



THE GOSPELS AND THE DEATH OF JESUS IN RECENT STUDY

CHANGING PARADIGMS

As with Gospels study more generally, so with inquiry into the death of Jesus in the Gospels, the hegemony of strictly historical methods has waned in recent decades, allowing for a wider range of questions to be addressed.¹ Perhaps most importantly, the loss of a narrow focus on tradition- and historical-critical concerns has opened up fresh paths for exploring the significance of the crucifixion of Jesus as this event is related to the entirety of Jesus' life and mission.

In previous generations, the study of Jesus' passion drew upon a now predictable inventory of questions. What actually happened "on the night when Jesus was delivered up"? What was the role of the Jews in Jesus' trial? How did the passion tradition develop? What sources did the evangelists have as they wrote their own passion accounts? What was the nature of those sources—oral or written, reliable or capricious? And so on. Even if questions such as these continue to be debated, it is nevertheless true that reflection on the death of Jesus has taken a decisive turn in recent years. The passion narratives of the four Gospels are studied less as discrete units of tradition, more as accounts integrated into the narratives in which they participate. What is more, study of "the death of Jesus in Matthew" (for example) now takes with utmost seriousness not simply the account of Jesus' death in Matt 26–27 but the whole of Matthew's Gospel as it impinges on our understanding of the death of the Messiah.

¹See Anthony C. Thiselton, "New Testament Interpretation in Historical Perspective," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995).

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This notable shift in the investigation of the Gospels as literary texts has been accompanied by a further innovation, the proportions of which are still being measured. This is the rediscovery of the Jewishness of Jesus.² It may seem odd to persons at the turn of the twenty-first century that Jesus' social, national, and religious identity as a Jew needed "rediscovering"; after all, this has been the subject of many recent studies in the wake of a new and more general appreciation of one's "context." But decades of questing after the historical Jesus prior to the 1980s had generated a kind of stand-alone Jesus, a universal figure outside history. Life-of-Jesus research had turned up a portrait of a person who had not felt the winds blowing off the Sea of Galilee or experienced, as a member of first-century Judaism, the winds of change arising from three centuries of cultural imperialism (Greek) and several decades of foreign rule (Roman). Chiding a major stream of New Testament study (and theological reflection based thereon) for its failure to let Jesus be a first-century Jew, David Batstone has recently urged that "the historical coordinates which frame Jesus' cause and led him to his death on a cross [must] serve as the criteria for determining the truthfulness of every Christology."³

Our purpose in this chapter is to locate contemporary readings of the death of Jesus in the Gospels on the horizon of recent research. By "recent" we refer above all to the final decades of the twentieth century. Some readers may find such an excursion of little value—an unnecessary rehearsal of bygone chapters of study. A report of this nature has significance in at least three ways, however. First, it will serve as a kind of introduction to the chapters that follow—indicating what issues have become prominent and how they have achieved notoriety. Second, it will suggest how newer readings of the passion of Jesus are indebted to older ones. The questions raised and assumptions made today build on, if sometimes by reacting against, earlier generations of attempts to make sense of the ignominy of the crucifixion of God's Messiah. Finally, for persons interested in pursuing questions of the sort raised in these chapters, this summary may serve as an entry point and bibliographic prologue to ongoing deliberation.

²This emphasis in contemporary study was heralded especially by Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew: A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973).

³David Batstone, *From Conquest to Struggle: Jesus of Nazareth in Latin America* (Albany: State University of New York, 1991) 147.

THE GOSPEL AND THE PASSION

From Martin Kähler to Frank Matera

"To state the matter somewhat provocatively, one could call the Gospels passion narratives with extended introductions."⁴ Writing a century ago (1896), Martin Kähler perhaps quite unintentionally thus set the twentieth-century agenda for study of the accounts of Jesus' last days. With this assertion, Kähler hoped to draw attention away from the Gospels as biographies designed to show the development of Jesus' self-consciousness. This emphasis on Jesus' growth as a person, Kähler thought, is contrary to the concerns of those responsible for the completion of the Gospels; the ancient church highlighted not Jesus' person but his work. Hence, the Gospels devote substantial space to the passion account, and with the onset of the passion, the Gospel narratives become relatively more detailed.

In the twentieth century, Kähler's "provocative" comment was taken as axiomatic.⁵ Whatever its original meaning, this statement was made to participate in a segregation of the accounts of the death of Jesus from those of his life—a segregation helped along by the efforts of form criticism through the 1960s. Dividing the Gospels into series of pericopes, each with its own tradition history, each serving its own particular purpose in the early church, form critics worked with such categories as "miracle story" and "pronouncement story," but they were generally unsuccessful at subjecting the passion narratives to similar analysis.⁶ They tended to assume the very early provenance of a passion account, noting the narrative's self-sufficiency and internal coherence and its indications of time and topography.⁷

That is, the isolation of the accounts of Jesus' suffering and death from the study of the Gospels more generally grew out of concerns with tradition and history. The consequence has been the further separation of the passion accounts from the Gospels with respect to theological interests and theme. In fact, Etienne Trocmé went so far as to insist that

⁴Martin Kähler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ* (ET; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964) 80 n. 11.

⁵This is especially true of study of the Second Gospel, with Kähler's statement often misquoted as referring only to the Gospel of Mark.

⁶Cf. esp. Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (ET; Cambridge: James Clarke, [1933] 1971) 22–23, 178–80; Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (ET; 1963; reprint, Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994) 275; Vincent Taylor, *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (London: Macmillan, 1949) 49–62.

⁷Cf., e.g., T. A. Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation: An Examination of the Philosophy of St. Mark's Gospel* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University, 1963) 219–20.

chs. 14–16 of the Gospel of Mark are unrelated theologically to Mark 1–13 and that the original edition of the Second Gospel ended with ch. 13.⁸ Separate from other Gospel accounts in tradition history, the passion accounts, it was thought, need not cohere with their respective Gospel narratives in theology, character development, narrative strategy, geographical interest, or otherwise.

