

## THE HISTORICAL JESUS ACCORDING TO JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN'S FIRST STRATA SOURCES: A CRITICAL COMMENT

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### I. INTRODUCTION

When John Dominic Crossan wrote *The Historical Jesus* ten years ago, there were undoubtedly many who thought that his idiosyncratic view of Jesus was just another fad. In the last ten years, however, Crossan has written no less than nine additional books<sup>1</sup> and has contributed to several others.<sup>2</sup> He has also written at least nine articles<sup>3</sup> and has appeared in

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<sup>1</sup> Titles include: *The Birth of Christianity; Discovering what happened in the years immediately after the execution of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998); *The Essential Jesus: Original sayings and earliest images* (Edison, NJ: Castle, 1998); *Excavating Jesus: Beneath the stones, behind the texts* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001); *Four Other Gospels: Shadows on the contours of canon* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1992); *In Parables: The challenge of the Historical Jesus* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1992); *Jesus: A revolutionary biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994); *Who is Jesus? Answers to your questions about the historical Jesus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999); *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the roots of anti-Semitism in the Gospel story of the death of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995); *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up: A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> "The Historical Jesus in Earliest Christianity," in *Jesus and Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994) 1–21; "Itinerants and Householders in the Earliest Jesus Movement," in *Whose Historical Jesus?* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997) 7–24; "Itinerants and Householders in the Earliest Kingdom Movement," in *Reimagining Christian Origins* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996) 113–29; "Our Own Faces in Deep Wells: A future for Historical Jesus Research," in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999) 282–310; "Why is Historical Jesus Research Necessary?" in *Jesus Two Thousand Years Later* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 2000) 7–37.

<sup>3</sup> "Adventure story," *BibRev* 16/5 (2000) 27; "Blessed plot: A reply to N. T. Wright's review of 'The Birth of Christianity,'" *SJT* 53 (2000) 92; "The Challenge of Christmas: Two Views," *Christian Century* 110/36 (1993) 1270; "Commentary and History," *JR* 75 (1995) 247; "Earliest Christianity in Counterfactual Focus," *Biblical Interpretation* 8 (2000) 92–112; "The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant," *Christian Century* 108/37 (1991) 1194; "A Tale of Two Gods," *Christian Century* 110/36 (1993) 1270; "What Victory? What God? A review debate with N. T. Wright on 'Jesus and the Victory of God,'" *SJT* 50 (1997) 345; "Why Christians Must Search for the Historical Jesus," *BibRev* 12 (1996) 34–39, 42–45.

numerous videos,<sup>4</sup> debates,<sup>5</sup> teleconferences,<sup>6</sup> and television programs.<sup>7</sup> Most of these have been to promote his view of Jesus as a peasant Jewish Cynic.<sup>8</sup> Since Crossan continues to be so influential in American Jesus studies, it may be good to take another look at the basis for his view of Jesus.

## II. BACKGROUND

In *The Historical Jesus*, Crossan established a method by which to separate the core of what can be known about Jesus from the decades of tradition that allegedly accumulated after his death. Crossan's method consists of classifying biblical and non-biblical sources for the life of Jesus into "complexes" of texts with similar topics. For example, all texts related to Jesus' crucifixion were combined in one complex, all texts relating to Jesus' teaching on divorce are in another complex, etc.

Crossan then listed these complexes by "strata," depending on the dates he assigned to his sources.<sup>9</sup> First strata sources are those written from AD 30–60, second strata sources date from AD 60–80, third strata sources from AD 80–120, and fourth strata sources date from AD 120–150.

Finally, within each stratum the complexes were grouped by the number of times each saying was attested, once, twice, three times or more. In Crossan's methodology, the data that was most often attested in the earliest strata was generally considered to be the most historically reliable. Data had to be attested at least twice in order to be considered. Crossan then used this data pool to determine what can be known about the historical Jesus.

