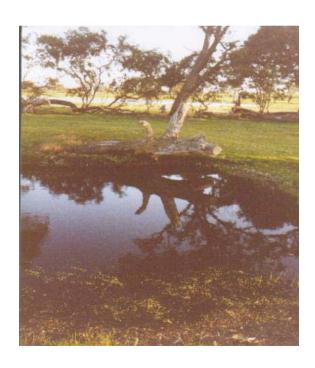# TOWARDS A SOCIOLOGICAL

INTERPRETATION OF THE GOSPELS

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Towards a Sociological Interpretation of the Gospels

CONTENTS

1.   Outline of "A Problem"

In the world of the Church there has been on-going conflict,
especially since the Vatican II Council of the 1960's, between
what is called the "left" and the "right."   In politics it is accepted
that both sides of the Parliament can make a contribution,
depending on the circumstances.   But in the Church it is often
inferred that only "one" point of view can be the correct one.
This cannot be so surprising given the theology of the Church
that it is "one." But the view that the Church should be 'biased'
towards one or other or neither position can result in the down-
grading of essential components in the Church.   A case in point
here is the present position of Catholic Religious in the
developed world. They may not appear to be involved in the
left/right conflicts.   But their circumstances suggest more
sociological work needs to be done to understand where, if any,
their rightful place in the church actually is.   Consider. "The
median age of all religious in Australia in 2009 was 73 years."[1] .
The numbers of Catholic Religious in Australia dropped from
about 19,000 in the late 1960's to about 8,000 in 2010. [2]   Many
Orders are on the verge of non-existence.   Yet the official
Church claims that Religious Life exists at its very heart and it
"undeniably belongs to its life and holiness."[3]   There is an
anomaly here.

A sociological interpretation of the gospels could throw more
light on the message that "in my Father's house there are many
mansions." (John: 14.2).   It may help to throw light on both the
on-going conflict and the social phenomenon of "no vocations."

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[1] Stephen Reid, Robert Dixon and Noel Connelly, *See I am Doing a New Thing: A report on the 2009 Survey of Catholic Religious Institutes in Australia* (Fitzroy: Australian Catholic Bishops Conference and Catholic Religious Australia, 2010), 2.
[2] Reid, *See I am Doing a New Thing,* 6.
[3] Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, in *The Documents of Vatican II,* ed. W.M.Abbot, trans. J. Gallagher (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), n. 44.

In 1993 the Pontifical Commission of the Catholic Church, headed by Cardinal Ratzinger, urged that a *synchronic,* multi-disciplinary approach be added to gospel interpretation.[4] This included the use of sociology. Twenty years after their statement, it is opportune to explore how far their recommended approach has come. Have the range of *synchronic* approaches increased in credibility amongst biblical scholars and can they throw light on the dilemmas of the present Church? Also to what extent were these methods integrated into the interpretation of first century CE writers?

2. Development of the Historical Critical Method of Interpretation

In this exploration let us first look at four interpretative assumptions about Scripture at the time of the first century CE The Scriptures were cryptic, relevant, perfect and the Word of God.[5] Interpretation, which was on-going, even as Scripture was being written [6] sought to explain the texts that appeared to contradict any of these four assumptions.[7] Also differing degrees of status were given to interpreters [8]. After the final formulation of the Christian Canon and through the centuries to follow it was the Church that took on the major role of interpretation.

After the Reformation there was another shift in this situation. The emerging Protestant tradition did not recognise the authority of the Church Magisterium. Alternative explanations of Scriptural unity were therefore needed to be found. Luther simplified the problem by saying the literal or grammatical or

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[4] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," *Origins,* Vol 23, n.29 (Washington: C.N.S., 1994) 497-524.

[5] James L. Kugel, *The Bible As It Was* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press,1998), 18-23.

[6] Kugel, *The Bible As It Was,* xv.

[7] Kugel, *The Bible As It Was,* xiv.

[8] Kugel, *The Bible As It Was,* 3.

historical sense is the true sense.[9] Calvin claimed Christ is the subject matter of the whole Bible and he saw God's Word as equally pervading all scriptural texts.[10] Later on Spinoza (1634-77) claimed the meaning of the Biblical narratives did not lie in their historical truth.[11] There were other proposed answers to the problem as well.