It may not be surprising, then, that some of the first chinks in the armor of the form-critical consensus on the ancient, autonomous existence of the passion narrative came from studies locating bridges—especially christological—from Mark 1–13 to Mark 14–16.⁹ Flank attacks of this sort did not stop the advance of tradition-historical study, especially of the Markan passion account, however. The 1970s saw the publication of several fastidious and minutely detailed studies of Mark 14–15, dividing verses and half-verses among multiple layers of tradition and redaction.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it was increasingly clear that the more Mark 14–16 looked *Markan*, the less easy or necessary it was to argue for a thoroughgoing, pre-Markan passion account.¹¹

As has become increasingly obvious, the shape of this discussion on the origins of the passion narrative was itself problematic. The reason is that it tended to pit tradition and interpretation, history and theology against each other as though they were mutually exclusive categories.

⁸Etienne Trocmé, *The Formation of the Gospel according to Mark* (London: S.P.C.K., 1975) esp. 215–59; and idem, *The Passion as Liturgy: A Study in the Origin of the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (London: SCM, 1983) 7–19.

⁹E.g., Johannes Schreiber, *Theologie des Vertrauens: Eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung des Markusevangeliums* (Hamburg: Furche, 1967) 22–82; Eta Linnemann, *Studien zur Passionsgeschichte* (FRLANT 102; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970).

¹⁰E.g., Ludger Schenke, *Studien zur Passionsgeschichte des Markus: Tradition und Redaktion in Markus 14,1–42* (FB 4; Würzburg: Echter, 1971); and idem, *Der gekreuzigte Christus: Versuch einer literarkritischen und traditionsgeschichtlichen Bestimmung der vormarkinischen Passionsgeschichte* (SBS 69; Stuttgart: Katholisches, 1974); Detlev Dormeyer, *Die Passion Jesu als Verhaltensmodell: Literarische und theologische Analyse der Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte der Markuspassion* (NTAbh n.s. 11; Münster: Aschendorff, 1974); and idem, *Der Sinn des Leidens Jesu: Historisch-kritische und textpragmatische Analysen zur Markuspassion* (SBS 96; Stuttgart: Katholisches, 1979). On this and related study, see the surveys in John R. Donahue, “From Passion Traditions to Passion Narrative,” in *The Passion in Mark: Studies on Mark 14–16*, ed. Werner H. Kelber (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 1–20; Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus: Tradition and Interpretation in the Passion Narrative* (WUNT 2:33; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1988) 9–14.

¹¹See, e.g., Werner H. Kelber (“Conclusion: From Passion Narrative to Gospel,” in *Passion in Mark*, 153–80 [157]): “*The understanding of Mk 14–16 as a theologically integrated part of the Mkan Gospel calls into question the classic form critical thesis concerning an independent and coherent Passion Narrative prior to Mk*” (italics original); Frank J. Matera, *The Kingship of Jesus: Composition and Theology in Mark 15* (SBLDS 66; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1982).

Of course, Willi Marxsen had noted, early on, the possibility that the Gospels were written *backwards*, so to speak: "Mark thus prefixes the passion story with the traditions of Jesus, and prefixes that tradition with the tradition about the Baptist."¹² Such a procedure could explain both the existence of a pre-Markan passion account and the existence of theological and narrative coherence between these two sections of Mark. But this does not address the more fundamental problem to which we have pointed. This is the reality that in the last decades of the twentieth century, the positivist segregation of "what actually happened" and "what was perceived to be meaningful" has become obscured. That is, significance is attributed to events even as decisions are made about *what* will be remembered and *how*, and this process of meaning making does not await the efforts of those, like Mark or Luke, who write it down.¹³ To the degree that these efforts proceeded along a line of investigation hoping to find uninterpreted "events" under the rocks of theological interests, then, such efforts were flawed from the outset.

Urs Sommer's recent study, *Die Passionsgeschichte des Markusevangeliums*, underscores this transformation.¹⁴ He notes that the characterization of the Gospels in general and the passion narratives in particular as faith documents is problematic precisely because it seems to pit "objective history" against "subjective faith." His historical and theological analysis of the Markan account of Jesus' suffering and death leads him to adopt the expression "testimony to faith" as a description of this narrative material, but only with qualifications. This is not testimony devoid of historical content, as though historical narrative necessarily lacks rhetorical aim. The passion narratives are theological discourse grounded in the narrative history of the passion of Jesus.

In recent years a number of other scholars have developed the significant literary and theological integration of Mark 14–15 with the rest of the Gospel while at the same time assuming that in narrating Jesus' passion, the second evangelist worked with a traditional account.¹⁵

A major shift in the study of the passion narratives was marked by the publication of *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies* by Frank J.

¹²Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969) 31.

¹³See, e.g., Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *CI* 7 (1980–81) 5–27; idem, "The Narrativization of Real Events," *CI* 7 (1980–81) 793–98; idem, "The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory," *HT* 23 (1984) 1–33; Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (The Frank W. Abrams Lectures; Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University, 1986).

¹⁴Urs Sommer, *Die Passionsgeschichte des Markusevangeliums: Überlegungen zur Bedeutung der Geschichte für den Glauben* (WUNT 2:58; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993).

¹⁵E.g., Christopher Bryan, *A Preface to Mark: Notes on the Gospel in Its Literary and Cultural Settings* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University, 1993) 112–19.