While this method may sound reasonable, in actual practice it functions as a way to divide (or deconstruct) and conquer by eliminating evidence from consideration. For example, Crossan listed nine first strata complexes

<sup>4</sup> *A Death in Jerusalem* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1996); *Faces on Faith: An Interview with John Dominic Crossan* (Nashville: EcuFilm, 1995); *Faith and Reason* (Shreveport, LA: D. L. Dykes Jr. Foundation, 1997); *The Historical Jesus and Earliest Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1996); *The Historical Jesus Lecture* (Duluth, MN: University of Minnesota at Duluth, 1995); *Jesus and the Kingdom: Peasants and Scribes in Earliest Christianity* (New York: Parish of Trinity Church, 1996); *Jesus the Peasant* (Washburn University, 1993); *Westar Institute and the Jesus Seminar Present John Dominic Crossan: Jesus, a Revolutionary Biography* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1994).

<sup>5</sup> E.g. *Will the Real Jesus please stand up: A debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (ed. William Buckley, Paul Copan; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> *Jesus @ 2000* (New York: Episcopal Cathedral Teleconferencing Network, 1996); *The Jesus Summit: The Historical Jesus and Contemporary Faith* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> E.g. "The Search for Jesus" (ABC News Special, 2000); "From Jesus to Christ: The First Christians" (Frontline; Public Broadcasting System, 1998); "Jesus the Complete Story" (Discovery Channel, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991) 421.

<sup>9</sup> The cutoff date for the first stratum is AD 60, which, as Gregory Boyd and others have pointed out, conveniently eliminates the canonical Gospels from consideration, since Crossan dates the first canonical Gospel to the AD 70s.

in which the phrase “Son of Man” occurs in an apocalyptic context.<sup>10</sup> This would seem to be strong evidence to conclude that Jesus was known by his earliest followers as the apocalyptic Son of Man. Not so. Crossan points out that the phrase “Son of Man” occurs only once in each complex.

For example, complex “30 Revealed to James” lists three first strata passages that record Jesus’ appearance to James.<sup>11</sup> Of these three passages, only one refers to Jesus as the Son of Man. Since “Son of Man” is attested only once in this complex, it was excluded from consideration as evidence, even though Jesus is called “Son of Man” in eight other first strata apocalyptic complexes.

Even when the phrase “Son of Man” occurs more than once in a single complex, Crossan finds ways to explain why the evidence should not be counted. For example, the complex “2 Jesus apocalyptic return” consists of (1) 1 Thess 4:13–18; (2) *Did.* 16:6–8; (3) Matt 24:30a; (4) Mark 13:24–27 = Matt 24:29, 30b–31 = Luke 21:25–28; (5) Rev 1:7, 13; 14:14; and (5) John 19:37. While Crossan admitted that all of these passages, except for John 19:37, are references to the apocalyptic coming of Jesus in language that alludes to Dan 7:13, he argued, first, that the phrase “Son of Man” does not appear in 1 Thess 4:13–18, and was not originally in the [hypothetical] source behind the *Did.* 16:6–8 and Matt 24:30. Then, after arguing that the writers of Mark and Revelation were merely creating ideas of Jesus coming in the clouds out of their reflection on Zech 12:10 and Dan 7:13, Crossan concluded that “this whole stream of tradition, far from starting on the lips of Jesus, began only after his crucifixion with meditation on Zechariah 12:10, then moved on to combine Daniel 7:13 with that prophecy . . .”<sup>12</sup>

Even apart from the myriad of undemonstrated assumptions in these arguments, the fact still remains that at least three first strata sources independently refer to Jesus as the Son of Man,<sup>13</sup> and two other first strata sources<sup>14</sup> independently assert the apocalyptic return of Jesus in terms which allude to Dan 7:13–14. These sources are supported by numerous other independent sources in later strata. But this evidence was not seriously considered because Crossan classified the data in separate “complexes.” If all nine apocalyptic Son of Man complexes<sup>15</sup> had been combined into one, the result of Crossan’s study might have been different.