With the Age of Enlightenment (17th and 18th centuries) there was an increased challenge to the historical credibility of the Bible. In order to deal with this, the Protestant tradition evolved the Historical Critical method of interpretation.[12] This explored the historical background of stories and their likely historicity. It also sought out the original meanings of words and the literary forms to be found in the biblical text. Scholars focussed on those sections of Scripture that appeared to have relevance to their own situation and which, according to their research, they could demonstrate to be historical. The Historical Critical method helped to deal with the claims that the Bible was 'only' a collection of myths.[13] In the C20th archaeological findings endorsed the method by showing many of the details of Old Testament stories, did in fact reflect the customs of the time. The historian John Bright[14] and the archaeologist William F. Albright were prominent in improving the credibility of Bible stories.[15]

[9] Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974) 18-19.
[10] Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 19, 21.
[11] Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 44.
[12] Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 8.
[13] Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 277.
[14] John Bright, *A History of Israel,* (London: SCM Press, 1981)
[15] William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel: new introduction by Theodore J. Lewis,* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminister John Knox Press, c2006).

3.   Catholic response to
Historical Criticism

The Catholic response to historical criticism was slow, partly because of an early anti-church bias taken by some interpreters. However by the 1940's an encyclical by Pius XII recognised there was value in the further studies of linguistics and background.[16] The Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome was set up to train clergy in a better understanding of these studies.[17] At the same time Rome continued to exercise control over research by requiring that no one could be made a Professor of Scripture in a seminary without having been trained in this Institute.[18] A document on interpretation written by Vatican II in the 1960's gave further endorsement to the Historical Critical method of interpretation.[19]

The advantages of using this method of interpretation developed further and became more acceptable in the Catholic Church until its Pontifical Biblical Commission conceded it is "the indispensable method for the scientific study of the meaning of ancient texts."[20] But even as the method has developed, its limitations have also become apparent. It is claimed for instance that it puts a focus on learning 'about' the Bible rather than 'from' the Bible.[21] It tends to focus on the past. Its scientific base makes its users less accepting of a "cryptic" meaning to biblical texts. Its focus on what is relevant to the researcher means it tends to overlook the overall relevance of the text.[22] In particular, because the method looks at sections of a biblical

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[16] Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (The Most Opportune Way to Promote Biblical Studies 1943) (Glen rock N.J.: Deus/Paulist, 1961).
[17] Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu,* para. 723.
[18] Pius XII, *Divino Afflante Spiritu,* para. 724.
[19] Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, in *The Documents of Vatican II,* ed. W.M.Abbot, trans. J. Gallagher (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), n. 12
[20] Pontifical Biblical Commission, 500.
[21] Kugel, *The Bible As It Was,* 544.
[22] Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Augsbert: Fortress Press, 1990), 91.

book, a sense of the whole structure can be lost. As the Commission describes, the method takes a *diachronic* approach to scriptural text and the Commission points out it is now in competition with methods that insist upon a *synchronic* understanding of texts.[23]

It has been said one of the great attractions of using the Historical Critical Method of interpretation has been its relationship to science and therefore its likelihood of improving the credibility of the Bible.[24] The Catholic Commission agrees with this but also recommends the use of a number of *synchronic* methods of interpretation which it believes should help interpreters to consider the texts in their final and complete form.

It might be pointed out that there has been an irony in the exploration of the range of disciplines in Scriptural Interpretation. Such exploration requires freedom to be exercised by Scholars. But if the Roman Pontifical Institute itself has a heavily endorsed discipline of historical criticism then other more *synchronic* methods of interpretation can tend to be downplayed. For instance, an unpublished comment about a biblical course in Rome around 2011, said a whole term was taken up looking at the passion story in the gospel of Mark. This of course is laudable. But one wonders if students get the opportunity to see this section in the context of the whole gospel? Over-emphasis on the *diachronic* method in Rome would affect the approach taken by seminary professors around the world.

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[23] Pontifical Biblical Commission, 500.
[24] Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 323.

4. The Development of Narrative Criticism

Despite restraints, methods of interpretation, besides the historical critical method, have evolved to some extent. In the 1970's the Gospel of Mark was considered at length in terms of its literary narrative by David Rhoads and others [25] They argued a narrative approach is largely based on the idea that the final version of a gospel, was pulled together by the one person, even though the historical critical method may show it comes from a number of sources. For example Matthew and Luke appear to be based from Mark and the source called Q.

Narrative criticism has set in train more studies of the gospels which consider them in terms of their literary qualities.[26] Also, because historical criticism has continued to be the dominant method of interpretation being used, there appears to have been a degree of synthesis between this and other approaches. For instance Frank Moloney[27] and Brendan Byrne[28] consider the "narrative" of Mark on the one hand but they also appear to be using the historical critical method of interpretation to look at the gospel's detail. Their approach does fit in with the 1993 Statement of the Pontifical Biblical Commission which says the historical-critical method is the "indispensable method for the scientific study of ancient text".