Matera.¹⁶ He does not eschew tradition-historical concerns but (1) provides an overview of each of the synoptic passion accounts, briefly addressing the question of sources; (2) provides a commentary on each synoptic passion account, attending especially to primary theological themes; then (3) traces the development of selected themes of each passion account through the Gospel narrative as a whole. The result is a deliberate move away from narrowly defined *historical* concerns toward the *theological* integration of each passion account within its respective Gospel.

The class of study represented by *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies* accents the role of the Gospels as whole narratives in the interpretation of Jesus' death. In his discussion of the theology of Jesus' death in the Gospel of Luke, for example, Matera underscores four motifs: "The Passion as the Destiny of Jesus," "The Passion as a Model of Discipleship," "The Passion as the Rejection of Jesus the Prophet," and "The Passion as the Death of God's Royal Son." This is not to say that contemporary Gospel study has fallen prey to what Kähler had opposed a century ago. Inquiry into the theologies of Jesus' death in the Gospels today is not especially motivated by an attempt to grapple with Jesus' development as a *person* or to discern the nature of his emerging *self-consciousness*—against which Kähler argued; rather, students of Jesus' passion now attempt to take with more seriousness the ways in which the evangelists characterize Jesus of Nazareth and demonstrate the relationship between his mission and his execution. This is the burden of Matera's monograph, but also of Donald Senior's "Passion Series" (see below) and the lengthy essay by Joel B. Green in *DJG*.¹⁷

Before surveying recent monographs treating the passion narratives of each Gospel, we draw attention to the encyclopedic treatment in *The Death of the Messiah* by Raymond E. Brown.¹⁸ Altogether, Brown devotes some 1600 pages in two volumes "to explain in detail what the evangelists intended and conveyed to their audiences by their narratives of the passion and death of Jesus."¹⁹ Given this objective, Brown surprisingly

¹⁶Frank J. Matera, *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies: Interpreting the Synoptics through Their Passion Stories* (TI; New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1986).

¹⁷Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew* (PS 1; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1985); idem, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (PS 2; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1984); idem, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke* (PS 3; Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989); and idem, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (PS 4; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1991); Joel B. Green, "Death of Jesus," *DJG*, 146–63.

¹⁸Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah—from Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives* (2 vols.; ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1994).

¹⁹Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 1.4; italics original.

elects to read the passion narratives of the four Gospels “horizontally” rather than “vertically”—that is, he examines each episode of the passion in all four Gospels simultaneously rather than treating each passion narrative on its own merits. This does not mean Brown is uninterested in the passion theology of each evangelist. He provides general introductions to the perspective each Gospel writer gives to the death of Jesus, then weaves into his episodic structure an ongoing discussion of the outlook of each Gospel account. It does mean, however, that one is unable easily to follow the development of, say, John’s passion theology from the beginning of his passion account to the end. Moreover, as the subtitle, “From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives,” suggests, Brown devotes relatively little space in his book to the passion theology of the whole of each Gospel, including material on Jesus’ suffering and death occurring proleptically, prior to the onset of the passion accounts. Finally, Brown is not concerned primarily with questions of a historical nature. He does not accord privilege to the question, What actually happened? Although he addresses questions of historicity (and also of composition), Brown’s principal intent is to comment on the text and not on its prehistory. In some ways, then, *The Death of the Messiah* provides a bridge from tradition-critical inquiry into a more narrative-oriented study of the death of Jesus in the four Gospels.

The Gospel of Matthew

Perhaps because of its similarities to the Gospel of Mark—on which, most scholars believe, the first evangelist was dependent—Matthew’s presentation of the death of Jesus has not received the attention given Mark’s or Luke’s. Two studies can be mentioned nevertheless.

First, Donald Senior has built on a previous study of the sources and redaction of the Matthean passion narrative with a second book exploring further the passion theology of Matthew.²⁰ The latter book, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew*, is structured in three parts—(1) a survey of the first twenty-five chapters of the Gospel in order to show how the death of Jesus has been looming before the reader almost from the very beginning of Matthew’s narrative of the good news; (2) a scene-by-scene exploration of the passion narrative of the Gospel; and (3) a relatively brief section constructing a synthesis of Matthew’s passion theology.

²⁰Donald Senior, *The Passion Narrative according to Matthew: A Redactional Study* (BETL 39; Louvain: Leuven University, 1975); and idem, *Passion of Jesus in Matthew*.

As helpful as it is in distilling contemporary Matthean scholarship into a highly informative and readable format, Senior's commentary on the passion narrative is not the chief contribution of his study. This lies elsewhere, especially in showing the degree to which the death of Jesus is integral to his identity and mission in the First Gospel ("the cross reveals the inner core of Jesus' commitment to give his life on behalf of the many")²¹ and in outlining the shape of Matthew's message of Jesus' suffering. Thus, Senior demonstrates how Jesus' passion is related, e.g., to *Christology* (revealing Jesus as God's faithful Son whose suffering and death is both redemptive and exemplary); to *discipleship* (underscoring the role of the disciples as people of "little faith" in Matthean perspective and highlighting the admirable faith of such "little people" as Mary Magdalene, "the other" Mary, and Joseph of Arimathea); and to *the suffering of God's people*.

More recently, John Paul Heil has attempted "A Narrative-Critical Reading of Matt 26–28."²² His point of departure is his understanding of the Gospels as "artistic, literary communications" designed to produce a "rhetorical effect" for their implied readers. Without employing the technical language of narrative criticism or rhetoric, Heil comments on the death and resurrection accounts of the Gospel of Matthew in order to explore how Matthew summons his audience to respond to the events unfolding before them. In fact, Heil participates more in a new-literary "close reading of the text" than in narratology, though he is able to suggest some illuminating relationships among the episodes in Matt 26–28. These narratives, he surmises, lead us into the story of the conflict of the human and divine and so better prepare us for a similar challenge in our own lives. Will we, like Jesus' enemies and friends, oppose or abandon God's plan in the midst of suffering? Will we, like Peter and Judas,²³ repent of our failings and follow the model of Jesus, who undergoes suffering without abandoning trust in God? Will we follow the line of faithful witnesses from the cross to the empty tomb and so be led into authentic faith in the crucified but risen Lord?

