

What I Have Written

An alternative view of the life of Jesus



DAVID YOUNG

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19 And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was,
JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS.

20 This title then read many of the Jews; for the place where Jesus was
crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek,
and Latin.

21 Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King
of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews.

22 Pilate answered, What I have written I have written.

(John 19, KJV)

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INTRODUCTION

The story of Jesus presented to us by mainstream Christianity is one that has been sterilized to the point that it now bears little resemblance to the events that actually took place. The reason for this could be that for more than one hundred years after the death of Jesus, the Gospels were an oral tradition.

Another reason for the sterilization of Christianity was a deliberate campaign to eliminate anything that did not conform to an “official” party line. To allow the possibility of the first alternative is being very generous; the overwhelming evidence is that anything that did not conform to a very narrow view of Christianity was eliminated from official dogma in the first four hundred years after the death of Jesus:

The official church, quite clearly, must have its official doctrine.

Among the competing theological factions, the battle for supremacy was long and bitter, though not particularly bloody. Power changed hands a number of times, but it was rare that a dissenter from the views currently prevailing earned more than anathema and banishment. And by about the end of this fourth century, the central struggle was over and the adherents of one specific theological system emerged as victor and established the doctrinal framework

of the Catholic and Universal Church in the basic form in which it is maintained today in the church of Rome, and which finds its reflection in the Thirty-Nine articles of the Church of England and in the Episcopal Church of America.

(Horton, 1975)

What I Have Written examines an aspect of the life of Jesus that is ignored by Christianity. Jesus was a very powerful political figure. When the political aspects of the life of Jesus are included in the story, the life of Jesus takes on a whole new meaning.

What is missed in most works on Christianity is that Jesus is often the excuse for the religion, not the reason. The one and only thing that happened to Jesus that gives the excuse for the existence of Christianity is that he was crucified and rose from the dead. Christianity is a purely physical religion. If Jesus did not rise from the dead in a physical body, then the whole Christian dogma collapses.

This point is the key to the early split between Gnostic and conventional Christianity. Gnostic Christianity accepted the spiritual resurrection of Jesus and accepted his spiritual teachings, and for this the Gnostic thought, and its later derivatives such as Cathar doctrines, were ruthlessly suppressed.

The majority of Cathars seem to have regarded him as a prophet no different from any other—a mortal being who, on behalf of the principle of love, died on the cross. There

was nothing supernatural, nothing divine about the Crucifixion – if indeed it was relevant at all, which most Cathars seemed to doubt.

In any case, all Cathars vehemently repudiated the significance of both the Crucifixion and the cross – perhaps because they felt these to be irrelevant or because Rome extolled them so fervently, or because the brutal circumstances of a prophet's death did not seem worthy of worship.

(Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln, 1983)

If the conventional form of Christianity is accepted, God is a vengeful entity who requires physical retribution for the sins of the human race. To achieve this retribution, God sent his only son to this planet in physical form so that we could sacrifice him and cleanse ourselves of our sins.

Did God require a pointless act of violence to satisfy his need for revenge? Did God require his son to be subjected to crucifixion because he “loved” us? This is not the God I know. The Cathars suffered the same fate as other “heretics” who have opposed the dogma of the Christian church.

In 1209 an army of some 30,000 knights and foot-soldiers from Northern Europe descended like a whirlwind on the Languedoc – the

mountainous north-eastern foothills of the Pyrenees in what is now southern France. In the ensuing war the whole territory was ravaged, crops were destroyed, towns and cities razed, a whole population was put to the sword. This extermination occurred on so vast a scale that it may well constitute the first case of “genocide” in modern European history. In the town of Beziers alone, for example, at least 15,000 men, women and children were slaughtered wholesale - many of them in the sanctuary of the church itself. When an officer inquired of the pope’s representative how he might distinguish heretics from true believer, the reply was, “Kill them all. God will recognise His own.”

(Baigent, Leigh and Lincoln, 1983)

One of the main Christian proponents of the war against the Cathars of southern France was a Spanish fanatic by the name of Dominic Guzman, who went on to form the monastic order of Dominicans in 1216. In 1233, the Dominicans created the infamous Holy Inquisition.

But, of course, Dominic Guzman is seen in a different light by the Catholic church.

This long quotation comes from Sister Mary Jean Dorcy’s book, *St. Dominic*.

Probably very few of those who witnessed the opening of the campaign against the Albigensians would have believed the award of deathless fame was to fall, not on the bishop, but to one who followed his train and was known only as Brother Dominic. However, as soon as the formal disputes with the heretics began, his power and value began to emerge. . . .

The masterly arguments and the charming eloquence of Dominic, which time after time silenced his adversaries, excited an equal hatred of him. They spoke of him as their most dangerous enemy, a strange charge to make against a young priest who had no ecclesiastic authority. . . .

There is little doubt that the Albigensian heresy, besides its corruption of faith and its frightful immorality, had a directly political character. It was mixed up with a spirit of revolution and sedition, which partially explains the bitterness of the civil wars which it occasioned. Like all revolutionary movements, it had its disorganizing effect on all social ties, so that the south of France was plunged by it into a state of civil anarchy. . . .

There is a sinister implication here, in this whole question, and much obscurity. Father Marchese implies that the young girls were “sold” into the custody of the heretics; certainly from the available records, many of them were very young when they began their indoctrination into error. Much too

young to have chosen for themselves. By an association of women skilled in weaving – for which this area was famous – the heretic leaders kept up communication between the houses of their belief. The whole thing was well organized, and so effective that one wonders if Dominic, looking sad-hearted upon this terrible leakage from the Church, did not see this very organization as a weapon with which he might fight. Catholics, right in their beliefs but lacking any organization, could not work against this efficient system. Very well, then; if system was needed, he would organize the Catholics.

(Sister Mary Jean Dorcy, O.P., 1959.)

So now we know that the Catholic church amassed an army and invaded a defenseless independent state, massacring virtually the whole population because, according to Sister Mary Jean Dorcy, those nasty Cathars were using a weavers association as a front for an underground seditious movement that existed only for the purpose of selling Catholic girls into slavery.

The 2000 year history of the Christian church has been dominated by the brutal suppression of Gnostic/Cathar thought. The chapters later in this book that lay out the teachings of Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount contain what I understand to be the essence of Gnostic/Cathar thinking. Whether or not the reader agrees with the interpretation given to the teachings of Jesus is in many ways immaterial. What is

important is that these are the teachings that the Christian church has spent so much time and brutal energy suppressing.

The dogma that produced the genocide of the Cathars and the Holy Inquisition has not changed. The only thing that has changed is that the Christian church no longer has the physical power to practice genocide.

What seems to have been missed in most discussions is that the differences between Christian thinking and Gnostic/Cathar thinking is not in its ideology, but in its way of thinking. A different thought process. A different way of using thinking to relate to the material and spiritual world. Christian thinking is solely external and material whilst Gnostic/Cathar thinking seeks to integrate the spiritual and physical worlds.

The genocide Christianity has practiced against the “heretics” has gone beyond the physical genocide of people into the genocide of a way of thinking. A way of thinking that in the case of the Cathars produced a social system that was many hundreds of years advanced of anything else that existed in the world at that time. A social system based on free will, democracy, and the acceptance of the right of each individual to determine for himself what he wanted from life. That social system came to an end in 1209.

What we have been left with, in the Western world, at least, is a society dominated by Christian thinking, even if many people no longer call themselves Christians. Christian thinking dominates our institutions, our politics, our economy and our lives, even if we do not recognise it as “Christian.”

The Christian way of thinking has been a disaster for the human race. It is a way

of thinking that has led to continuous wars, hate, greed, poverty and the domination of the physically strong over the physically weak. The reason for the disaster of Christian thinking is that Christianity is a legal system, not a religion. This is also true for the Jewish religion and Islam. These are the three “Abramic” religions and the Abramic legal system will be discussed later in this book.