But limitations also exist in their approach. In the case of Byrne, he says on page one that in the first century CE there were two world views, that of Judaism and that of Hellenism. But his

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[25]David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel,* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1982).

[26] Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture,* 2nd ed. (Collegeville: A Michael Glazier Book, 1999), 21.

[27] Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002)

[28] Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel*, (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2008).

focus would only be dealing with the Judaic background.[29] In the case of Moloney, his book *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* avoids considering the writer's use of *chiasmus* (inverted, ABCDDCBA parallels), because these do not fit with the flow of the text.[30] Perhaps in the case of both Byrne and Moloney, they needed to "close off" such avenues of exploration in order to retain both the "narrative" focus combined with the focus of historical criticism.

The Commission admits to limitations in the narrative method of interpretation. For instance "the distinction between the real author and the implied author does tend to make problems of interpretation somewhat more complex."[31] Perhaps another way to express this limitation is that somebody using narrative criticism becomes involved in "the narrative world." And in doing this they close off other types of text exploration.

It could be said the narrative method of interpretation is biased towards a linear understanding of the 'whole' gospel, which suits the modern mentality.[32] But it does not appear to explain why a writer such as Mark, relies so heavily on parallels in his text. This omission in interpretation becomes more awkward still when the parallels are inverted or worse, when they are not very clear or 'tidy'. Chiasmus (or circular construction) might be accepted in narrative criticism when it is limited to a few sentences. But a prolonged chiasmus such as *hysterion proteron* is either overlooked by the narrative method of interpretation or its existence is dismissed as "conjecture".[33] The narrative critic is likely to claim a reader could not pick up connections between

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[29] Byrne, *A Costly Freedom,* 1.
[30] Francis Moloney, *Mark, Storyteller, Interpreter, Evangelist* (Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, 2004).
[31] Pontifical Biblical Commission, 504.
[32] John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the New Testament," Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship,
http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=111&chapid=1293 [accessed 30 June 2013}.
[33] Note: When an article was submitted for publication by a Feminist Peer Reviewed Journal the extended chiasmus pointed out in Mark's gospel was held to be "conjecture".

parallels unless they were close to each other in the text. In the case of a *diachronic* critic, they would be arguably less receptive still to extended chiasmus.

Narrative Criticism is actually the second type of interpretative method that the Pontifical Commission listed as "likely to contribute effectively...."to opening up the riches of the biblical texts.[34] The first of these methods is described as "Rhetorical Analysis" and the Commission puts particular focus on the "new rhetoric." This considers the essential message the writer is trying to communicate and convince his readers about. It considers how he does this. Thus the method looks at the power of argument being used in the text. But the Commission also points out that at the same time, a historical gospel situation needs to be borne in mind by a rhetorical interpreter in order to determine the likelihood that the writer would be using such an argument.[35]

The third synchronic method identified by the Commission is described as *semiotic analysis.* This relates to the biblical text as it comes before the reader in its final state. The approach considers the entire text, but only the text. In this sense it compares with Kugel's claim that interpretation should start with the text.[36] Thus *Semiotic analysis* considers the network of relationships (opposition, confirmation etc) between the various elements of the text but does not go beyond this. At its deepest level, according to the Commission, "It proceeds from the assumption that certain forms of logic and meaning underlie the narrative and discursive organisation of all discourse."[37] A way to understand this may be as follows. The real author stands back from the "narrative world" which contains the implied author and the implied reader. The real author retains the power to set out an abstract framework of logic on which the narrative

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[34] Pontifical Biblical Commission, 500.
[35] Pontifical Biblical Commission, 503.
[36] Kugel, *The Bible As It Was,* 24.
[37] Pontifical Biblical Commission, 504

world is developed. But this framework may not be explicitly mentioned in the text. The Commission points out that again, (at some stage) there is need to reference this sort of interpretation against the historical context of the gospel.