The Gospel of Mark

Senior's examination of the Markan passion account proceeds along a line similar to that already noted for Matthew—namely, a major section noting the ways Mark 1–13 prepares for the passion narrative, then a more detailed analysis of the Markan passion narrative itself, and

²¹Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Matthew*, 31.

²²John Paul Heil, *The Death and Resurrection of Jesus: A Narrative-Critical Reading of Matthew 26–28* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

²³Heil argues that Matthew presents Judas as repenting in the face of Jesus' innocence (*Death and Resurrection*, 67–69).

finally a thematic discussion of Mark's message of Jesus' suffering and death.²⁴ Senior is not concerned much with questions of sources or historicity but employs composition criticism to shed light on Mark's literary and theological achievement.

In order to clarify the profound degree to which Mark prepares for the passion account, Senior addresses four themes from Mark 1–13: the passion of John the Baptist, narrated in such a way as to anticipate Jesus' own trial and death; the plot against Jesus, which surfaces as early in the narrative as Mark 3:6; the journey of Jesus and the disciples in Mark 8–10, with its emphasis on Jesus' predictions of execution; and, very briefly, the warning of impending ordeal for the church. Here and in his appraisal of the Markan passion narrative itself, Senior underscores how Jesus cannot be understood or authentically confessed as Christ apart from his fundamental identity as the Crucified One.

Although he is fully aware of the importance of the cross for Mark's Christology, Senior's examination is also of interest for the way it draws out the implications of Jesus' suffering for those who wish to follow Jesus. This, too, is the concern of a recent book by Joel B. Green entitled *The Way of the Cross*, the approach of which is also literary-theological.²⁵ Green maintains throughout his exploration of Mark that the second evangelist's concern is pastoral; Mark encourages his readers to ground their understanding of discipleship in their understanding of Jesus, and he roots his portrait of Jesus as God's Son in his divine mandate: "He is God's Son, and this means above all being obedient to God in sacrificial service, even when the way of God leads to Golgotha."²⁶

These two books, by Senior and Green, are written with the purpose of bringing the insights of biblical scholarship to a wider audience. A further monograph, by Joel Marcus, is itself an important contribution to Markan study and, in terms of our interest in the death of Jesus, is significant for its exploration of the use of the OT by the second evangelist.²⁷ Marcus devotes a complete chapter to OT citations and allusions in Mark 14–16, focusing on four bodies of OT literature: Zech 9–14, Dan 7, the Psalms of the Suffering Righteous, and the Isaianic Servant Songs. He turns a sensitive ear to the many echoes of these OT texts in the Markan passion account and is thus more open than some twentieth-century scholarship to the imaginative interplay of passion narrative and OT prefigurations. He is also able to show how the use of the OT in the Markan narrative—some uses of which he takes to be

²⁴Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Mark*.

²⁵Joel B. Green, *The Way of the Cross: Following Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1991).

²⁶Green, *Way of the Cross*, 43.

²⁷Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992).

traditional, others he attributes to Markan innovation—portrays Jesus' suffering in an apocalyptic context that invites believers to see in their own suffering an invitation to cross bearing and an anticipation of divine vindication.

We have already had occasion briefly to mention a recently completed German dissertation by Urs Sommer on the passion narrative in the Gospel of Mark.²⁸ In some ways, Sommer's examination is reminiscent of earlier study concerned with historical questions and the contribution of Mark to the story of Jesus' execution. His analysis of Mark 14–16 is framed, however, by a quite distinct agenda, represented in the subtitle of his work: "Reflections on the Significance of Historical Narrative (*Geschichte*) for Faith." That is, Sommer wants to know how faith (and unbelief) might be related to the narrated history of the suffering of Jesus. In this way he navigates between simplistic categorizations of the Markan passion account as "fiction" or "fact" and queries how the reader might respond to this historical narrative.

The Gospel of Luke

The Third Gospel has attracted perhaps more than its share of attention among those interested in the death of Jesus. This is due to a number of factors—e.g., the enigma of Luke's presentation of Jesus' crucifixion, apparently devoid of soteriological meaning;²⁹ the concomitant view that Luke's Jesus dies the death of a martyr;³⁰ and the widespread but much-debated view that Luke 22–23 preserves an account of Jesus' passion that is not dependent on the Gospel of Mark.³¹

Taking as his point of departure an assumption of the unity of Luke and Acts and working within the rubrics of new literary criticism, Joseph Tyson has investigated how the third evangelist portrays the death of Jesus in Luke–Acts.³² Interestingly, he does so not by focusing narrowly on the passion narrative of Luke but by tracing Luke's depiction of Jesus'

²⁸Sommer, *Passionsgeschichte*.

²⁹Cf., e.g., Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (ET; New York: Harper & Row; London: Faber & Faber, 1960; reprint, London: SCM, 1982) 201.

³⁰See the discussion in Brian E. Beck, "'Imitatio Christi' and the Lucan Passion Narrative," in *Suffering and Martyrdom in the New Testament: Studies Presented to G. M. Styler by the Cambridge New Testament Seminar*, ed. William Horbury and Brian McNeil (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981) 28–47.

³¹This view is supported, e.g., by Vincent Taylor, *The Passion Narrative of St. Luke: A Critical and Historical Investigation*, ed. Owen E. Evans (SNTSMS 19; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1972); Green, *Death of Jesus*, esp. 24–104.