Everything is now changed, except the way we think, and if this is not soon altered we will continue to drift toward unparalleled catastrophe. We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive.

(Albert Einstein, cited Chrisci, 1986)

I agree with Einstein, except that my understanding is that this “substantially new manner of thinking” has always been there but has been actively suppressed by Christianity.

The pity is that from what can be pieced together from the teachings of Jesus, he was a teacher of great stature, independent of any religion. In fact, the teachings of Jesus do not seem to be religious in nature. They are rather very practical teachings for a way of life that works. That way of life can be summed up as personal responsibility and free will. Both those concepts are an embarrassment to the Christian church because they represent Gnostic/Cathar thinking, not Christian thinking.

The image of Jesus, without political and social context, and subject only to church dogma, becomes a sanitized, holier-than-thou figure that is seen in today's world as a "savior" by believers or as a total wimp by non-believers. Neither is true when the events of the life of Jesus are seen in the context of the world that he lived in.

The "savior" was exactly the image that the early leaders of Christianity needed to assume complete control of the Christian church; they were the only ones who understood the "mystery" of the resurrection, and so if anyone wanted salvation they had to do it through them. The early Christian church set itself up as God's representative on earth, and set up a franchise in much the same way KFC has. Colonel Sanders had his eleven secret herbs and spices; the Christian church had the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. What this had to do with Jesus is hard to tell. Amongst all the "marketing" and "power brokering," the teachings of Jesus have been either totally lost or distorted beyond all recognition.

The teachings of the Christian church are contained in the epistles. The first three Gospels, the synoptic Gospels, are not part of the teachings of the church, and are an add-on feature that seems to have come about by oral teachings that were written down sometime around the end of the first and in the second century.

Matthew is the exception to this oral tradition. Matthew was not written in Greek from an oral tradition, but translated from Hebrew into Greek. Although Matthew was the last Gospel to appear in Greek, it may have been the first Gospel written. It may even be

a contemporary account of the life of Jesus.

We end up with a curious situation where three of the four Gospels have nothing to do with the teachings of Christianity and only the Gospel of Luke appears to be epistleistic in nature. The only real account of the teachings of Jesus is the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, which is not part of Christian dogma.

The Christian church is built on the epistleistic writings of its founder (Paul), with the life of Jesus relegated to a non-essential adjunct. Take away the Gospels and nothing changes in Christian teachings. Take away the life of Jesus from Christianity and we are still left with is the essence of Christianity. A very strange situation. Christians are taught about the life of Jesus, sermons are based on the life of Jesus, and the teachings of Jesus (Christian version) are taught as if they are the basis of Christianity, when in reality Jesus is the excuse for the Christian church to exist, rather than the reason. The “hidden agenda” behind Christianity, and the reason for its existence, are the epistles.

The reason why Jesus the man is secondary to the epistles is the special place the Old Testament has in the Christian Bible. The Old Testament is the section of the Bible that gives Christianity its authority. The Christian stance is that the Old Testament is the prophetic justification for the coming of a Messiah. It is taken literally that there was to be a Son of God sent to earth to be crucified as the culmination of God’s plan for humanity. Without the justification of the Old Testament, there cannot be Christianity. The only thing that happened to Jesus that makes him the saviour in Christian terms is that he was crucified. The epistles are built solely on the crucifixion, justified by a narrow

and selective literal reading of the Old Testament.

However this may be, his followers were united in the belief that God's promises had been uniquely and decisively fulfilled in him. Hence they sought to interpret his life of obscurity and rejection, and especially the scandal of a crucified Messiah, as well as the Lordship which they had come to recognise through the Resurrection, by reference to the Old Testament. The Church thus depended for its understanding of itself, and of the Gospel on which it was founded, upon its interpretation of the Scriptures as a book about Christ. In that book it found the key to its understanding of the historical traditions about his deeds and his words, so that the subject of the apostolic preaching was Jesus as seen in the light of Scripture, and it was Jesus as interpreted by Scripture who provided the theme of the Gospels.

(The Cambridge History of the Bible, Vol 2)

If Jesus had not been crucified there would be no basis for Christianity. There have been many suggestions that Jesus was not crucified, or was rescued before he died. The Christian church has to deny totally any possibility that Jesus did not die on the cross because without the crucifixion, Christianity has nothing. All this adds up to the teachings of Jesus being secondary to the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies.

This is not really surprising, because Paul was a devout Jew and a Pharisee, and any understanding Paul had came from a strong Jewish tradition.

The ultimate irony of Christianity is that Jesus was in total opposition to the teachings of the Pharisees. After Jesus was crucified, Paul the Pharisee was sent to stamp out the remaining followers of Jesus, but instead, took over the fledgling Christian movement and converted it into exactly what Jesus had opposed. Christianity now uses the name of Jesus to justify exactly what Jesus taught against.

Throughout the Gospels there is continual reference to Jesus saying that he had come to fulfill the Scriptures. Whether or not Jesus actually said he came to fulfill the Scriptures cannot be determined. What is important, though, is that, no matter what, the Christian church has to have these references in the Gospels to support the epistles on which the church is founded.

This could easily account for the teachings of other forms of Christianity, such as Gnostic Christianity, being so firmly opposed by orthodox Christianity. If the spiritual nature of the resurrection as proposed by the Gnostics is accepted, rather than the orthodox view that the resurrection was physical, the whole foundation of orthodox Christianity collapses. The foundation of orthodox Christianity is so narrow and brittle that any supposed “heretics” have to be opposed with the utmost vigor. If they are not, Christianity collapses.

The term “Gnostic Christianity” follows the Hellenic tradition that truth comes from within. The Greek word *gnosis* means literally “the truth that comes from within.” It

is this idea of truth from within that orthodox Christianity calls heresy.

Little survives of Gnostic Christianity. However, enough has come to light in this century to gain some idea of how it differed from orthodox Christianity. It is clear that the Gnostics accepted that Jesus could have returned in spirit. That sentence may appear to be very harmless, but to orthodox Christianity, it is death. That is how fragile Christianity is in its present form. If Jesus did not return in the flesh, Christianity does not exist.

If Christianity did not exist, the teachings of Jesus would still be with us. The real death of Jesus is that Christianity has distorted and destroyed his teachings and deprived us of what could have been a mountain of wisdom to help us understand our existence.

The only part of the Bible that in any way states what the teachings of Jesus were is the Sermon on the Mount, and that event is only reported in the Gospel of Matthew. As written in the Authorised Bible, or the Catholic Bible, the teachings of Jesus appear to have little or no connection with the Christian church.

To make matters worse, both the Authorised and Catholic Bibles have several errors in the translation of the Sermon on the Mount when compared with the Greek text of Matthew from which it was translated, and several insertions that did not exist in the original text. All this adds up to the teachings of the Christian church in its present form having no relation to either the life or teachings of Jesus.

An example, and perhaps the essence, of the way in which the teachings of Jesus have been “doctored” by Christianity for its own ends is the last two verses of the Sermon

on the Mount.

The Christian version reads:

28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

(Matthew 7, KJV)

The word “one” has been inserted by Christian sources. Without this insertion a correct translation would be;

28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine:

29 For he taught them as having authority, and not as the scribes.

Jesus did not teach as “one having authority,” but “them” (the people) as having authority. This one point alone destroys any claim that the church makes for acting in the name of Jesus. Jesus taught personal authority and responsibility, not blind obedience.

The crux of the matter is that Christianity is not a religion, it is a legal system. It

is a legal system inherited from the Pharisees via Paul. The premise of the Christian legal system is that the Christian church is the legal representative of God on earth, and that it cannot do any wrong because everything that it does is God's will.