This raises the question: What would happen if we were to follow Crossan’s method of stratification and multiple independent attestation but without his sometimes arbitrary division of material into complexes? My hypothesis is that an entirely different picture of Jesus would emerge.

This study will therefore apply the criteria of multiple independent attestation to Crossan’s first strata sources to see if the result supports his view of Jesus as a peasant Jewish Cynic. In other words, we will assume, *for*

<sup>10</sup> Crossan, *Historical* 243.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Cor 15:7a, *Gos. Thom.* 12, and *Gos. Heb.* 7.

<sup>12</sup> Crossan, *Historical* 247, 454.

<sup>13</sup> *Gos. Heb.*, *Gos. Thom.* 86, and Q<sup>1</sup> 9:57–58 = Matt 8:19–20.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Thess 4:13–18 and the “Apocalyptic Scenario” = *Did.* 16:6–8/Matt 24:30a.

<sup>15</sup> Crossan, *Historical* 454.

*the sake of argument*, that Crossan's first strata sources are valid. These sources include: 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, Romans, the Gospel of Thomas,<sup>16</sup> the "Egerton Gospel,"<sup>17</sup> Papyrus Vindobonensis 2325,<sup>18</sup> Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1224,<sup>19</sup> the "Gospel of the Hebrews,"<sup>20</sup> the sayings Gospel Q,<sup>21</sup> the "Miracles Collection,"<sup>22</sup> the "Apocalyptic Scenario,"<sup>23</sup> and the "Cross Gospel."<sup>24</sup> The following is a sampling of information about Jesus multiply attested in these first strata sources.

### III. MESSIAH

In *The Historical Jesus*, Crossan discusses five men from the first century AD whom he recognized as messianic claimants.<sup>25</sup> Although Josephus did not directly call any of these men "messiah," Crossan accepts them as messianic claimants because all had aspirations to royalty. It is significant that Crossan accepts this information as historical even though it is only attested in one source, i.e. Josephus, and Josephus wrote too late to qualify as one of Crossan's first strata sources. On the other hand, Crossan does not recognize Jesus as a messianic claimant even though the evidence that he was seen as such is multiply attested in the first stratum.

<sup>16</sup> Crossan postulates two editorial strata to the Gospel of Thomas, the first being composed of passages with independent attestation elsewhere. Crossan dates this strata to the AD 50s (*Historical* 427). "The Gospel of Thomas is known in the tradition from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century on." Eusebius lists it as being rejected by the church. A second-century date is probable, though Blatz comments that "the collected sayings material may in part go back even into the first century" (Schneemelcher, *Apocrypha* 110-13).

<sup>17</sup> The "Egerton Gospel," or Papyrus Egerton 2, as it is usually known, is a papyrus document discovered in 1935 consisting of two full leaves and a part of a third. Much of the content is paralleled by the Gospel of John. It is usually dated between AD 150 and 200. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha* Vol. 1 (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991) 96.

<sup>18</sup> Discovered in 1885, this papyrus leaf is also known as the "Fayyum Fragment." It consists of only a few lines dealing with the prediction of Peter's betrayal of Jesus. Schneemelcher comments that "[t]he brevity of the fragment forbids sure statements of any kind . . ." (*Apocrypha* 102).

<sup>19</sup> "The remains of a papyrus book, the writing of which points to the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century . . ." (Schneemelcher, *Apocrypha* 100).

<sup>20</sup> The Gospel of the Hebrews was probably written in the first half of the second century and is known from quotations by Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria.

<sup>21</sup> Crossan follows Kloppenborg in postulating three editions to Q, the first of which is placed in the first stratum (*Historical* 429).

<sup>22</sup> The "Miracles Collection" is a reconstruction of a hypothetical source for the miracles in Mark 2, 6, and 8, John 5, 6, 9, and 11, and the Secret Gospel of Mark (Crossan, *Historical* 429).

<sup>23</sup> The "Apocalyptic Scenario" is a hypothetical document, which, according to Crossan, "is a common apocalyptic source behind both *Did.* 16:3-8 and Matt. 24:10-12, 30a . . ." (Crossan, *Historical* 429).