The Commission promotes approaches that use human sciences such as sociology. It says "Knowledge of sociological data, which help us understand the economic, cultural and religious functioning of the biblical world is indispensable for historical criticism**."** However it points out there is difficulty in trying to understand the sociological models which were current at the time the gospels were written.[38]

5.   Starting Out with a Question

The Pontifical Biblical Commission is not the only source to provide reflections on the range of approaches that can be taken to Biblical Interpretation. In her book *The Revelatory Text*[39] Sandra Schneiders describes a range of such methods. She describes attempts at developing structural interpretation and also psychological and feminist interpretation.[40]   These methods include sociology. However one could gather from her book that in the area of sociological interpretation, progress has been slow.[41]

Schneiders claims that Scripture should be considered in a way similar to great literary works such as the Shakespearean tragedies. In such case the historicity of the story is less important than the great universal themes focussed upon by a writer. It is the presentation of universal themes that have permanent relevance to the human condition. Schneiders also says a literary interpretation, as with responses to great poetry, is

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[38] Pontifical Biblical Commission, 507.
[39] Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture,* 2nd ed. (Collegeville: A Michael Glazier Book, 1999).
[40] Schneiders,   *The Revelatory Text*, 21.
[41] Schneiders,   *The Revelatory Text*, 24.

a personal response which is unique to every individual, "Consequently there is no such thing as the one correct interpretation of a text."[42]

Reading the gospels in the same way as great poetry does touch on the four traditional assumptions about Scriptural interpretation that is, that the Scripture is cryptic, relevant, perfect and the Word of God. It also it ties in with synchronic approaches that the Commission recommends as helping to balance out the diachronic approach of Historical Criticism. But there are also some problems here. For instance to what extent does a literary approach uncover the specific theological message that a writer is trying to pass on? Also, the gospel of Mark for instance was written around 70 CE when an urgent message about the nature of Christianity needed to be passed on to Jews, Christians, Gentiles and Romans alike.[43] Shakespeare's tragedies and much other great literature are not so conditioned by historical circumstance.

Another point Schneiders develops is that an interpreter "should start with a question that he or she wants to answer" and then work out the most appropriate method to find the answer.[44] An example similar to her point could be as follows. If one has been doing reading on the various social models suggested over the centuries by social philosophers, one can detect a common inheritance from Greek social philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. It is after all, general knowledge that Western culture is largely derived from the ancient Greeks. A study of social philosophers over the centuries can show them to be weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of following Platonic ideas or Aristotlean ideas. Having done such a study one could then ask to what extent gospel writers themselves knew about Hellenistic ideas on social construction and whether or not a critique of these

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[42] Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 153.
[43] James S. McLaren, *Turbulent times?: Josephus and scholarship on Judaea in the first century CE*(Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).
[44] Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text*, 111.

ideas was built into the structure of the gospels. A further follow-on of this question could be to focus (for a start) on the gospel of Mark which is generally accepted to be the first gospel that was written.

In order to look for an underlying critique one could list the places where Jesus went in a first section of the gospel, for example up to where his relatives came to take control of him (Mark 3:21). Then one could work out whether or not parallels are being set up between the places and whether or not there is a pattern here.

In making an attempt to analyse Mark's structure, some of the Pontifical Commission's recommendations for a synchronic reading of the text are being met. For instance it proposes use of "new rhetoric" to examine if the writers are trying to convince readers of a particular position.[45] In this case one is exploring whether or not a writer had particular opinions about Hellenistic social structures and whether or not he is trying to convince readers about this. The Commission also recommends the use of narrative criticism that considers the text as a whole. Thus one could expect the story of the life of Jesus would be told at one level of the text. But there would be a development of the writer's views about Hellenism at another level as well. One could also expect that the figure of Jesus would be tied in as the key to questions the writer is trying to raise at the level behind the story.

The Commission recommends the use of "semiotic analysis" or structuralism. In the approach described above, that is, choosing interpretation model(s) that are most likely to answer a question, a structuralist approach could be used here as well. In this approach a user of the method considers only the text and the network of relationships between its various elements.[46] Also,

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[45] Pontifical Biblical Commission, 503.
[46] Pontifical Biblical Commission, 504.

"Each text follows a "grammar," that is to say, a certain number of rules or patterns." There is also the "logico-semantic level" of analysis which "proceeds from the assumption that certain forms of logic and meaning underlie the narrative and discursive organization of all discourse. .(this is) . the logic which governs the basic articulations of the narrative."[47]

A *logico-semantic* level of analysis has special application to exploration of the question as to whether or not there is a critique of Greek society in the structures of the gospels. If for instance the writer is deliberately pairing off places that Jesus went, for example into a parallel or inverted parallel literary structure, one could expect a "grammar" to be followed here. For instance, just as places may be paralleled, so the sentences around them be paralleled (or have opposite meanings). There would only be the one place mentioned in each paragraph (that is, group of sentences.) The parallel groups of sentences would be roughly the same size, whether long or short. There would be a major point common to both groups of sentences which, in a background and abstract dimension, would constitute a third parallel. Such 'abstract' parallels in a section could add up to a summary point about the whole. Following on from a "grammar", all of the text in a "section" would need to fit into the background framework. Also, 'points of logic' that are developed in one section would need to follow into or follow on from other sections until the whole of the text is incorporated into the background framework.