What I Have Written seeks to explore what really happened in the context of political history, and looks at the teachings of Jesus in that context.

Three of the Gospels were an oral tradition, and it seems likely that there was at least one hundred years between the death of Jesus and these Gospels being committed to writing. The exception is Matthew, which may be a contemporary account of the life of Jesus. Apart from being the only Gospel to contain the teachings of Jesus, Matthew also seems to fit the political events of the times.

Fortunately, the political history of the times survives, and when this is transposed onto the Gospel according to Matthew, the life of Jesus makes sense. I believe also that because Matthew was originally written in Hebrew, there is strong possibility that it is a contemporary account that decreases the possibility of Christian tampering.

The way that I have approached this book is to see what can be salvaged from what we know of Jesus using the most reliable source, which I think is Matthew, and to see whether this fits in with the total shambles that was the political situation existing at the time. The result is very different from the Christian version of Jesus. It may or may not be correct in every detail, but at least it cannot be more incorrect than the Christian version.

We know that Christianity, as it remains, represents in most part the narrow,

Jewish-based dogma of one man, Paul. *What I Have Written* takes a particular stand on the interpretation of the life of Jesus that is totally opposed to the dogma of Paul. It is an alternative view.

This is not an anti-Christian book. I do not want to see the end of Christianity; I want to see the end of orthodox Christianity, and look at what Christianity could be in its unadulterated form, so that Christianity can begin. This is in itself nothing new. Martin Luther and the Reformation were about the same thing: Martin Luther proposed doing away with existing dogma and returning to the teachings of Jesus.

Martin Luther has not been the only person in our history to propose a return to the teachings of Jesus. It has been a sort of “underground” movement that has somehow survived the concerted attempts of Christianity to suppress it. Perhaps now, with the physical power of Christianity diminished, it can come out into the open.

For Christianity to begin, the idea that God needs lawyers here on earth has to be dispensed with. The Christian church has placed God “out there,” with itself as the intermediary between God and the human race. This is a fallacy. The teachings of Jesus place the relationship between God (however we conceptualise God) and each of us on a one-to-one basis.

This means that the same entity may appear to be different to each of us. No relationship between two people is ever the same as another relationship, so why should we all have the same relationship with God defined by narrow religious dogma?

Placing God “out there” is the biggest complaint that I have with Christianity. This eliminates the inner understanding of each of us, and of our society. Christianity, by placing God “out there,” has robbed Western Society of its soul.

The Christian myth of Jesus begins with the assertion that Jesus was the son of a simple carpenter; this is not true. Joseph may have been a carpenter, although that may have been a choice of expediency, but he was also, in conjunction with Mary, the person who could produce an heir who was the legitimate contender to the throne of the House of David.

The sign “King of the Jews” on the cross of Jesus was literally true. The lineage of Joseph went back to King David, and the lineage of Mary went back to the brother of Moses. It is possible that Jesus was the result of a deliberate breeding program, and that his birth was contrived to coincide with the exact conditions that the Jewish Testaments predicted for the coming of the Messiah.

At the time of the birth of Jesus, the Jewish people desperately needed a “king” who would lead them out of Herod’s rule. Jesus was supposed to be that king. From the moment of his birth, Jesus was a marked man. There was simply no way in which he could have led a quiet, inconspicuous life. Either he was marked to save the Jews from their untenable position, and become the greatest king they had ever had, or to die in ignominy. Jesus did neither. Instead he became the first Son of God, and even that statement needs to be understood outside of the context of modern Christianity.

The Jewish hierarchy disposed of Jesus when he became a political liability, and in doing so created a new sect of Judaism that was to become Christianity. Even the split between the Jewish and Christian religions is misrepresented by having the crucifixion of Jesus as the cause. The split between the Jewish and Christian religions occurred over a much more basic issue: circumcision. The Jewish stance was that gentiles would be allowed to join the Christian sect as part of the overall Jewish religion provided they agreed to be circumcised. Many gentiles were not happy with this and the Christian sect split from the Jewish religion.

Jesus the ordinary son of a simple carpenter? Never. Jesus was unique by virtue of his birthright. The understanding that Jesus was born into a unique position is the beginning of understanding true Christianity.

To understand Christianity it is necessary to understand the life of Jesus, and that cannot be understood outside of the social and political context. With an understanding of the life of Jesus comes the understanding that the events of the Gospels are more secular than religious; then the real value of the teachings of Jesus can come through.

Christianity insists that Jesus came to save the world: true in one sense, but false in another.

The act of Jesus dying on the cross did not automatically cleanse the human race of "sin." The teachings of Jesus show us how to save ourselves, and the way to save ourselves has very little resemblance to the teachings of Christianity

* * *

There is a repeating pattern in Jewish history. The Jews learnt to live according to the laws of God, and were given everything they could want, but they became greedy and debauched. Then they were reduced to slaves. Next they returned to the ways of their God, and were restored to prosperity. This happened over and over until God gave up on them. God giving up on the Jews is written in Malachi.

8 And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? Offer it now unto thy governor; will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person? saith the Lord of hosts.

9 And now, I pray you, beseech God that he will be gracious unto us: this hath been in your means: will he regard your person? saith the Lord of hosts.

10 Who are there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? Neither do you kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.

11 For the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense

shall be offered in my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts.

(Malachi 1, KJV)

Basically the Jews had their chance, and they blew it. Now it was time for the Gentiles to be given a chance.

The Jewish prophets end with Malachi.

Jesus was the person who transferred the love of God from the Jews to the Gentiles, as prophesied by Malachi, the last of the Jewish prophets. Jesus took the power of God away from the Pharisees and passed it on to the Christians.

In all fairness to the Jewish nation, the Christians have not fared any better than the Jews had before them; the Christians have proved to be every bit as greedy and debauched as the Jews ever were.

* * *

The Greek translation of the Gospels I have used in this book is by Alfred Marshall, and there are notes in the introduction that need to be reiterated here.

The Authorised Version of 1611 follows what is known as the

Received Text (Textus Receptus, or T.R.). But this is now generally recognised as unreliable; also, since it was compiled in 1550 by Stephens (or Stephanus) many further manuscripts have come to light.

The Greek text used in this book is that of the 21st edition of Eberhard Nestle's *Novum Testamentum Graece*, based on study and critical research of generations of scholars, except that the passage John 53, 8. 1-11 is not in that text but relegated to the foot of the page as a critical note. It is here retained in the text.

(Marshall, 1975)

The Bible is an unreliable document. I cannot claim that Marshall's translation of the New Testament is one hundred percent accurate, but because of its source, it stands a better chance of being the truth than the Authorised or Catholic Bibles.

Greek does not translate into English with exact meaning. No two languages will translate with exact meaning. In my use of Marshall's *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, I accept there are many "grey" areas that have to be read with the "feeling" of what was meant. This is true for all translations of one language into another.

Marshall's notes cannot be quoted here in full, and it is recommended that anyone interested in the full academic details of the text or the method of translation refer to

Marshall.

I find the wording of non-sexist language cumbersome. Throughout this book, I have used the words “their” or “they” to denote a person of either sex instead of the tiresome “he or she” or changing gender on alternate chapters.

1 HEROD AND THE JEWS

King Herod, who is often referred to as Herod the Great, is the character who co-stars in the story of Jesus. Although Herod died about three years after the birth of Jesus, it was Herod who set up the conditions that permeate throughout the life of Jesus. The King Herod referred to in Jesus' later years is not the same Herod who ruled at the time of the birth of Jesus.