<sup>24</sup> According to Crossan, the Cross Gospel is now embedded in The Gospel of Peter. It consists of *Gos. Peter* 1:1-2; 2:5b-6:22; 7:25; 8:28-9:34; 9:35-10:42; and 11:45-49 (Crossan, *Historical* 429). The Gospel of Peter was mentioned in early Christian writing, including Eusebius, who lists it among those not recognized by the church. Schneemelcher suggests a date in the middle of the second century AD (Schneemelcher, *Apocrypha* 217-21).

<sup>25</sup> Judas of Galilee, Simon in Perea, Athronges in Judea, Manahem, son (or grandson) of Judas the Galilean, and Simon son of Gioras (Crossan, *Historical* 200-204).

According to the “Cross Gospel” Jesus was mocked by being seated on a judgment seat, crowned with thorns, and hailed as the king of Israel. Whether Jesus held this view of himself is not clear from the Cross Gospel alone, but it seems clear that the writer of the Cross Gospel intended to portray Jesus as the Messiah, the king of Israel.

The Gospel of the Hebrews directly calls Jesus the Christ or Messiah several times and speaks of him as one who reigns forever. Even if the word Christ had not appeared in this source, however, the assertion that Jesus would reign forever should have been enough for Crossan to conclude that the writer considered Jesus to be the Messiah.

Since there is no doubt that Paul called Jesus the Christ, this point will not be argued. While Crossan simply ignores this evidence in *The Historical Jesus*, some scholars dismiss Paul’s claims as “mythmaking”<sup>26</sup> or “meaning making.”<sup>27</sup> Crossan’s methodology provides several reasons to reject the mythmaking theory. First, the fact that Jesus was known as messiah by two other independent first strata sources argues strongly that Paul was not merely mythmaking. Second, the fact that there were several known messianic claimants in the first century AD means that Paul’s claims meet the criteria of contextual credibility,<sup>28</sup> which simply means that “[t]he Historical Jesus must be understood within his contemporary Judaism.”<sup>29</sup> Finally, there is the sheer unlikelihood that Paul would give his life to the preaching of a dead Jewish Cynic whom he had mythologized as a messiah.

While Crossan acknowledges five first-century men as being messianic claimants on the basis of only one source that would not even qualify as a first strata source, he denies that Jesus was a messianic claimant even though this is supported by three independent first strata sources.

#### IV. SAVIOR

While recent scholars have emphasized that there existed a variety of “Judaisms” in the first century AD,<sup>30</sup> almost all faithful first-century Jews would have agreed that Yahweh was the only one who could bring salvation. It is therefore notable that three first strata sources appear to present Jesus as the one who brings salvation.

<sup>26</sup> Burton Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament: The Making of the Christian Myth* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 94–95: “For ancient documents, reliable traditions must conform to the historical and social context to which they relate.” Ehrman illustrates this principle by pointing out that the phrase, “When you undress without being ashamed and you take your clothes and put them under your feet as little children and trample on them, then you shall see the Son of the Living One and you shall not fear,” fits much better in a second-century Gnostic setting than in the days of Jesus.

<sup>29</sup> Crossan, *Historical* 417.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

First, according to *Gos. Thom.* 82, Jesus said, “He who is near me is near the fire, and *he who is far from me is far from the kingdom*” (emphasis mine). In the OT it was the people’s relation with Yahweh that determined their future in the kingdom, but the Gospel of Thomas seems to indicate that Jesus thought it was people’s relation to him that determined their future in the kingdom.