³²Joseph B. Tyson, *The Death of Jesus in Luke–Acts* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1986).

relations to others within the narrative—the Jewish public, the Jewish leaders, and Jerusalem and the temple—before examining in more detail the trial of Jesus. This allows him to bestow special significance to the motif of conflict in the Gospel³³—conflict that adds to the dramatic interest in the narrative, accents Jesus' legal innocence over against the Jewish leadership, and creates an arena in which Luke can emphasize his conviction regarding the divine necessity of Jesus' death. All of this suggests for Tyson that Luke's passion theology is controlled by the identity of his own community, a Christian community that was anti-priestly and pro-Roman and, though perhaps regretting its segregation from Judaism, blamed this break on the Jews.

Robert Karris has also adopted a literary approach in his presentation of "Luke's Passion Account as Literature."³⁴ How does Jesus get to the cross, according to Luke? This is a central question for Karris, and his answer lays special stress on Jesus' eating habits—or, at least, on Jesus' commitment to justice and faithfulness as this is embodied in his table fellowship with outcasts.

As with his other contributions to the Passion Series, Senior's *Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke* sets Luke's interpretation of the death of Jesus within the context of the larger Lukan narrative. Hence, he devotes the first major section of his book to Luke 1–21, exploring how Luke's narrative of the birth and ministry of Jesus prepares for and interprets the passion. Senior draws special attention to the challenge of justice, breaking the boundaries, Jesus as the rejected prophet-martyr, the test of evil, and the divine destiny of Christ. Study of these themes accentuates Senior's view that "death comes as no surprise to Jesus but as part of his God-given mission, a fearful yet inevitable climax to a prophetic destiny,"³⁵ and leads to an engaging, scene-by-scene commentary on Luke 22–23. How is Jesus' death related to Luke's overall portrayal of Jesus? Senior believes Luke does present Jesus' death as integral to his redemptive mission, and he draws particular attention to the fate of the repentant criminal on the cross (Luke 23:43).³⁶ He also develops Luke's concerns with Jesus' death as the obedient and trusting Son of God, with God's validation of Jesus' mission and message even in the jaws of death, and with the conquest of evil in Jesus' passion.

³³See also Joseph B. Tyson, "Conflict as a Literary Theme in the Gospel of Luke," in *New Synoptic Studies: The Cambridge Gospel Conference and Beyond*, ed. William R. Farmer (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University, 1983) 303–27; cf. Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Luke: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

³⁴Robert J. Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian. Luke's Passion Account as Literature* (TI, New York/Mahwah, N.J./Toronto: Paulist, 1985).

³⁵Senior, *Passion of Jesus in Luke*, 17.

³⁶Similarly, cf. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Luke the Theologian: Aspects of His Teaching* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1989) 203–33.

Shunning any narrow commitment to questions of historicity or Luke's sources, Jerome Neyrey bases his *Passion according to Luke* on his view of Luke as "a learned and creative author," "a master of literary styles."³⁷ Compared with the previously noted books, Neyrey's is significant for its greater attention to the relation of the passion narrative to parallels in the Acts of the Apostles; he finds in Luke's second volume, e.g., analogues for Jesus' farewell address and trial. Nevertheless, vis-à-vis the Third Gospel, his study is concerned more narrowly with Luke 22–23, and he provides a detailed redaction-critical analysis of these chapters. In spite of his characterization of the third evangelist as "learned and creative," Neyrey is unable to find any common interpretive threads by which to hold together Luke's presentation of Jesus' passion.

In 1990, Dennis Sylva edited a collection of essays entitled *Reimagining the Death of the Lukan Jesus*, a primary purpose of which was to call into question the often repeated notion that Luke presents Jesus' death as that of a martyr.³⁸ Although these essays follow no common method, they do surface other key questions in the contemporary study of Jesus' death in Luke—a theological rationale for the lack of atonement theology in Luke–Acts coupled with an unparalleled stress on the divine necessity of the Messiah's death; the attitude of Luke toward the Jewish people as this is worked out in Luke's narration of Jesus' rejection and execution; and the implications of Jesus' message (including his death) for the Roman Empire. These are not settled issues, however, and studies of Jesus' death in Luke–Acts must revisit them.

The Gospel of John

The passion account of the Fourth Gospel has always presented special problems, most related to the distinctive character of the Gospel of John vis-à-vis the Synoptics.³⁹ For example, although the first three Gospels locate material related to Jesus' suffering and death in a tightly woven narrative, John disperses some of this same material throughout his Gospel. The prayer in Gethsemane in Mark 14:32–42 has a parallel earlier in John's Gospel, in 12:27–30; the anointing of Jesus in Mark's account occurs two days before Passover (14:3–9), according to John six days before (12:1–8); and so on. Second, even though the passion narrative proper in John is often judged to commence with Jesus' trial in ch. 18, almost one-half of the Gospel is given over to Jesus' last week

³⁷ Jerome Neyrey, *The Passion according to Luke: A Redaction Study of Luke's Soteriology* (TI; New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist, 1985) 1–2.

³⁸Dennis D. Sylva, ed., *Reimagining the Death of the Lukan Jesus* (AMT:BBB 73; Frankfurt am Main: Anton Hain, 1990).

³⁹Cf. Green, *Death of Jesus*, 105–34.

(John 12–21), with five chapters devoted to Jesus' final discourse (John 13–17). Third, it is in the passion material that John's Gospel is closest to the synoptic tradition, so this has been the focus of discussion on the possible literary relationship between the Synoptics and John.⁴⁰ Finally, within the passion narrative itself, John's portrayal of Jesus departs from that of the other canonical Gospels by its heightened emphasis on irony and Jesus' majesty.