The forty-year relationship before the birth of Jesus between Herod the Great and the Jews placed Jesus in a unique position. Jesus was the legitimate king of the Jews. If Jesus had "claimed" his legitimate position as the heir to the throne of David, at the very least, the Jewish people could have forced Rome into accepting Jesus as the rightful king instead of Herod. Herod had been appointed by Rome as king.

Even if the Jewish people were not able to overthrow the Roman occupiers of their country, they could have forced Rome into the politically expedient course of dumping Herod in favour of Jesus. The existence of Jesus spelt political, if not physical, death for Herod. This is the factor that the story of Jesus in the Gospels does not go into. It is the factor that changes the whole complexion of the Gospels. If the Jews could produce their own legitimate king, then Herod the Great was finished.

The suffering of the Jewish people under Herod can only be compared with the Holocaust. If Jesus was Christ, Herod was the anti-Christ. If Jesus was the Son of God, Herod was the personification of evil. Flavius Josephus wrote the following about Herod a few years after Herod died.

He was no king, but the most cruel tyrant who ever ascended to the throne. He murdered a vast number of people and the lot of those he left alive was so miserable that the dead might count themselves fortunate. He not only tortured his subjects singularly but ill treated whole communities. In order to beautify foreign cities he robbed his own, and made gifts to foreign nations that were paid for with Jewish blood. The result was that instead of their former prosperity and time honoured customs the people fell victim to utter poverty and demoralisation. Within a few years the Jews suffered more misery through Herod than their forefathers had done in the long period since they left Babylon and returned under Xerxes.

(cited Keller, 1975)

It is understandable that Jews wanted to be free of Herod, and in many ways their continued existence depended on being free of him. On the other side, Herod's very existence as king depended on keeping the Jews fragmented, demoralised and leaderless.

The Jews needed a leader, someone with an unimpeachable claim to the throne of David. Someone Rome could not ignore. The perfect opportunity to have such a leader came in the person of Jesus.

Jesus was “manufactured” to suit the needs of the Jewish people, the result of scheming to produce the very person, under the exact conditions predicted in the Jewish Testament.

According to Jewish prophecies, the Messiah would appear when there was a conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in the constellation of Pisces. This unusual astrological event occurred three times in the year 7 BC. This was a perfect time for the Jewish community to acquire a new king.

Since Herod the Great died in 4 BC, and since there were several errors in the calculations made in 533 AD by Dionysius Exiguus that were meant to establish the birth year of Jesus, it seems likely that Jesus was born in 7 BC. The idea that the conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter in the year 7 BC was the “star” referred to in Matthew’s account of the birth of Jesus is supported by the nature of the conjunctions. The conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter were “heliacal” risings in Pisces; that is, the first visible sightings were at daybreak. “We have seen his star in the East” (Matthew 2, KJV) has been mistranslated from the original Greek.

“We have seen his star in the East” (Matt.2²), said the Wise Men,
according to the A.V. The translation is however incorrect, for the words “in

the east” are in the original “En te anatole” - the Greek singular - but that elsewhere “the east” is represented by “anatolai” - the Greek plural. The singular form “anatole” has, it is maintained, quite a special astronomical significance, in that it implies the observation of the early rising of the star, the so called heliacal rising. The translators of the Authorised Version could not have known this.

When “en te anatole” is translated properly Matth.2² reads as follows:

“We have seen his star appear in the first rays of dawn.” That would have corresponded exactly with the astronomical facts.

(Keller, 1975)

According to Christian dogma, the three Wise Men “followed” the star to Bethlehem. This was not necessary. The location of the birth of the Messiah is given in the Old Testament. “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, and yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel” (Micah 52 KJV). The Wise Men did not have to follow a star; the location of the birth place of Jesus had been given more than 700 years before. Matthew 25 reads “And they said unto him, in Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet.” Confirmation that there was no need to follow a star to find the birthplace of Jesus.

There is nothing mystical about the star, the place of the birth of Jesus or any

other aspect of the nativity. Any competent, educated Jewish scholar could have put together the birth of the “Messiah.” The Jews had the astrological conditions, the place of birth, and above all, the motivation. The motivation was to rid themselves of Herod. All that the Jews needed to complete their “conspiracy” against Herod was someone with a family tree that was a direct line to King David, and Joseph was that person. The family tree of Joseph is given in Matthew 1, and shows that Joseph was a direct descendant of King David.

There was even an “opening act” in the person of John the Baptist, a person to go slightly ahead of Jesus to prepare the way. Someone to preach the coming of the king of the Jews, and set up the political scene. A little bit of stage managing and the Jews could have a Messiah who also happened to be the rightful claimant to the throne of David. All so simple that the possibility would not have escaped learned Jewish scholars and, once the possibility had been seen, almost irresistible in its simplicity and elegance.

Jesus was probably born as a result of a conspiracy by the Pharisees to produce a puppet “king” for their own political ends. This argument is strengthened by the extraordinary lengths that the Pharisees went through to get rid of Jesus once the puppet had become his own man. Jesus must have been seen by the Pharisees as extremely dangerous politically for them to have expended so much energy on vilifying him from the time of the temptation onwards. It was not the Romans who wanted to get rid of Jesus, it was the Pharisees. Once Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount he was completely harmless to the Romans, and may have even been seen as a helpful mediating force. The

Romans were free of any blame for the death of Jesus.

The Pharisees were the ones who opposed Jesus so vehemently and elevated Jesus to the position of Messiah by their opposition. Without the opposition of the Pharisees, Jesus would have been a wandering prophet who worked a few miracles, in keeping with a long established Jewish tradition. Not really much to get excited about. That is, if he had not been deliberately bred as a Messiah and legitimate king of the Jews by the Pharisees.

* * *

The father of John the Baptist was Zacharias, a high priest. Zacharias was married to Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's cousin was Mary. Zacharias was descended from King David through a female link to Abia, grandson of David. Elizabeth and Mary were descendants of Aaron, the brother of Moses. Joseph was a direct descendant of David.

Jesus was "well connected" with the upper echelons of Jewish "aristocracy," and with Joseph as his father, his claim to the throne of David would have been difficult to dispute. Jesus had exactly the breeding needed for the Jews to come up with a king to replace Herod.

John the Baptist almost fits the requirements to be king of the Jews, but did not quite make it because of that one female link in his ancestry. But for that, we could have had John the Christ instead of Jesus Christ.

There is in Jewish history the prediction that the Messiah would be preceded by

the Prophet Elijah. The position of John in relation to Jesus is that of Elijah, the one that goes before, and was an essential part of making Jesus, legitimate king of the Jews, into Jesus the Messiah.

5 Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord:

(Malachi 4, KJV)

John is a much more important figure in the story of Jesus than the Christian church gives him credit for. There is a duality about the Messiah, with John as the second part of the duality. Just how important John was will be seen later.

Was there a conspiracy? After all this time it would be difficult to say with absolute certainty, but if it were not a conspiracy to breed a “king of the Jews,” then it was at least a very fortuitous coming together of people and events. The conspiracy idea is given weight by the actions of Zacharias immediately after the birth of John the Baptist. It would have been difficult to get a people as demoralised as the Jews under Herod to rise up spontaneously against Herod by simply announcing that there was such a king. The people had to be prepared, their morale lifted. The first part of this morale lifting exercise was undertaken by Zacharias, as described in the first chapter of Luke.

63 And he asked for a writing table and wrote, saying, His name is John. And they marveled all.

64 And his mouth was opened immediately, and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God.

65 And fear came on all that dwelt around them: and all those sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hills of Judaea.

66 And all they that heard them laid them up in their hearts saying, What manner of child shall this be! And the hand of the Lord was with him.