Second, Paul calls Jesus’ death a sacrifice of atonement (Rom 3:21–26) and likens it to the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb (1 Cor 4:7). Paul says that for those who have faith in Jesus (Gal 2:16–17; 3:2–29; Rom 3:22–30; Gal 2:16–20), his death resulted in the redemption (Gal 3:13–14), justification (Rom 4:25; 5:16, 18), reconciliation (Rom 4:24–25; 5:1, 6, 8, 10; 6:9; 7:4), salvation (1 Thess 5:9–10; 1 Cor 1:18, 23–24, 30; Rom 10:13, 17), eternal life (Rom 2:7; 5:21; 6:23), removal of condemnation (Rom 8:1), and rescue from the coming wrath (Rom 5:9; 1 Thess 1:10).

Finally, according to the Cross Gospel, one of the men being crucified with Jesus called Jesus the “savior of men” (Cross Gospel 4:13). While the word “savior” in a first-century context could refer to one who was to deliver the Jews from the Romans, it is hard to imagine that a man being crucified by the Romans was referring to a fellow crucifixion victim as a deliverer from the Romans. It is more likely that the writer of the Cross Gospel is providing independent attestation to the idea of Jesus being savior in the full Pauline sense of the word.

While Crossan might be excused for disagreeing with Paul’s interpretation of Jesus’ death, there is no excuse for ignoring the evidence that Jesus was presented as the bearer of salvation in no fewer than three independent first strata sources.

#### V. INCARNATION / DEITY

The fact that three first strata sources present Jesus as the one who brings salvation, which only Yahweh could do, raises the question of whether the Johannine view of Jesus as the incarnation of God can be found in first strata sources as well.

First, there is a hint of Jesus’ incarnation in the Miracles Collection. The first miracle of that collection is recorded in Mark 2:1–12 = John 5:1–18, in which a paralyzed man is healed by Jesus. In Mark’s version, Jesus tells this man that his sins are forgiven, and as a result Jesus’ opponents charge him with blasphemy. In John’s version Jesus is charged with making himself equal with God. Regardless of which version better represents its Miracles Collection source, both Mark and John interpret that source as presenting Jesus as one who thought he could forgive sins and who was charged with blasphemy for thereby making himself equal with God.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Crossan, *Historical* 324. Crossan acknowledges that being “equal to God” is implicitly present in the accusation of blasphemy from Mark 2:7.

Second, there can be little doubt that the writer of the Gospel of the Hebrews believed in the pre-existence and incarnation of Jesus:

When Christ wished to come upon the earth to men, the good Father summoned a mighty power in heaven, which was called Michael, and entrusted Christ to the care thereof. And the power came into the world and it was called Mary, and Christ was in her womb seven months.<sup>32</sup>

The Gospel of the Hebrews also records that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus at his baptism, saying that Jesus was the first-begotten son who reigns forever.<sup>33</sup> In Crossan's view these are "abbreviated mythological narratives" based on the myth of the embodiment of divine wisdom.<sup>34</sup> While these narratives certainly have mythological elements, the question Crossan avoids is why such a myth would be attributed so early to a peasant Jewish Cynic who had no such pretensions. The fact that Jesus' incarnation is multiply attested in independent first strata sources is evidence that the theology of Jesus' incarnation and deity comes from the teaching of Jesus' earliest followers, if not from Jesus himself.

Third, the writer of the Gospel of Thomas also appears to hint that Jesus was the incarnation of God. According to *Gos. Thom.* 77 Jesus said:

It is I who am the light which is above them all. It is I who am the all. *From me did all come forth, and unto me did the all extend* (emphasis mine; cf. John 8:12; 9:5; 12:46).

While this passage is undoubtedly open to a variety of interpretations, the idea that all came forth from Jesus and unto him all extend sounds similar in some ways to 1 Cor 8:6<sup>35</sup> where Paul writes,

Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, *through whom are all things and through whom we exist* (emphasis mine).

Gordon Fee comments on this passage, "Although Paul does not here call Christ God, the formula is so constructed that only the most obdurate would deny its Trinitarian implications."<sup>36</sup>

The idea that all things came forth through Jesus is a theology that is therefore multiply attested in first strata sources and, in a first-century Jewish context, would seem to imply belief in Jesus' deity.