These and other important motifs are developed helpfully in Donald Senior's final contribution to the Passion Series, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of John*. The format of his study is now familiar: a general overview of the Gospel to show how John's narrative prepares for, and is integrated with, the passion of Jesus, followed by a more detailed analysis of the passion account itself, with a concluding section devoted to John's passion theology. The distinctive character of John's account allows Senior to focus on such themes as the role of the execution of Jesus in his journey as God's Son from incarnation to glorification; Jesus and his opponents; and the suffering of Jesus and discipleship.

The significant integration of Jesus' death into the overall Johannine story of Jesus has also been examined by Godfrey C. Nicholson.⁴¹ Jesus has come from God, and in the passion narrative Jesus is shown to return to God; John's concern was to situate the death of Jesus within the context of the movement of the Son back to his Father. Hence, for John the death of Jesus was not an inexplicable calamity, but neither is John's presentation controlled by the categories of sacrifice and atonement (even if these are present—cf. John 1:29).

Rather, the Johannine Passion Narrative is presented in terms of victory and glory: Jesus gives himself up to his arrestors, he becomes the judge, he is crowned as king and his cross becomes his throne. When he is ready to die (and not before), having put his own house in order, he lays down his life before anyone can take it from him (cf. 10:17f.).⁴²

Carrying forward his ongoing study of the shape of Christian persuasion in the Roman world, Richard Cassidy's "new perspective" on John's Gospel includes an interesting study of the Johannine report of

⁴⁰See D. Moody Smith, *John among the Gospels: The Relationship in Twentieth-Century Research* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 111–37; also Anton Dauer, *Die Passionsgeschichte im Johannesevangelium: Eine traditions-geschichtliche und theologische Untersuchung zu John 18,1–19,30* (SANT 30; Munich: Kösel, 1972); Till Arend Mohr, *Markus- und Johannespassion: Redaktions- und traditions-geschichtliche Untersuchungen der Markinischen und Johanneischen Passionstradition* (ATANT 70; Zurich: Theologischer, 1982).

⁴¹Godfrey C. Nicholson, *Death as Departure: The Johannine Descent-Ascent Schema* (SBLDS 63; Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1983).

⁴²Nicholson, *Death as Departure*, 3.

Jesus' Roman trial.⁴³ He regards this section of the Gospel as carefully plotted, dramatic in its presentation, as it shows how "Jesus comes to be tried before the Roman governor because he insists upon his own exalted identity and sharply attacks the Pharisees and the chief priests ('the Jews') for refusing to accept him."⁴⁴ On the one hand, Cassidy notes the evangelist's interest in the salvific consequences of Jesus' death, highlighted in an ironic way in the words of Caiaphas (John 11:47–53). On the other, through a series of six interchanges between Pilate and Jesus' adversaries—especially the Pharisees and chief priests—a more distinctively political element is brought into relief. Jesus is portrayed as sovereign in a way that supplants any possibility of support for the worship of the emperor, but also in a way that allows no room for violent resistance against Rome. Christians on trial as Christians are challenged to follow Jesus' example—calling into question the supremacy of Rome, bearing witness to the truth of the good news, inviting Rome and its representatives to faith.

In contrast to such readings of John's passion theology, J. Duncan M. Derrett argues that the fourth evangelist presents Jesus as a willing sacrificial victim.⁴⁵ Jesus is thus the victim in a double sense—the one executed at Israel's behest and the one whose sacrificial death was a vicarious atonement for the sins of the nation. As is typical of Derrett's other works, this one reexamines an important aspect of the Gospel from a vantage point very much outside the mainstream of Gospel study. In this case, the author is particularly influenced by his perception of sometimes quite evasive allusions to the OT, discerned between the lines of the Johannine narrative.

FAMILIAR QUESTIONS

If studies of the death of Jesus have focused more and more on the individual passion theologies of each evangelist and if a wide-angle lens has been used in such studies to situate the suffering and rejection of Jesus more fully in the narrative portrayal of his life in each Gospel, this does not mean that older and more familiar questions have been discarded completely. The question of the origin of the passion narrative

⁴³Richard J. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1992) 40–53. Cf. his earlier *Jesus, Politics, and Society: A Study of Luke's Gospel* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1978); and *idem, Society and Politics in the Acts of the Apostles* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987).

⁴⁴Cassidy, *John's Gospel*, 41.

⁴⁵J. Duncan M. Derrett, *The Victim: The Johannine Passion Narrative Reexamined* (Shipston-on-Stour, England: Drinkwater, 1993).

continues to be raised, in spite of premature conclusions in some, especially North American, circles that this had been resolved in favor of the hypothesis that the second evangelist was its architect. Moreover, the debate over the relation of the Scriptures of Israel to the passion accounts—creative or interpretive agent?—persists. Jesus studies, and especially the recovery of Jesus' social context in ancient Palestine, have brought into focus a third, now ongoing issue of a more narrowly historical sort. Why was Jesus executed? Pursued along *historical* lines, this issue nonetheless is implicated in profoundly significant *theological* concerns.

The Origin of the Passion Narrative

In the last decade or so, investigation of the origin of the passion narrative has been carried on less in order to isolate the possible sources of Mark 14–15;⁴⁶ instead, more attention has been paid to the possibility of non-Markan sources behind the Johannine and Lukan passion narratives. Till Arend Mohr, for example, argues that the Markan and Johannine passion accounts are independent of one another, with John's source actually the more primitive of the two.⁴⁷ Matti Myllykoski also focuses on the passion narratives of the second and fourth Gospels;⁴⁸ he assumes their independence and so, in his analysis of the Markan material, turns repeatedly to the Johannine for verification of his proposals about the traditional material employed by Mark. He believes that an old passion report began with the entry of Jesus and the Twelve into Jerusalem, followed by the scene of provocation at the temple, moving to the conspiracy scene of Mark 14:1–2, 10–11, then to the arrest scene and the examination of Jesus before the high priest. In vol. 2 of this study of "The Last Days of Jesus," he argues that this "old passion account" extended to include, in the briefest terms, a hearing before Pilate and a report of the crucifixion. This passion report accorded privilege to the question of Jesus' identity as "King of the Jews"—a focus consonant with its beginning in the early Christian mission, where the death of Jesus was characterized as the death of the Messiah. In his view,

⁴⁶See, however, the recent conclusion in favor of a pre-Markan passion narrative in Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) ch. 4. C. Clifton Black (*The Disciples according to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate* [JSNTSup 27; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989]) has shown how easily efforts at discerning redaction and tradition in Mark belie the preconceptions of those doing the discerning.