67 And his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel: for he had visited and redeemed his people,

69 And hath raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David;

70 As he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began:

71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

72 To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant;

73 The oath which he swore to our father Abraham,

74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand
of our enemies might serve him without fear,

75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the highest; for thou
shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his way;

(Luke 1, KJV)

Here we have Zacharias, who has not spoken a word since John had been conceived, suddenly breaking into prophesy and proclaiming that his son would be the one to prepare the way for the Lord to follow. We have a close family with two cousins pregnant at the same time. One cousin (Elizabeth) pregnant with the “almost king” and the other pregnant with the “king.” At the birth of the “almost king,” the father “prophesies” that the “almost king” will be the one who prepares the way for the king. How much effort would there be in that prophecy? Not much, but it was an extremely courageous prophesy to make in the context of the political climate of that time. A prophesy that was certain to bring about his death.

Herod did not like the things that Zacharias was saying, and shortly afterwards, Zacharias was murdered. Later traditions say that Zacharias was murdered on the orders of Herod. Jesus laid the blame on the Pharisees. Matthew 23³⁵ gives Jesus speaking to the

Pharisees and saying, “So comes on you all righteous blood being shed on the earth from the blood of Abel the righteous until the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye murdered between the shrine and the altar.” (Translated Marshall, 1982). The choice of “Abel the righteous” by Jesus is typical of Jesus, relating back to the family tree of Zacharias to Abel, grandson of David.

The probability is that Zacharias was murdered by the Pharisees acting on the orders of Herod, either by Pharisees who knew nothing of the plan to bring to life the king of the Jews, or by the conspirators themselves. Zacharias would have known that the only outcome of his prophecy would be his death. Zacharias was very old at the time of his murder, and may well have accepted his death before his prophecy.

In the context of today’s world there is nothing about Zacharias’ “prophecy” that anyone would get excited about. Certainly there would be no need for “And fear came on all that dwelt around them: and all those sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hills of Judaea.” In the context of the Palestine in 7 BC, these were either the words of an extremely courageous man or someone totally insane. To say “That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies’ was treason. There would have been every reason for fearing the reaction of Herod by those who “dwelt around them.”

Herod actually showed some constraint in not taking the murder of Zacharias further. He was quite capable of wiping out everyone who had the slightest connection with Zacharias, if the mood had taken him. This could be the key to why Jesus later

accuses the Pharisees of murdering Zacharias. It could have been that by murdering Zacharias, the Pharisees were appeasing Herod by a show of “loyalty,” and in this way prevented wholesale bloodshed. The whole thing sounds barbaric, but that was the nature of the world that Jesus was born into.

In a more modern context, imagine Zacharias, in Germany in 1943, standing up in a very public place and announcing that the God of the Jews was about to destroy Hitler, and replace him with a Jewish nation. That is the magnitude of Zacharias’ actions, and the death of Zacharias had to follow.

The only real difference between Hitler and Herod was that Herod could not practice genocide against Jews in total, because most people in Palestine were Jews; there would have been nobody left. Herod certainly practiced genocide against Jewish traditions, beliefs and culture. Herod attempted to destroy the Jews by destroying everything that made them Jewish.

The position of the Romans helped the Jews in Palestine. As demonic as Herod’s actions were, he was held in check to some degree by his need not to upset his Roman masters. Herod pushed his genocide of the Jewish culture to the maximum possible without incurring the wrath of Rome. Essential to the understanding of a conspiracy is that Herod the Great was King of the Jews because Rome said Herod was King of the Jews. If Rome had withdrawn Herod’s mandate, he would have been powerless. If the Jews could have come up with a king that Rome saw as politically more expedient than Herod, Herod would have been dumped in favour of the new king. The first aim of the

conspirators would have been to rid themselves of Herod and replace him with a king of their own. To rid themselves of Rome and become an independent nation again may have been the long-term aim, but the first target was Herod.

Joseph and Mary marrying was an extremely dangerous act for both of them. From their heritage and upbringing both knew that a male child would be the heir to the throne of David, and were fully aware of the lengths Herod would go through to destroy any threat to his position. How dangerous was it for Joseph and Mary to marry?

In the thirty-six years hardly a day passed without someone being sentenced to death. Herod spared no one, neither his own family nor his closest friends, neither the priests nor least of all the people. On his list of victims stand the names of the two husbands of his sister Salome, his wife Miriamne and his two sons Alexander and Aristobulus. He had his brother-in-law drowned in the Jordan, and his mother-in-law Alexandra put out of the way. Two scholars who had torn down the golden Roman eagle from the gateway of the temple were burned alive. Hyrcanus the last of the Hasmoneans was killed. Noble families were exterminated root and branch. Many of the Pharisees were done away with. Five days before his death the old man had his son Antipater assassinated. And that is only a fraction of the crimes of this man who “ruled like a wild beast.”

(Keller, 1975)

Joseph was in a very dangerous position simply because he was descended from King David. Mary was in a dangerous position simply because she was descended from the brother of Moses. For Joseph and Mary to marry was akin to signing their own death warrants, if they had been caught, but it is likely that they were not given a choice.

Joseph and Mary marrying to complete a contrived breeding program is perfectly in keeping with the customs of the Jews in Palestine, and would have seemed a natural thing to do. If the object was to breed a king of the Jews, then Joseph and Mary would have had no say in the matter; they were there simply to breed.

The rabbi who advised the father to marry his son “while he still had his hand upon his neck” shows, by implication, the real state of affairs: in most cases it was the parents who married their children. No doubt it was said that marriages were decided in heaven, decided by God Himself forty days before the boy’s birth; but there is no doubt either that it was the parents who referred to this tradition, in order to justify their choice.

(Rops, 1962)

Arranged marriages were the rule, and it would be exceptional if the marriage of

Joseph and Mary were not so. Here, as in the Bible, forty days is a term that was used simply to denote a long time. Joseph would most likely have been told that his marriage to Mary had, in the old tradition, been arranged by God a long time before Joseph had been born.

The claim that the marriage of Joseph and Mary had been arranged long before by God would have been irresistible; it was to be exactly as written in the Scriptures. In saying that the marriage of Joseph and Mary was a conspiracy, I am not claiming anything extraordinary; in a sense, virtually every Jewish marriage in Palestine at that time was arranged, and in that sense a conspiracy.

The tradition that marriages were arranged by God long beforehand also makes it possible to claim that the birth of a child was the will of God. Jewish law at the time was extremely complicated, and it is uncertain just what the laws on marriage and legal status of Mary were at the time of the conception of Jesus, but it is possible to say that modern English words are not sufficient to explain her legal status.

In Jewish Law this was not the case at all. Two conditions were clearly distinguished: betrothal and marriage. Young people who had agreed with one another with a view to marriage were betrothed, but they would not be considered as truly married until the husband, according to the words of Deuteronomy, should have “taken her to himself.” The “taking possession,” the *hakhnashah*, was really the uniting of two beings for life; the word had

both meanings. Thus, in Saint Matthew the angel says to Joseph, “Do not be afraid to take thy wife Mary to thyself” - that is: “Let her, who has been your betrothed, become your spouse.”

But although these two conditions were in theory quite separate, in fact they merged into one another. The fact is that the Law recognised rights and obligations during the betrothal that were almost the same as those of marriage.

(Rops, 1962)

It is possible to put facts together, but the actual understanding of words is not possible without the understanding of the thinking behind the words. This is particularly true when we try to translate the writings from a culture that has changed over time. Even Jewish scholars, well versed in modern Judaism, have difficulty deciphering exactly what was meant by some of the terms and legal decrees of Palestinian Jews two thousand years ago.

It is likely that Mary was betrothed, but not legally married at the time of the conception of Jesus, and according to law still a virgin, even though Joseph and Mary were living as husband and wife. The question of the meaning of “virgin” in the context of the Bible is further complicated by the word being filtered through the medieval Western patriarchal tradition that all women between seven and seventy are whores. We,

Western society, have unfortunately inherited a tradition that dictates that the only way Mary could have been pure enough to be the mother of the Son of God was that she was a virgin at the time. This tradition is now working against us, because to accept the teachings of Jesus, the Christian church dictate that we must accept the pre-condition that Mary was a virgin, when it really is of no importance.