Fourth, not only does Paul claim that all exist through Jesus, he also calls Jesus the "Son of God" (Gal 1:15; 4:4–5; 1 Thess 3:13; 1 Cor 1:9; Rom 1:9; 8:3, 29, 31–32) and "Lord of Glory" (1 Cor 2:8) and applies Joel 2:32

<sup>32</sup> Gospel of the Hebrews as quoted by Cyril of Jerusalem (Schneemelcher, *Apocrypha* 177).

<sup>33</sup> Schneemelcher, *Apocrypha* 177).

<sup>34</sup> Crossan, *Historical* 232.

<sup>35</sup> It is also, of course, strikingly similar to Col 1:15–17, which teaches that through Jesus all things were created and in him all things hold together. Crossan attributes Colossians to a disciple of Paul and places it in his second stratum (*Historical* 430).

<sup>36</sup> Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987) 375.

directly to Jesus, even though in its original context it referred to Yahweh (Joel 2:32; Rom 10:13). In Rom 9:5, Paul may actually go as far as to attribute deity to Jesus directly, calling him "God over all." While this passage is strongly disputed, Harris examines it in nearly exhaustive detail and concludes that it is indeed highly probable that Paul intended to do just that.<sup>37</sup> In fact, the idea that Paul taught that Jesus was the incarnation of God makes sense of his statement that Jesus was "born of a woman" (Gal 4:4–5),<sup>38</sup> which otherwise seems rather strange since everyone is born of a woman.

If Jesus actually believed that he was the embodiment of God, it would also make sense of multiply attested statements to the effect that Jesus demanded allegiance to himself above all else. According to *Gos. Thom.* 55, for example, Jesus said:

Whoever does not hate his father and his mother cannot become a disciple of me. And whoever does not hate his brothers and sisters and take up his cross in my way will not be worthy of me (*Gos. Thom.* 55, cf. 102; Matt 10:37; Luke 14:26; Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; 10:21; Luke 9:23).

This idea is also attested in Q<sup>1</sup> 14:26.<sup>39</sup> While the Hebrew prophets often demanded such unqualified allegiance to God, there is no evidence that they ever demanded this kind of loyalty to themselves. In fact, it is possible to read *Gos. Thom.* 55 and Q<sup>1</sup> 14:26 as a practical application of the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me."

## VI. VERIFICATION

Multiple independent first strata sources therefore present Jesus as the Messiah, Savior, and incarnation of God. They also present these views as coming, not only from Jesus' followers, but in some cases from Jesus himself. This raises several important questions. First, if Jesus actually taught these things about himself, would not such views result in opposition and even questions about Jesus' mental stability?

The answer is yes, and that is precisely what we find in Crossan's first strata sources. The Gospel of Thomas (*Gos. Thom.* 39, 68, 102), the Oxyrhynchus papyrus 1224, the "Egerton Gospel," Paul's letters, and the "Cross Gospel" all attest to opposition toward Jesus on the part of his enemies. In addition to the opposition expressed in these first strata sources, Jesus was accused of blasphemy (Matt 26:65; Matt 9:3 = Mark 2:7?; 14:64; Luke 5:21; 33–36), insanity (Mark 3:21; John 10:20), and of being demon-possessed (John 7:20; 8:48–52; 10:19–21; 2Q: Luke 11:14–15, 17–18a = Matt 9:32–34;

<sup>37</sup> Murray Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 143–72.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Charles Cousar, *Galatians* (Interpretation series; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982) 95: ". . . the preexistence and incarnation of Christ are stated in verse 4 . . ."

<sup>39</sup> This paper follows the usual practice of identifying Q passages by their versification in the Gospel of Luke.

12:22–26). While this evidence does not come from the first strata, it is all multiply attested in independent sources and is supported by the criterion of embarrassment.<sup>40</sup> Such opposition and accusations are what might have been expected toward someone who made himself equal with God and claimed to be Israel's Savior. This raises the next question, however: Why would anyone believe such claims?