⁴⁷Mohr, *Markus- und Johannespassion*.

⁴⁸Matti Myllykoski, *Die letzten Tage Jesu: Markus und Johannes, ihre Traditionen und die historische Frage* (2 vols.; Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemia Toimituksia, Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae B/256 and B/272; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1991–1994).

this account evolved into “an expanded passion narrative,” which was then developed independently by Mark and John into their passion narratives.

The source-critical study of Marion Soards centers on the possibility that the third evangelist had access to a non-Markan passion source.⁴⁹ He concludes that Luke 22:1–71 represents Luke’s redaction of the parallel material in Mark, together with “special Lukan material” (e.g., 22:3a, 15a–16c, and 19a–20c) derived either from Lukan composition or Luke’s access to oral tradition. Etienne Trocmé, on the other hand, holds that Luke’s narrative of Jesus’ suffering and death is not at all based on the Gospel of Mark; in addition, he finds that the Fourth Gospel includes a passion account built along the same lines as, but not dependent on, the synoptic narratives.⁵⁰ Trocmé goes on to argue that an archetypal account of the passion, used independently by Mark, Luke, and John, dates back to the period before 40 C.E. and had its beginnings in the liturgical commemoration of Jesus’ death by Christians during the Jewish celebration of Passover.

Three broadly conceived studies have been written by John Dominic Crossan, Joel B. Green, and Wolfgang Reinbold.⁵¹ Of these, the most provocative is Crossan’s. He argues that the earliest stratum of the apocryphal *Gospel of Peter* was a self-contained narrative of Jesus’ passion and resurrection. This primitive account—the “Cross Gospel,” according to Crossan—was composed of three narrative units: (1) crucifixion and deposition of Jesus, (2) tomb and guards, and (3) resurrection and confession. Mark’s passion account has as its sole source this Cross Gospel; Matthew and Luke made use of both Mark’s narrative and the Cross Gospel; John used all three synoptic accounts together with the Cross Gospel; and the *Gospel of Peter* was produced by the combination of the Cross Gospel with material from the four canonical Gospels. Crossan supports his theory in a detailed exegesis of each scene of the *Gospel of Peter*, drawing on a wide array of, especially, extracanonical Christian literature. For him, the dominant influence in the process of constructing the passion narratives was *passion prophecy*—i.e., the fabrication of passion events from OT texts.

By comparison, Green’s work is more traditional. He regards the *Gospel of Peter* as secondary, dependent on the canonical Gospels.⁵² He

⁴⁹Marion L. Soards, *The Passion according to Luke: The Special Material of Luke 22* (JSNTSup 14; Sheffield: JSOT, 1987).

⁵⁰Trocmé, *The Passion as Liturgy*.

⁵¹John Dominic Crossan, *The Cross That Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988); Green, *Death of Jesus*; Wolfgang Reinbold, *Der älteste Bericht über den Tod Jesu: Literarische Analyse und historische Kritik der Passionsdarstellungen der Evangelien* (BZNTW 69; Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994).

⁵²Joel B. Green, “The *Gospel of Peter*: Source for a Pre-canonical Passion

thus builds his analysis of a precanonical passion narrative on the basis of (1) his arguments for Luke's use of a non-Markan passion account in addition to Mark and for the literary independence of Mark and John and (2) a detailed comparison of these three "sources" of the passion tradition. In his view, the early and ongoing practice of the Lord's Supper in the life of the church provided the setting for the development of the narrative tradition of Jesus' passion.

Like Green, Wolfgang Reinbold regards the *Gospel of Peter* as secondary and argues for the basic literary independence of John and the Synoptics.⁵³ Against Green, though, Reinbold regards the hypothesis of a special, Lukan passion source as unnecessary and so treats the Gospels of Mark and John as "primary tradition" for Jesus' passion. This analysis leads to the designation of "the earliest passion account" in nine scenes: resolution to have Jesus executed; entry into Jerusalem; last meal with the announcements of betrayal and denial; arrest; hearing before the high priest and denial of Peter; hearing before Pilate and the Barabbas episode; scourging and mockery; crucifixion and death; and burial. According to Reinbold, this account was available in written form as a report of historical narrative, a "narrative concerning the death of Jesus Christ" (διήγησις περὶ τοῦ θανάτου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, *diēgēsis peri tou thanatou Iēsou Christou*.)

Early on in his analysis, Reinbold insists that the issue of historical veracity must be kept separate from the literary identification of an early passion tradition. Not surprisingly, then, he devotes part 2 of his monograph to a more narrowly focused historical analysis—first of the various scenes of "the oldest passion account," then of various secondary elements in the wider passion tradition and relevant testimony about Jesus' death elsewhere in the NT and beyond. Interestingly, Reinbold finds that the theological concerns emphasized in the unhistorical material of "the earliest passion account" underscored Jesus' innocence according to the Roman perspective and the complicity of the Jews in the crucifixion of Jesus.