* * *

A really telling part of the whole thing about the virgin birth is that there was a major problem in it for the Christian church. If Mary had to be a virgin to be pure, then original sin could only have been transmitted by the male of the species. If Mary was pure until she lost her virginity, then all women are pure while they remain virgins.

This makes utter nonsense of the doctrine that all mankind inherits original sin from Adam and Eve at the moment of conception, and that Eve is the cause of all sin in this world. Jesus had to inherit sin from the flesh of Mary whether she was a virgin or not. Without the doctrine of original sin, Christianity self-destructs.

A virgin birth was legally possible, and maybe even common, according to Jewish law. The real problem for Christianity came when the Christian church elevated the virgin birth to the level where Mary had to have an immaculate conception, if she were to be the mother of Jesus.

The concept of the immaculate conception was not part of original Christianity; it

evolved over a period of several hundred years after the crucifixion of Jesus. Horton, quoting apocryphal texts, writes:

Of the immediate sequel to this happy meeting we know no more than “Joachim rested the first day in his house,” that Anne conceived and Joachim was readmitted to the temple; and that eventually a girl was to be born to them they called Mary. The coming of this child had been announced to each of the parents by divine messengers, and we know that this was the child who was to be the Virgin Mother of Jesus, the Mother of God. But as yet there is no suggestion that any special circumstances had to attend her begetting; which brings up a point in the story which is delicate to the extreme, for in later centuries the conception of Mary was required to have a far more subtle character: to be, in fact, the “Immaculate” conception.

(Horton, 1975)

And so Mary’s mother had to be pure if Mary was to be pure. “And once this point was accepted it was no great leap forward, and to eventually to establish, the theory that on this spot they had exchanged a chaste, and holy, and procreative kiss which had breathed into the mother’s womb the concept and substance of Mary her daughter; a kiss which precluded the need for any physical act of generation” (Horton). And if Mary’s

mother had to be a virgin, what about her grandmother? and her great grandmother? and so on.

If Mary was pure because she was a virgin, original sin self-destructs. Either way, the Christian church cannot win. This is a paradox that plagued the Christian church for eighteen hundred years.

When all else fails, use retrospective legislation, which is exactly what the Christian church did. On December 8, 1854, Pope Pius IX decreed, in bull *ineffabilis Deus*, that by a special act of grace, Mary had been made utterly sinless from the moment of her conception. I wonder if Pius IX was able to keep a straight face when he made that decree?

“He’s making it up as he goes along.”

(Life of Brian, Python, Monty Films)

It is worth looking closer at what this piece of retrospective legislation by “God’s lawyers” means. For Christianity to stand up, physical woman has to be the blame for all sin and suffering in this world. Without that, original sin self-destructs, and Christianity self-destructs.

This piece of legislation re-affirms the position of physical woman as the sole cause of sin and suffering in this world. It does so by making Mary the one and only

exception.

If a woman claims to be a Christian, then she is accepting this hideous piece of legislation that brought the immaculate conception into being, and in doing so a woman also accepts by default that she is the sole cause of all the sin and suffering in this world.

To me this is a ridiculous position to take.

Papal decrees have been very useful over the years for solving problems for the Church that cannot be solved by factual means.

* * *

If the Christian church is to be believed, it has a monopoly on virgin births. This is simply not so. Virgin births have been around since the beginning of recorded history in relation to deities and gods. Chinese legend claims that the greatest of all Taoist masters, Lao-tzu, was the result of a virgin birth. Lao-tzu lived, according to legend, in the time of the Shang dynasty (1766-1121 BC).

Among the villages was a young woman of nineteen who was known for her intelligence and wisdom. Once [sic] summer day she was resting under a tree that had borne unusually large red fruit that year. The day was hot, so the young woman ate a fruit to quench her thirst. The fruit she picked was bright and shiny and looked like no ordinary fruit. A few days later the

girl found herself to be pregnant. When the villagers consulted the oracles it was revealed to them that a great sage was to be born in the region.

(Wong, 1990)

There is an essential difference between the Taoist and Christian doctrine that overrides all other differences. Whilst the Taoists have their enlightened masters, these masters are not held to be in an unattainable position. All followers of the way of Tao can aspire to become masters themselves, and taoism (small t) is the earthly form of training to become a master. There is no separation between the human race and the Great Tao (capital T) that stops humans aspiring to becoming part of the Great Tao.

Christianity, however, effectively blocks anyone progressing past the “I am but a poor sinner” syndrome. There is no evidence that the “poor sinner” syndrome is anything but a doctrine introduced to Christianity many years after the death of Jesus, part of the separation of God from the human race that had no part in the teachings of Jesus.

The Canon of the Christian church, the New Testament, is so full of holes that Christianity has survived largely by “making it up as it goes along,” with a continuous stream of church laws and papal decrees being introduced to plug the holes. So far this “band aid” approach has kept the official line of the Christian church afloat, but this cannot last forever. Christian dogma is totally contradictory to the source of the conception of Jesus. In Matthew 1²⁰, the source of Mary’s impregnation is the Holy

Ghost, but the spirit of God did not descend on Jesus until he was baptised by John (Matthew 3¹⁶), and the Holy Ghost was given as the comforter of mankind by Jesus some thirty years after his birth.

26 But the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach all things, and bring things to your remembrance, whatever I have said unto you.

(John 1:4, KJV)

According to the Authorised Version of the Bible, the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, was not called into existence by Jesus until shortly before his death. The contradiction is that if taken absolutely literally, Jesus conceived himself thirty years after he was born. The original Greek version does not mention the Holy Ghost at all; throughout “spirit holy” is used.

26 But the comforter, the spirit holy which will send the Father in the name of me, that one you will teach all things and remind you [of] all things which told you I.

(John 14, translated Marshall)

Somewhere in the translation of the Bible there seems to have been confusion between “ghost” and “spirit,” which in common usage can be interchanged, but in a spiritual sense are completely different. Read “spirit” instead of “ghost,” and the meaning of many of the passages in the Bible change.

There is another interpretation of the meaning of the virgin birth that comes from Gnostic sources:

If some gnostic sources suggest that the spirit constitutes the maternal element of the Trinity, the Gospel of Philip makes an equally radical suggestion about the doctrine that later developed as the virgin birth. Here again, the Spirit is both Mother and Virgin, the counterpart and consort of the Heavenly Father: “It is permitted to utter a mystery? The Father is everything united with the virgin who came down” that is, with the Holy Spirit descending into the world. But because this process is to be understood symbolically, not literally, the Spirit remains a virgin. The author goes on to explain that as “Adam came into being from two virgins, from the Spirit and from the virgin earth” so “Christ, therefore, was born from a virgin” (that is, from the Spirit). But the author ridicules those literal-minded Christians who mistakenly refer the virgin birth to Mary, Jesus’ mother, as though she conceived apart from Joseph: “They do not know what they are saying. When

did a woman ever conceive by a woman?” Instead, he argues, virgin birth refers to that mysterious union of the two divine powers, the Father of All and Holy Spirit.

(Pagels, 1980)

Another translation of Matthew 1:18-20 is given by Raymond E Brown:

18 Now as for [Jesus] Christ, his birth took place this way. His mother Mary had been betrothed to Joseph; but before they began to live together, it was found that she was with child through the Holy Spirit.

19 Her husband Joseph was an upright man, but unwilling to expose her to public disgrace; and so he resolved to divorce her quietly.