Those who came to believe in Jesus' claims apparently did so in part because of his miracles. The "Egerton Gospel" records Jesus' healing of a leper (cf. Mark 1:40–44 = Matt 8:1–4 = Luke 5:12–14), and the Gospel of Thomas records that Jesus sent his disciples out to heal the sick, which would seem to imply that he also had that ability (*Gos. Thom.* 14:2). According to the "Miracles Collection," Jesus fed 5000 men with five loaves and two fishes (Mark 6:33–44 = John 6:1–15),<sup>41</sup> he walked on water (Mark 6:45–52 = John 6:16–21), healed a man born blind (Mark 8:22–26 = John 9:1–7), healed a man who could not walk (Mark 2:1–12 = John 5:1–18), and raised Lazarus from the dead (Secret Mark 1v20–2r11a = John 11:1–57).

Remarkable deeds like these may be the reason that, according to the "Egerton Gospel," Jesus' enemies acknowledged that he did works "beyond that of all the prophets" (Egerton 2). While they are not sincere in their accolades, it seems very probable that they are echoing popular beliefs about Jesus. It seems likely, therefore, that Jesus' followers believed his claims in part because of his ability to perform miracles greater than those of the prophets or magicians.

Second, those who believed Jesus' claims did so in part because of his resurrection, which is also attested in Crossan's first strata sources. The Gospel of the Hebrews records that Jesus appeared to and ate with his brother James after the resurrection. According to the Cross Gospel, two men appeared from heaven after Jesus' death and escorted Jesus out of the tomb with their heads reaching to the heavens, being followed by a cross.

It would be easy to dismiss this entire narrative as symbolic or mythological, but there are at least two arguments against this possibility. First, the resurrection is multiply attested in other first strata sources. Second, the rest of the events in the Cross Gospel are historically plausible, and many of the details recorded therein are attested in multiple independent sources.

Finally, Paul refers to the resurrection of Jesus in all four of the letters Crossan assigns to the first strata. Although some critics argue that Paul was only teaching a spiritual resurrection, Paul's statement in Rom 14:9 that Jesus died and lived again would be a very misleading way of expressing a spiritual resurrection that left Jesus' body still in the tomb.

<sup>40</sup> The criterion of embarrassment states that material that would have been embarrassing to early Christians is more likely to be historical since it is unlikely that they would have made up material that would have placed them or Jesus in a bad light.

<sup>41</sup> Crossan, *Historical* 311. Note that postulating a miracles collection behind Mark and John prevents these miracles from being seen as two separate attestations.

## VII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study has shown that three first strata sources either directly call Jesus the Messiah or present him in messianic terms. Three first strata sources refer to Jesus as one who brings salvation. Four first strata sources say that Jesus either thought of himself as the incarnation of God or was thought of in those terms by his followers. Three first strata sources attest to the resurrection of Jesus.

Nothing in this article should be construed as lending support to Crossan's creation of sources out of whole cloth, like the "Cross Gospel" or the "Apocalyptic Scenario" or the "miracles collection,"<sup>42</sup> nor for his idiosyncratic use and dating of sources like Egerton 2, Oxyrhynchus 1224, etc. Nor did this paper attempt to construct a comprehensive picture of Jesus from Crossan's first strata sources.

The purpose of this article was to show that even assuming Crossan's system of stratification and the idiosyncratic dating of most of his sources, the Jesus we find in Crossan's own multiply attested first strata sources is radically different than the Jesus Crossan is proclaiming. While Crossan proclaims Jesus as a peasant Jewish Cynic who preached a message of egalitarianism and did not even think of himself as Messiah, much less as someone who was equal with God, Crossan's first strata sources actually paint a picture of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, Savior, and incarnation of God, who performed amazing miracles and rose from the dead.

<sup>42</sup> It is hard to avoid wondering whether these "sources" were imagined specifically to eliminate multiple attestation for an apocalyptic Jesus who performs nature miracles. The "Miracles Collection," for example, conveniently avoids having multiple attestation for three "nature" miracles.