In terms of the question being explored all the points would need to be relevant as to whether or not a critique of Greek society is being established in the gospel.

A further expectation of the text could be established by this sort of analysis as well. One could assume that if a writer was developing a critique of Greek society in his gospel structure

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[47] Pontifical Biblical Commission, 504.

they would also be doing this to compare and contrast Hellenism with Judaism. Therefore one could expect the same sort of structures and critique to be developed in relation to Jewish society as well.

An exploration of whether or not gospel writers are doing a critique of both Judaism and Greek society within the structures of their gospels may help to respond to questions raised by other methods again. For instance Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza approaches the texts with a "hermeneutics of suspicion". In her book, *In Memory of Her* she points out a there is an anti-female bias within the gospel text, especially that of Luke. She claims this has been influenced by the over-culture and patriarchal value system of Greek society.[48] Her criticisms and that of other feminists throw up a serious question about whether or not the gospel text could really be "the word of God." They appear to promote an anti-female view in any society that is based upon the gospels.

Exploration of a critique of Greek society in the gospel structures may provide some clues as to why Luke for instance should have followed patriarchal Greek conventions. It could be suggested in this context that he realised he was using the "faulty" literary conventions of a "faulty" society. But he accepted these realities of the day for what they were and he was trying to balance them out with something else.

The "exploration of a question'" approach as proposed by Schneiders, also meets all four assumptions about Scripture interpretation in the first century CE and the centuries immediately after this.[49] In this approach an exploration is being made of a level of meaning underneath the text (c/f cryptic), the whole text and follow-through of this level is being explored (c/f perfect). The question being explored has relevance to the

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[48] Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (London: SCM, 1983).
[49] Kugel, *The Bible As It Was,* 552.

societies of the present time (c/f relevant). The question is exploring reality as such and therefore is aligned to the ultimate reality, that is, God.

6. Recognition by Scholars of Hellenistic Culture in Palestine

As the Pontifical Commission has pointed out, an exploration of social models being used in the Gospels needs to be based upon the culture and historical events which shaped Palestine at the time the Gospels were written.[50] It has only been through more recent historical and archaeological findings that a clearer picture of the social situation of first century Palestine has emerged. It can now be said that the impact of Hellenistic culture on Palestine over this period was like a "steamroller".[51] Such an impact was largely under estimated well into the twentieth century when it was considered Palestinian and Hellenistic culture were largely distinct from each other.[52] Thus, while the extent of Hellenistic impact could be debated in the 1970's,[53] the idea that Jewish and Hellenistic cultures were "separate" in first century CE Palestine is no longer tenable.[54]

The evidence to show the cultural impact of Hellenism there includes:
- Buildings (even the Jerusalem Temple) were based on Hellenistic architecture.[55]
- Jerusalem was at the centre of Judaism. But at the same time it was a Hellenised city. Buildings and activities

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[50] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," *Origins,* Vol 23, n.29 (Washington: C.N.S., 1994), 507.
[51] Lee I. Levine *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity: Conflict or Confluence?* (Peabody, Massachusetts: University, 1988), 181 .
[52] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 182.
[53] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 17-18.
[54] Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism,* trans. John Bowden (London:SCM Press Ltd, 1981), 1.
[55] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 5.

promoted by Herod included a Gymnasium, hippodrome, theatre and even an amphitheatre.[56]

- Palestinian people wore the same sort of clothes as other people in the Graeco-Roman Empire. They used similar money and much the same customs as in the wider world for example how they buried their dead.[57]

- Social structures such as that of the Sanhedrin were actually based on Greek models of governance.[58] Even religious ceremonies had Hellenistic parallels.[59]

- The graves of wealthy Jerusalemites from first century CE copy the Greek styles with solid square bases, columns, capitals, cornices etc.[60]

- More than one third of inscriptions found in and around Jerusalem from the second Temple period, are in Greek.[61]

- Funerary inscriptions show that the Greek language was widely spoken. Lee Levine points out of the approximately 600 catacomb inscriptions from Rome in the later Empire, only 21% were in Latin, while 78% were in Greek and the remaining 1% in Hebrew and Aramaic.[62]

- Levine points out that Josephus, an historian of the first century CE, says even a slave can learn Greek. This implies it was a common language.[63]

- He also points out that Jews from the Diaspora would have spoken Greek.[64]

- There were some Jews in the upper classes that were given an advanced education in the Greek classics and in studies such as rhetoric and mathematics. There was a