20 Now, as he was considering this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary your wife to your home, for the child begotten in her is through the Holy Spirit.

(Brown, 1993)

In his notes on this passage, Brown says, in part: “Not only is the Holy Spirit not

male (feminine in Hebrew; neuter in Greek), but also the manner of begetting is implicitly creative rather than sexual. In the COMMENT (C2) I shall contend that the relationship of the Holy Spirit to Jesus' divine sonship was articulated first in reference to the resurrection (Rom 1⁴) and then in relation to the ministry beginning with the baptism (Matt 3¹⁶⁻¹⁷). Thus, an articulation of this relationship in reference to Jesus' conception came after considerable Christian reflection upon the Spirit of God." The Hebrew feminine form of Spirit correlates with the question in the Gospel of Thomas, "They do not know what they are saying. When did a woman ever conceive by a woman?"

* * *

The first concern with the church was to establish Jesus as the Messiah of the Old Testament. The resurrection was the main concern of the early church. Without the resurrection, Jesus was not the Messiah and the Christian church would have disintegrated.

The circumstances of Jesus' birth did not become an issue for the church until awkward questions were asked; then they had to conform to the Old Testament. Originally, Jesus did not become the son of God until the resurrection. Then, as time passed, this was taken back to his baptism and finally to his birth; thus the later Gospels actually start at an earlier stage than the earlier ones.

The exception is Matthew. Matthew appears to be the last Gospel written, but because it was probably translated into Greek from Hebrew it may have been the first. This could well be the reason for the discrepancy about the early life of Jesus between the Gospel according to Matthew and the Gospel according to Luke.

Then there is the argument that because he was the Son of God, Jesus had always existed, and that his birth was just a continuation of his existence in human form. That argument is getting too far from the subject at hand, so I will just note that such an argument exists.

There is another plausible explanation for why the virgin birth is essential to Christianity. Jewish opponents of early Christianity suggested that Jesus was illegitimate. This fits with the idea of a conspiracy because it would be a denial that Jesus was the legitimate king of the Jews, legitimate heir to the throne of David. Having deliberately bred by the Pharisees as the legitimate king to the throne of David, when that king turned against them he had to be destroyed. One of the options for the Pharisees would have been to claim he was not really the king of the Jews because he was illegitimate.

One of the provisions of Jewish law at the time was that a high priest had to be physically perfect and completely beyond reproach. The distinction between high priest and king was very vague in Jewish law, and the claim that Jesus was illegitimate would have effectively barred him from any high office. This need for physical perfection is something that comes up time and time again.

The Jews would not have liked being accused of crucifying their own legitimate king. The suggestion is that the virgin birth was a counter move to the claim that Jesus was illegitimate. This is plausible, since the concept of Jesus' virgin birth did not come about until some time after his death. The original concept was that Jesus became the Son of God as a result of the resurrection. The idea that Jesus was born the Son of God came later.

But suppose the marriage situation and the pregnancy as described were historical fact rather than the product of imagination. Then we can understand why a charge of illegitimacy arose among Jesus' opponents, a charge that may be foreshadowed in 1¹⁸⁻¹⁹. In responding to this charge, Matthew would not have been free to change the fact that Jesus was born noticeably early. But he could brand the Jewish interpretation of that fact as calumny and offer a (or the) Christian explanation of it.

(Brown, 1993)

* * *

There is an aspect of the virgin birth of Jesus that adds weight to the theory that the birth of Jesus was a conspiracy of the Pharisees. Both Joseph and Mary are supposed

to have undergone “Trial by the water of the Conviction of the Lord,” an invocation of divine judgment which might be compared with trial by fire and water of the middle ages. (Horton) Joseph and Mary were supposedly forced to drink foul water. If they vomited that were lying, if they did not vomit they were telling the truth. The result, according to Horton, was:

Joseph and Mary were given the test in turn, and to the astonishment of the congregation they emerged from it triumphantly. Neither of them was affected in any way, no “sign” appeared, and amid rejoicing and wonder their innocence from carnal sin was proclaimed. Here, to priest and people alike, the greater, the thaumaturgical wonder was revealed, the irreconcilable reconciled, and all Man’s experience set aside by this great exception: Mary, mother-to-be, had known not Joseph, had committed no adultery, had known no man. It was manifest to all that the child to come was of a very special nature: perhaps, even Divine. And among the general rejoicing Mary and Joseph returned to their house to await the momentous birth.

(Horton, 1975)

The priests ordered both Joseph and Mary to submit to trial by water and both proved innocent. If such an event took place, it would have been an irresistible

opportunity for the priests to stage the innocence of Mary and Joseph, and establish the divine nature of the unborn Jesus. Mary is pregnant, and to prove that the child is divine, the priests, who would have been Pharisees, give Joseph and Mary a harmless potion in the guise of the test potion, and surprise, it has no ill effect. Today we are supposed to accept this “test” as proof of the “virgin” nature of the birth of Jesus.

This is purely speculative, of course, because the trial by water was a later story, as were the Gospels. My feeling is that this is just another of those “make it up as you go along” stories.

* * *

By whatever means, Mary had become pregnant during the betrothal period, Jesus had to be born under the astrological conditions predicted in the Scriptures. The timing was critical. Fortunately, the timing of the conception of Jesus was not as critical as it would seem to be at first. The heliacal rising of Jupiter and Saturn in conjunction in Pisces, the astrological event the Scriptures foretold, happened three times in 7 BC, on May 29, October 3 and December 4.

This meant that Mary had six months to become pregnant for the birth of Jesus to be close enough to claim fulfilment of the Scriptures. The conception of Jesus at a time to fulfill the Scriptures was, of course, not a certainty, but much more likely than if there had been only one heliacal rising of Jupiter and Saturn in conjunction in Pisces.

A conjunction is when two stars or planets appear to be so close together that they seem to be one, and, of course, the two together are much brighter than the individual stars or planets. To a layman, the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn would appear to be a new, very bright star. Jewish scholars at the time had an extremely deep understanding of astronomy, and could predict with complete accuracy events such as the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces. If there were a conspiracy to breed a king of the Jews, there is no doubt about the ability of the conspirators to predict accurately the time at which Mary had to be pregnant.

* * *

The lackluster style of the Gospels gives the impression that the Romans had been in Palestine for many years. This is not true. The Roman general Pompey invaded Palestine in 63 BC, only fifty-four years before the birth of Jesus. The time between the last of the Jewish prophets, Malachi, and the birth of Jesus was about four hundred years. Between Malachi and Jesus, Palestine was mostly under foreign rule, first by the Greeks, then the Egyptians and Syrians. Between the Syrians and the Romans was a period of self-rule that showed that the Jews of Palestine at that time were completely unable to govern themselves. It was during this period that the scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees came into being and became a powerful force.

The rise of Herod to King of the Jews, appointed by the Romans, was because of the ineptitude of the Jews in managing their own affairs. The Jews had never differentiated between religious and secular law, and the head of the Jewish nation, which existed between the Syrian occupation and the Roman invasion, was the high priest.

Jannaeus (106 BC-76 BC) was king and the high priest but he was opposed by the Pharisees because, among other things, he was not descended from the house of David. The Pharisees staged a revolt against Jannaeus which was put down, at the cost fifty thousand lives. The result was a nation divided. After the death of Jannaeus, his widow, Salome Alexandra, ruled for nine years, and in that time the Pharisees were able to pack the Sanhedrim (the Jewish high court, tribunal, pontifical college and political council) with friends and establish themselves as a powerful group. The Pharisees were the rulers of Palestine. After the death of Alexandra, a bitter struggle took place between Jannaeus' two sons, Hycanus II and Aristobulus II. The country degenerated into civil war.

