink | 22% R | 67% P | 07% G | 04% B |
| Associates | 0.75 Red | 37% | 53% | 11% | 00% |
- Q4 The oldest materials preserved in the Didache represent some of the most ancient of early Christianity's cherished teachings.
- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fellows | 0.68 Pink | 22% R | 59% P | 19% G | 00% B |
| Associates | 0.74 Pink | 26% | 68% | 05% | 00% |
- Q5 The core teachings of the Didache reflect the essential M materials of a community from which the compilers of Matthew also drew.
- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fellows | 0.53 Pink | 04% R | 59% P | 30% G | 07% B |
| Associates | 0.67 Pink | 16% | 68% | 16% | 00% |
- Q6 The core liturgical teachings of the Didache reflect the essential M traditions of a community that the compilers of Matthew rejected in favor of Markan traditions.
- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fellows | 0.46 Gray | 00% R | 48% P | 41% G | 11% B |
| Associates | 0.63 Pink | 18% | 53% | 29% | 00% |
- Q7 Both the texts of Matthew and the Didache arose in or around the environs of Antioch in Syria.
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|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fellows | 0.48 Gray | 07% R | 37% P | 48% G | 07% B |
| Associates | 0.63 Pink | 25% | 38% | 38% | 00% |

church was discovered in the ruins of Dura Europus, in eastern Syria on the banks of the Euphrates River. This remarkable find is unique in many ways. First it is datable. Since the city of Dura was destroyed by the Sassanians in 256 CE, we know that this church must have been built in the first half of the third century, at the latest. Second, because of the destruction of the city, no other subsequent buildings—say, a larger church or later mosque—were built on top of this structure to replace it. Third, the church was actually buried in a fortification wall prior to the destruction of Dura, so that the church itself was not destroyed, but left remarkably intact. Michael White has studied the Dura house church extensively and introduced all of this to the Seminar.

Ballot 4
The Sacred Food of Didache 9–10
John Riggs

- Q1 The historical origin of the Last Supper gospel narratives lie in Jesus' table sharing, not in a specific Passover meal.
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|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fellows | 0.71 Pink | 54% R | 15% P | 19% G | 12% B |
| Associates | 0.72 Pink | 50% | 25% | 15% | 10% |
- Q2 The historical Jesus' table sharing was part of a wide-ranging meal tradition already culturally established.
- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fellows | 0.76 Red | 54% R | 27% P | 12% G | 08% B |
| Associates | 0.87 Red | 65% | 30% | 05% | 00% |
- Q3 The 1 Corinthians death motif of a last supper by Jesus comes from the noble death tradition, probably learned by Paul in Antioch.
- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fellows | 0.65 Pink | 19% R | 62% P | 15% G | 04% B |
| Associates | 0.68 Pink | 30% | 50% | 15% | 05% |
- Q4 The shift from table sharing to eucharistic divine food can be seen in the prayers of Didache 9 and 10, which lack the influence of the noble death tradition.
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|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fellows | 0.64 Pink | 20% R | 56% P | 20% G | 04% B |
| Associates | 0.74 Pink | 32% | 58% | 11% | 00% |
- Q5 The Didache shows a connection between the emergent emphasis on eucharistic divine food and fixed ecclesial offices so that Christian clergy controlled the means of life in a way analogous to patronage in the wider social context.
- | | | | | | |
|-------------------|-----------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Fellows | 0.67 Pink | 28% R | 52% P | 12% G | 08% B |
| Associates | 0.72 Pink | 39% | 39% | 22% | 00% |

What did early Christians do when they gathered together in these relatively intimate settings? They ate together. Gathering for a meal, or banquet, was the most important form of social integration, formation, and experimentation in the ancient world. Three papers dealt with this defining activity of nascent Christianity. Dennis Smith and Hal Taussig both presented material from their recent monographs on early Christian meals, and John Riggs presented his research on the meal prayers found in chapters 9–10 of the *Didache*. Among the papers, all seemed to agree on one very important premise: that the followers of Jesus did not gather for meals because Jesus instituted such a practice at a "Last Supper," a Passover meal just prior to his death. They did so because table-sharing was the culturally established means by which such associations typically took shape. In other words, according to Smith, early Christians gathered for meals because that is what people did in the Greco-Roman world. Moreover, Smith argued, and the Seminar agreed, that early Christian meals generally conformed to standard practice and etiquette for such events in the Greco-Roman world. But that is not to say that the Jesus-followers did not create and innovate. Hal Taussig's new work recounts how