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[56] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 87.
[57] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 23.
[58] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 84.
[59] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 134.
[60] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 62.
[61] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 74.
[62] Lee I. Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity.* 71-72.
[63] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 134.
[64] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 78.

demand for such an education in the Empire in the areas of administration and business. Thus acquiring a basic Greek education was considered necessary for a better income.[65]

7. Palestinian History and the Ambivalent Jewish Response to Hellenism

In an exploration as to whether or not the gospel writers were providing a critique of both Judaism and Hellenism in their gospel structures, one must also ask whether or not such questions were around at the time the texts were being written. What were Jewish writers concerned about in the centuries leading into and during the first century CE?

One of the distinguishing features of Jews, as distinct from other peoples of the Middle East was, that despite their immersion in Hellenistic culture, they also retained their faith in Jewish Law. According to Martin Hengel "The Jews were the only people of the East to enter into deliberate competition with the Greek view of the world and of history."[66] At the same time there was on-going discernment in terms of what they would adopt from Hellenism, for example, cooperation with Greek-style public administration and what they would reject, for example attendance at blood sports in an amphitheatre.

The process of discernment here was not straightforward. In the C2nd BCE the upper classes of Judaism in Jerusalem had found that the Jewish law was hampering them from making more money and they tried to get rid of it. But the mass of the Jewish people, who came from the lower classes, revolted against them (168-164 BCE). The lower classes were victorious in this revolt and the Hasmonean rulers came into power in Palestine in 140-

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[65] Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism,* trans. John Bowden (London:SCM Press Ltd, 1981), 68-9.
[66] Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism,* 100.

63 BCE. The four books of Maccabees in the Old Testament give a description of what happened.

Even while the Hasmoneans rejected the attempt at a full integration with Hellenism, they deliberately retained many of the administration practices already introduced. For example it appears they retained the use of coins which they made bilingual.[67] They also learned the Greek language and acquired more Greek knowledge because they realised that without a Greek education they would lose their independence.

The practice of discernment of Hellenism then acceptance or rejection of its aspects continued. Consider the 2nd Book of Maccabees. This outlines the victory of the Hasmoneans over the inroads being made by the 'paganistic' Greek culture. But at the same time the writer uses a Greek literary structure in this book.[68] The same process is reflected in other books accepted into the canon of the Christian New Testament, for example the books of Koheleth, Daniel and Ben Sera.[69]

The process of acceptance or rejection is also evidenced in an offshoot of people from the Hasmoneans, believed to be the Essenes.[70] It is considered that the Essenes were connected with the manuscripts found at Qumran.[71] On the one hand these people asserted their rejection of Hellenistic culture. But the structure of their community (or communities) had more in common with Hellenistic social structures than did mainstream Judaism.[72]

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[67] Martin Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ.* In Collaboration with Christoph Markschies, Trans. John Bowden .(London: SCM Press Ltd, Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 8.
[68] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 79.
[69] Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 21.
[70] Hengel, *The 'Hellenization' of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 30.
[71] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 110.
[72] Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism,* 60.

The experience of Jews with Herod the Great who ruled from 37-4 BCE provides yet another example of the ambivalence with which Jews regarded Hellenistic culture and society. On the one hand Herod enthusiastically accepted higher Greek studies such as rhetoric. He employed the Peripatetic Nicolaus of Damascus, who had been teacher to the children of Cleopatra and Antony and the two became firm friends[73] Herod obtained and retained his position by cultivating links with the rulers in Rome.[74] He set about trying to establish Jerusalem as a "jewel" in the Graeco-Roman world with the same standard types of buildings to be found elsewhere. He set up a Gymnasium and this would have included a school adjoined to it. He also established a library.[75] In all these activities he measured his progress against other great cities of the time and tried to outdo them. For instance the Temple was one of the largest of its type in the world.[76] He also encouraged upper class Jews to excel in Hellenistic culture and some structures e.g. a tomb built outside Jerusalem, were admired around the known world.[77]

In doing all of this, Herod established Jerusalem as the centre of the Jewish world, as a centre of Jewish ritualistic sacrifices and Jewish learning and administration. He also succeeded in developing an outreach to all Jews around the Graeco-Roman empire who constituted about 10% of the population of the Empire.[78] Both Herod and the Roman overlords would have gained considerable income from Jews visiting Jerusalem via the Temple drachma revenue.