It was at this time that many Jews began to think of appealing to an arbiter. A third force had come into existence, and it sent a delegation to that powerful stranger who was then, in the spring of 63 BC, at Damascus. Somewhat later both of the rival brothers approached him to secure his

support in exchange for ready cash. The stranger to whom these frogs were so naively offering a sceptre was none other than Pompey.

(Rops, 1962)

The Romans entered Palestine as saviours, not conquerors. The Romans set up a protectorate. The Palestinian Jews may well have lived a prosperous life, but there followed plot and counterplot in Palestine and in Rome. The whole thing became such a shambles that Rome appointed Herod the Great as king of the Jews because he was the only one who could keep any sort of order in Palestine. As hated as Herod was by the Jews, his existence as king was the result of the Jews not being able to look after their own affairs.

Although Herod had been proclaimed king of Judaea, he had to take Jerusalem from his predecessor, Antigonus, by force. Herod had been a skillful and ambitious politician in Judaea previously, but about three years before being proclaimed king had been forced to flee Jerusalem when Antigonus seized power.

After fleeing Jerusalem, Herod went to Nabatea, to his mother's kinsmen, for help in raising an army, but was refused help. Then Herod went to seek the help of Cleopatra, who welcomed him and offered him the position of commander in her army. Herod refused Cleopatra's because he had heard that Antigonus had mutilated Herod's brother Hycanus by cutting of his ear.

A high priest had to be physically perfect, so Antigonus had cut off the ear of Hycanus to make him ineligible for the position. This act added resolve to Herod's desire to take revenge on Antigonus.

Cutting off a person's ears to make him ineligible for high office was a tradition amongst the Jews of the time.

Herod next traveled to Rome to see his old friend Mark Anthony, who introduced Herod to Octavian, Caesar's adopted heir, and soon to become Emperor Augustus. Herod was proclaimed king of Judea by the Romans and raised an army to return to Judea and defeat Antigonus in 37 BC.

This is a very abbreviated account of the events between 106 BC and the birth of Jesus. The story of how Herod became king is a story of plot, counterplot, and double cross that involves Pompey, Julius Caesar, Mark Anthony and Cleopatra and many others, but above all a Jewish nation with a death wish. It is a story that as Rops (1962) says:

“It is a little-known piece of history, the Bible says nothing of it and it is extremely complicated, a web of intrigues, revolts, civil wars and assassinations, a series of complexities made still more difficult by the repercussions of Roman politics, which at that time, as everybody knows, were themselves far from simple.

At the time of the birth of Jesus, Palestine was a land of turmoil, passion and hatred. The Jewish nation had self-destructed and come under the rule of a monster who killed anyone he wanted at the slightest provocation, real or imagined. The Jewish nation had degenerated into total insanity, and it was into this insane world that Jesus was born.

Palestine was nothing like the land of the Christian New Testament. The position of the Romans in Palestine was, in modern terms, akin to that of the British in Northern Ireland—hated, but if they left, the locals would tear each other apart. Into this insanity was to be born a sane man, possibly the first totally sane man the world had ever seen.

Was Jesus the result of a contrived breeding program, designed to produce a king of the Jews who would lead the Jewish people to the establishment of an independent Israel? I cannot prove that.

What is true is that Palestine was a land of conspiracy on conspiracy, and that a contrived breeding program was totally in keeping with the politics of the time, and I think a likely result.

We have the Romans trying to keep peace in a distant colony ruled by a king of their choosing who probably owed the continuation of his kingship to the presence of the Romans. Roman politics at the time was very unsettled, and the position of Herod was difficult, to say the least, as was that of the Romans.

Add to this the existence of at least two internal factions, the Pharisees and the Sadducees, each vying for power against the other as well as against Herod and the Romans. This was a political nightmare of enormous proportions, a country tottering on

the brink of the re-emergence of civil war without clear-cut ideologies or enemies; everybody hating everybody else.

Everything that was needed by the Pharisees to set up a conspiracy was in place. The Scriptures, the astrological conditions, Joseph and Mary and the political history of the Jews all came together perfectly for a conspiracy to take place.

The actions of Herod at the time of the birth of Jesus support the conspiracy hypothesis. Herod became most upset when Jesus was born. Support for the conspiracy hypothesis can also be found in the literal translation of Matthew from the original Greek.

18 Now of Jesus Christ the birth thus was. Being betrothed the mother of him

= When his mother Mary was betrothed

Mary to Joseph, before to come together them she was found in womb

= she was pregnant.

having (by)[the] Spirit.

19 Now Joseph the husband of her, just being and not wishing her to hold up as an example, resolved secretly to dismiss her.

20 But these things him thinking on, behold an angel of [the] Lord by dream

= while he thought on these things

appeared to him saying: Joseph son of David, not fear thou to take

Mary the wife of thee: for the thing in her begotten of [the]; Spirit is holy.

21 And she will bear a son, and thou shalt call the name of him Jesus; for he will save the people of him from the sins of them.

22 Now this all has occurred in order that might be fulfilled the [thing] spoken by [the] Lord through the prophet saying;

23 Behold the virgin in womb will have and bear a son, and they will call the name of him Emmanuel, which is being interpreted with us God.

(Translated Marshall, 1982)

“The fact is that the Law recognised rights and obligations during the betrothal that were almost the same as those of marriage.” (Rops) So Joseph and Mary were married, the only remaining formality was the “taking to him.” Mary had not yet moved into Joseph’s family home. Mary was betrothed and pregnant, and subject to the same law as a married woman. If she had committed adultery, she would have been liable to death by stoning.

A possible meaning is that Joseph cared for Mary and wanted to keep Mary’s pregnancy secret to protect her. “Not fear thou to take Mary the wife of thee: for the thing in her begotten of [the]; Spirit is holy” could mean “do not be afraid to make public your

marriage to Mary because her child is holy (protected by God); there is no need to fear for her safety.” Not a very strong case so far, but add to this “And she will bear a son, and thou shalt call the name of him Jesus; for he will save the people of him from the sins of them.” and the case for a conspiracy becomes very strong.

The Authorised Version is “And she will bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins.” I question the Authorised Version because “from the sins of them” does not equate to “their sins.” Who is “them”? The mysterious “them” that people today still blame for all their troubles. “Save the people of him from the sins of them” is two entities, not the one entity of the Authorised Version. “The people of him” are the Jews; “the sins of them” are the sins of the oppressors of the Jews, headed by Herod.

Putting it all together: Mary becomes pregnant, Joseph is scared that Mary is in danger and wants to keep her pregnancy secret. Joseph is told not to worry, make it official, because his son is the one who will save the Jews from Herod, and they will be protected.

Joseph is reminded that he is a direct descendant of King David. Joseph’s father was named Jacob, but Joseph was called, in this passage, “Joseph son of David”, a nice little piece of morale boosting. To be fair, it was not uncommon for Jews to refer to the ancestral father rather than the biological father when saying, “the son of.”

The passage does not say that Mary became pregnant by the “Holy Ghost” as the Authorised Version claims, but “in womb = she was pregnant, having(by)[the] Spirit.”

and “for the thing in her begotten of [the] ;Spirit is holy.” The claim is that Mary’s child is Holy. To the Jews, a king of the Jews directly descended from David was holy.

“Behold an angel of [the] Lord by dream appeared to him saying:” is typical of Matthew’s writing. Every time there is something that needs to be bypassed without elaboration, Matthew throws in a dream. To the present time, the Catholic Church maintains that when a person is at confession they are not talking to a priest, but directly to God. There is nothing unusual in any religion in seeing a priest as a representative or “angel” of God, and I believe that the “angel of [the] Lord” means a priest.

Mary is pregnant with Jesus and it has been arranged to be in accordance with the scriptures to fit in with Jesus being the king of the Jews and the awaited Messiah.