communal table sharing became the occasion for Jesus followers to experiment with new kinds of social commitments, to form a new identity, to develop songs and stories to reflect on how they came to be, and why, and to screw up their courage to resist the imperial surround of force in which they were living. Taussig's work received broad endorsement from the Seminar. Riggs' paper traced how the common meals of the Jesus movement gradually began to assume formal and ritualized elements, eventually becoming the symbolic sacred occasion of the Eucharist. He finds clues to this development in the meal prayers of the *Didache*. Here one can see for the first time the table being fenced off from common space, and the food—the bread and the wine—becoming in the imagination of the participants a kind of “divine food,” which must be dispensed by those in authority, bishops.

Finally, in a special session the Seminar took up the question of the much-disputed and controversial Secret Gospel of Mark. Since it was introduced to the scholarly world by Morton Smith in 1973, scholars have debated whether the newly-discovered fragments of an esoteric version of the Gospel of Mark thought to have been used in Alexandria in the second century are indeed authentic. The fragments are quoted in a then unknown letter of Clement of Alexandria—this is what Smith actually



NEW DVD from Spring 2009 meeting

Stephen J. Patterson Re-Locating Jesus

The Gospel of Thomas tells few stories about Jesus, makes little of his death and resurrection, and perhaps most significantly, does not speak of Jesus or his followers as having “faith.” Why is this? The answer may lie in the difference “place” or “context” makes in the way the early Christian message was formulated. In an attempt to understand why Thomas is what it is, and is not what it is not, Patterson puts it in its place—Edessa, east of the Euphrates. He examines how Christianity came to focus on the death and resurrection of Jesus, and explains how, under different circumstances, the followers of Jesus might have focused instead on the words of Jesus.

90 minutes, retail price: \$20

Members got a 20% discount.

See order form at the back of this issue.



POLEBRIDGE PRESS

Ballot 7 Meals & Early Christian Identities Hal Taussig

Q1 The festive meals of first- and second-century Jesus or Christ groups were a primary occasion for social experimentation.

Fellows 0.63 Pink 10% R 76% P 10% G 05% B
Associates 0.67 Pink 12% 76% 12% 00%

Q2 The festive meals of first- and second-century Jesus or Christ groups were a primary occasion for the performative negotiation of proto-Christian identities.

Fellows 0.86 Red 62% R 33% P 05% G 00% B
Associates 0.92 Red 88% 00% 12% 00%

Q3 The festive meals of first- and second-century Jesus or Christ groups were a primary occasion for symbolic resistance to Roman domination.

Fellows 0.57 Pink 00% R 76% P 19% G 05% B
Associates 0.63 Pink 12% 71% 12% 06%

Q4 The festive meals of first- and second-century Jesus or Christ groups were a primary occasion for the composition of stories and songs which eventually made their way into the New Testament or other written collections.

Fellows 0.65 Pink 48% R 24% P 05% G 24% B
Associates 0.86 Red 71% 18% 12% 00%

Q5 The festive meals of first- and second-century Jesus or Christ groups were a primary occasion for the performance of stories and songs which eventually made their way into the New Testament or other written collections.

Fellows 0.78 Red 57% R 29% P 05% G 10% B
Associates 0.88 Red 71% 24% 06% 00%

discovered—that had been copied onto extra leaves of a seventeenth-century edition of the letters of Ignatius. The question is, did Smith really discover this new manuscript, or did he or someone else forge it? The controversy was recently fanned to life again by a new book by Stephen Carlson, a lawyer, entitled: *Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith's Invention of Secret Mark* (Waco: Baylor, 2005). The new evidence Carlson brings to the table is an analysis of the handwriting in the manuscript itself, arguing that it betrays the marks of a forger. The matter was explored for the Seminar by Charles Hedrick, Marvin Meyer (both of whom regard the manuscript as authentic), and Dennis MacDonald (who regards it as a forgery). None of the panelists (all of them experts in ancient manuscripts) gave much credence to Carlson's argument. They simply did not trust Carlson's modern forensics on a pre-modern Greek hand. Hedrick, who has done his own investigation of the Smith case, has gathered impressive evidence from those most closely associated with Smith, and who consulted with him on specific problems in its interpretation. If Smith forged it, Hedrick argued, it was a hoax he per-