Yet even while Jews of Jerusalem and the Diaspora supported the Temple there was still a process of discernment about Hellenism going on amongst them. For instance Herod had built

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[73] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 35-36.
[74] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,*40.
[75] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 36.
[76] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 13.
[77] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 62.
[78] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity ,*46.

an amphitheatre where there were blood sports with wild animals and between gladiators. But attendance at such a place was against Jewish law. The amphitheatre would therefore have been boycotted.[79] Josephus notes that unlike other public buildings, it was located outside the precincts of the city.[80] On the other hand it appears that there was some support for Herod's theatre and the hippodrome where races could be held.[81] But again, people remained suspicious. Levine comments on the record of Josephus about an outburst against Herod when it was mistakenly thought some of the prizes being given out at the hippodrome had idol worship images on them.[82]

Despite the grand building projects, the Jews had plenty of evidence to remind them that Herod's interest in learning did not match the moral demands of their own law. He had some of his children murdered. Even the gospel of Matthew recorded the anomaly that the Jewish population witnessed in the life of Herod. On the one hand he was interested to hear from the Eastern kings who came following a star in the East. Then he murdered all the infants aged under two years around Bethlehem (Matthew 2:13-18).

8.   Palestinian Writings and the Ambivalent Jewish Response to Hellenism

Interpretative activity between 300 BCE and 100 CE shows the response to Hellenistic culture as reflected in the writings of the time. The historian Martin Hengel for instance comments on the interpretative writing of Jason of Cyrene. Jason was writing the history of Judaism from over the previous fifteen hundred years,

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[79] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity* ,49.
[80] Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, trans. Willian Whiston (London: Routledge & Sons, n.d.),   15.268-291.
[81] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity* ,49.
[82] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity* ,60-1.

> The fact that he could attempt this in what is externally a completely Hellenistic, highly rhetorical form, is a sign of the flexibility of the Jewish religion and its capacity for adaptation to a new intellectual environment.[83]

 This was a period of what was described as Hellenistic Judaism.[84]

The Jews realised that if they were to resist total assimilation into a Hellenistic environment they needed to extend a process of discernment into their writings as well as in their lifestyle. Thus while they based their re-interpretation of the Torah on Hellenistic literary models, a freedom was exercised in adopting which literary models and ideas would suit their own particular ends.[85]

Material from the First century BCE that was found at Qumran (in the 1940's) has shown that Scriptural interpretation took on many more literary forms than that of the traditionally accepted commentary.[86]   For instance the re-writing of a biblical story could in itself provide an interpretation of the story. Then, such a new interpretation would be further refined by later texts. An example of this process is provided in the Old Testament story of Joseph.[87] As demonstrated by Kugel, ancient interpreters would be trying to explain details of the stories about Joseph that appeared to be contradictory. The on-going refinement or elaboration of the original texts about him would be largely done in terms of "motifs".[88] These would be re-adjusted in an on-going way so that the overall scriptural story would continue to

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[83] Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism,* 100.
[84] Byrne, *A Costly Freedom,* 1.
[85] Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism,* 99.
[86] Hindy Najman and Judith H. Newman editors, *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2004), xix..
[87] Kugel, *The Bible As It Was,* xiv.
[88] Kugel, *The Bible As It Was,* 33.

be viewed by its readers as "cryptic, relevant, perfect and the Word of God." [89]

In the history of the Jews, with their return from Babylon in (538 BCE), the interpretation of Scripture was accelerated. The Persian King Cyrus who permitted the return of the Jews encouraged them to rebuild their Temple. He also encouraged the Egyptians to live according to their own ancestral law which was codified by Darius,[90] his son-in-law.[91] If the Jews did (or hoped to) have a similar permission given to them by Cyrus, this was an extra spur for them to clarify what their ancestral law actually was and try and make this more relevant to their times.

After Alexander the Great conquered Palestine in 332 BCE, and then after the establishment of the reign of the Ptolomies in 301 BCE, interpreters of Scripture again faced the challenge of grappling with inroads being made by a foreign culture. Decades later, with the rule of the Seleucid King Antiochus III (223-187 BCE) they were again encouraged to live according to their ancestral law. In this case they needed to clarify it in terms of their present Hellenistic environment. But then thirty years later, Antiochus IV would try to totally Hellenise Jerusalem and its people. So again there was need for adjustment.[92]

The influence of Greek philosophy on Jewish material written over these years can be seen in the Wisdom literature and some of these books are included in the Christian Old Testament. Some biblical scholars may claim that there was a synthesis of Judaism and Hellenism over this period. And, at a cultural level this may have been true. But tension between the Judaic and the

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[89] Kugel, *The Bible As It Was,* 552.
[90] Richard A. Parker, "Darius and His Egyptian Campaign"
http://www.jstor.org/stable/528821
[accessed 14 July 2013]
[91] Wikipedia "Xerxes !" http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Darius and [accessed 14 July 2013].
[92] Lawrence H. Shiffman "Palestine in the Hellenistic Age"
http://www.myjewishlearning.com/history/Ancient_and_Medieval_History/539_BCE-632_CE/Palestine_in_the_Hellenistic_Age.shtml?p=2.) [accessed 4th July 2013].