The Old Testament and the Gospel Passion Accounts

Early in the twentieth century, Martin Dibelius had postulated the formative role of the OT in the developing passion tradition. Some more recent critics have pushed Dibelius's hypothesis to the limit, arguing that the earliest passion accounts had little or no historical basis but are based entirely on contemplation of the OT. As we have noted, this is the view of Crossan, and on this point he is joined by others, including

Narrative?" ZNW 78 (1987) 293–301.

⁵³Reinbold, *Der älteste Bericht über den Tod Jesu*.

Werner Kelber.⁵⁴ Whether the OT served above all as the basis for the creation of passion material in the absence of historical memory or was most prominent for its interpretive agency has thus become a topic of discussion, taken up at length by Douglas Moo.⁵⁵

Moo locates his examination of the use of the OT in the Gospel passion accounts within a larger exploration of contemporary Jewish hermeneutics. Appealing to a range of biblical interpretations within the period of Second Temple Judaism, Moo argues against the assumption that biblical texts might exercise a creative influence at the point of application. Even though OT texts were often conscripted for the interpretive agenda of Jewish writers and communities, narrative does not appear to have been created on the basis of Scripture. Rather, Moo points out, more evidence exists for emendation of the scriptural text in order to make it fit more closely the shape of recent events.

One other point about recent study of the OT and the passion theology of the Gospels is worth mentioning. This is the growing recognition of the phenomenon of intertextuality in the NT materials as a whole and in the passion accounts in particular. Previous scholarship had insisted on plain, explicit evidence for the deliberate citation of OT materials and often treated the use of OT texts in an atomistic way. As illustrated, for example, by the study of Joel Marcus (noted above, and see ch. 11 below), students of the Gospel passion accounts are more and more ready to explore how these narratives are engaged in an interplay of other texts and so exist as nodes within a larger literary and interpretive scriptural network.

What Killed Jesus?

Until recently, the question, What killed Jesus? was especially related to Jesus' foreknowledge or intent: Did Jesus "intend" his death? Did he anticipate his death? Did he interpret his death?⁵⁶ Contemporary installments to the quest of the historical Jesus have given this matter a new twist, however. In fact, John Meier, whose recently published tome covers only matters preliminary to a discussion of the historical Jesus, goes so far as to list as a criterion for determining what

⁵⁴Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel: The Hermeneutics of Speaking and Writing in the Synoptic Tradition, Mark, Paul, and Q* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 196–97.

⁵⁵Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983); cf. R. T. France and David Wenham, eds., *Studies in Midrash and Historiography* (GP 3; Sheffield: JSOT, 1983).

⁵⁶Cf., e.g., Joachim Gnllka, "Wie urteilte Jesus über seine Tod?" in *Der Tod Jesu: Deutungen im Neuen Testament*, ed. Karl Kertelge (QD 74; Freiburg/Basel/Vienna: Herder, 1976) 13–50; Rudolph Pesch, *Das Abendmahl und Jesu Todesverständnis* (QD 80; Freiburg/Basel/Vienna: Herder, 1978).

material actually comes from Jesus the "Criterion of Rejection and Execution": what historical words and deeds of Jesus can explain his trial and crucifixion as "King of the Jews"?⁵⁷

Why did Jesus have to die? Several answers have been given. Jesus had to die as a religious deceiver and false prophet, according to Deut 13.⁵⁸ Jesus, in his saying about the Son of humanity (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, *ho huios tou anthrōpou*) seated at the right hand of God, committed blasphemy, a capital violation.⁵⁹ Jesus' teachings threatened the sensitive coexistence of Jewish and Roman authority, and even Roman sovereignty itself⁶⁰—though this is not necessarily to characterize Jesus as a "zealot."⁶¹ And so on.

The magnitude of the question, What killed Jesus? for historical scholarship arises out of the virtual certainty of Jesus' execution by means of crucifixion—a form of capital punishment ordinarily reserved for Roman military and political punishment—by the Romans.⁶² And it is against this question that contemporary attempts to present the historical Jesus will be measured.⁶³

⁵⁷John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1991) 177. Cf. Ellis Rivkin, *What Crucified Jesus? The Political Execution of a Charismatic* (Nashville: Abingdon; London: SCM, 1984); Francis Watson, "Why Was Jesus Crucified?" *Theology* 88 (1985) 105–12.

⁵⁸Cf. Graham N. Stanton, "Jesus of Nazareth: A Magician and False Prophet Who Deceived God's People?" in *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1994) 164–80; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Jesus of Nazareth—Christ of Faith* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1993) 42–47.

⁵⁹Darrell L. Bock, "The Son of Man Seated at God's Right Hand and the Debate over Jesus' 'Blasphemy,'" in Green and Turner, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 181–91.

⁶⁰Nils A. Dahl, "Messianic Ideas and the Crucifixion of Jesus," rev. Donald H. Juel, in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 382–403. E. P. Sanders (*Jesus and Judaism* [London: SCM, 1985]) relates Jesus' political threat to his prophetic act against the Jerusalem temple.

⁶¹See the thoroughgoing denial of the characterization of Jesus as a revolutionary in Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule, eds., *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984).

⁶²Cf. A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982) 11–12.

⁶³Thus, e.g., Stephen Mitchell's "historical Jesus" fails to convince. In *The Gospel according to Jesus: A New Translation and Guide to His Essential Teachings for Believers and Unbelievers* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991) he allows no room for the historical Jesus to have provoked opposition sufficient to lead to his death by execution.

Conclusion

Clearly, this central ingredient of Christian faith, the death of Jesus, continues to excite the interest of students of the NT. For study of the enigma of his crucifixion, multiple methods are being engaged—literary and narratological, literary-theological, social-scientific, and more traditional, historical approaches. This is a consequence of the several levels of meaning contemporary study seeks to discern, for the focus today is both on why the historical Jesus was executed in so brutal and dishonorable a manner and on how those early Christians worked to make sense of his ignominious demise.