Ballot 8
The Greco-Roman Meal Tradition
Dennis Smith

Q1	The default historical context for early Christian social formation was the dining room in the house church.				
Fellows	0.79 Red	68% R	09% P	14% G	09% B
Associates	0.98 Red	94%	06%	00%	00%
Q2	The community meal of early Christians followed the model of the Greco-Roman banquet.				
Fellows	0.88 Red	73% R	18% P	09% G	00% B
Associates	0.96 Red	88%	13%	00%	00%
Q3	The worship of the community took place at the table during the symposium portion of the meal.				
Fellows	0.80 Red	64% R	18% P	14% G	05% B
Associates	0.96 Red	88%	13%	00%	00%
Q4	Early Christians gathered for meals because that is what groups did in the Greco-Roman world.				
Fellows	0.85 Red	68% R	23% P	05% G	05% B
Associates	1.00 Red	1.00	0.00%	00%	00%
Q5	Stories about meals of Jesus were generative of early Christian community meals.				
Fellows	0.45 Gray	14% R	32% P	32% G	23% B
Associates	0.27 Gray	06%	00%	63%	31%
Q6	Stories about meals of Jesus arose in the context of early Christian meal gatherings.				
Fellows	0.76 Red	59% R	14% P	23% G	05% B
Associates	0.88 Red	69%	25%	06%	00%
Q7	There was no trajectory of historical practice extending from the meal practice of the historical Jesus to the meal practice of the early church.				
Fellows	0.41 Gray	27% R	05% P	32% G	36% B
Associates	0.54 Pink	38%	19%	13%	31%
Q8	Early Christian groups adapted the Greco-Roman banquet in diverse ways.				
Fellows	0.94 Red	81% R	19% P	00% G	00% B
Associates	0.98 Red	94%	06%	00%	00%

**On the Voting Results for
the Acts Seminar**

Dennis E. Smith, Chair

The so-called Secret Gospel of Mark has come under criticism in recent years, accused of being a hoax perpetrated by Morton Smith, who in 1972 first proposed the existence of this ancient variation of Mark when he published a previously unknown fragment of a letter by Clement of Alexandria. Since Morton Smith died several years ago and can no longer defend his arguments, and since the original manuscript which he published in transcription is no longer available for scholarly study, the debate about the authenticity of Secret Mark has become particularly dicey.

Three papers were presented on this issue. Charles Hedrick (“Evaluating Morton Smith: Hoaxer Outed or Colleague Slandered?”) and Marvin Meyer (“Secret Mark: The Debate Goes On”) argued that Secret Mark was not a hoax by Morton Smith. Dennis MacDonald (“The Naked Truth about the Naked Youth: Why the Secret Gospel of Mark is a Modern Hoax”) proposed that it was a hoax by Morton Smith, but rather than arguing for that position in detail he made a case that canonical Mark can be understood as is, without the variation provided by Secret Mark.

Hedrick answered the arguments recently proposed by Stephen Carlson (*The Gospel Hoax: Morton Smith’s Invention of Secret Mark*, 2005). He noted that many of Carlson’s arguments are ad hominem in nature and so should be dismissed, since, whether or not Morton Smith was the misanthrope that Carlson and others take him to have been, that does not make him a dishonest scholar. As for the opportunity of Smith to create such an ancient manuscript, Hedrick points out the difficulty of doing so under the field conditions in which he was working. Furthermore, Hedrick argues, it is exceedingly difficult to develop the skill to forge an ancient document and those who knew and worked with Morton Smith testify that he did not have that skill.

Meyer takes up the argument from a different perspective, noting how scholars such as Helmut Koester and John

petrated over the course of a lifetime on some of his most respected and closest colleagues. MacDonald’s argument had to do mostly with an argument within the Secret Mark discussion itself, namely, the question of whether Secret Mark might have actually pre-dated our current canonical Mark. This he holds as unlikely, since the Secret Mark passages would seem to break up narrative patterns he sees as original to Mark—patterns that reflect Mark’s use of Homer. In the end, the Seminar agreed on the slimmest margin (.51, pink) with MacDonald that canonical Mark actually pre-dates Secret Mark. But on the question of authenticity, the Seminar rejected overwhelmingly the idea that Secret Mark is the product of a modern forgery. **4R**