Hellenistic world views can still be seen in Jewish literature, even while Scriptural writers adopted concepts of God such as "Wisdom" which reflected the cultural beliefs of their overlords. Some may claim that this period was an "inter-testamental" period. But the Pentateuch of the Jews had already been written before the Babylonian exile and some of the "Wisdom" writings that were written between 300 BCE and 100 CE were eventually incorporated into the Christian Canon.[93]

The impact of Hellenism on Judaism can be seen in books such as *Ecclesiastes*, written by a person called Koholeth. This reflects the stance of Greek philosophy which asks questions about existence as such and its purpose. These sorts of questions do not reflect the certainty of the faith to be found in previous generations.[94]

The uncertainty and even disillusionment of Koholeth is also found in the book of *Ben Sira* or *Ecclesiasticus* written approximately 200-175 BCE[95] In this book Ben Sira tries to come to grips with the challenges of Greek philosophy and he re-interprets the Scriptures that the Jewish faith is based upon. On the one hand he points out how the prophetic tradition comes from God, whereas Hellenism only relies on human reason.[96] But at the same time he expresses confidence in the possibility of a rationalistic understanding of the world.[97] Ben Sira was held in high regard by the Jewish rabbis but they did not accept his book into their sacred texts, probably because they knew who the author was. His grandson was also well-known.[98] On the other hand, his thinking was very much part of the Jewish interpretative process of the time.

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[93] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 60.

[94] Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism,* 117.

[95] *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 115-6.

[96] Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism,* 136.

[97] Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism,* 147.

[98] Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism,* 104-6.

In the adoption of books like Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiasticus into the Christian Canon, a similar process of on-going discernment was also adopted in the emerging church of the first century CE.

9. A Spectrum of acceptance of Hellenistic culture in the First Century CE

In the Jewish situation around first century CE there was what could be described as a "spectrum" of acceptance of Hellenistic culture.

On the one hand the lower classes of Jews remained faithful to their law and although Greek was a fairly common language they did not have access to the high education that included the detailed study of rhetoric and classic philosophy. On the other hand, as Hengel notes, "It was necessary to get to grips with the Greek spirit which apparently dominated the world in so many areas, by learning as much as possible from it."[99] Upwardly mobile people would at least try to obtain some literacy in Greek.[100] At the upper end of the social scale there were Jews who were well advanced in Greek learning as in the case of the Jews of Alexandria.[101] There was also a school similar to that of Alexandria in Jerusalem although their culture was annihilated in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE[102]

In Alexandria one of the prominent scholars was Philo. While the writings of Philo did not have a great impact on Judaism itself he was a central figure in the early development of Christianity.[103]

As with other Jewish scholars of the time Philo was conscious there were good and bad sides to the type of society based upon

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[99] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 30.
[100] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 17.
[101] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 41.
[102] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 29.
[103] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 165-6.

Hellenistic culture. However, rather than weigh up the good and bad aspects of Hellenism itself, he praised the Greek culture in its purest form. But he also disparaged the way in which some of the Egyptians had adopted this culture.[104]

The historian Josephus, like other people of the time, had ambivalent experiences with Hellenism. On the one hand he had opposed the Graeco-Roman Empire and had been a general in the Jewish army that revolted against Rome in 66CE But after the Jewish defeat, Vespasian spared the life of Josephus. Later again, when the prophecy of Josephus that Vespasian would become Emperor had come to pass, he was released.[105] Yet despite the debt Josephus owed to the Romans, the records of history that he used in his writings are based on an anti-Herodian source that was highly critical of the pro-Hellenistic Herod. Such criticisms contrasted with the descriptions of Herod that were given by Herod's friend Nicolaus of Damascus.[106]

10.   Environment of the Gospel Writers e.g. the Cynics

The gospel writers and writers of other New Testament literature found themselves in a general situation that was similar to the one described above. It is likely that at least some of them knew Greek. Peter for instance conducted a successful ministry in his later life outside Judea from Antioch, via Corinth to Rome.[107] So he must have been able to speak Greek. Even Jesus may have had some familiarity with the language and this has implications in terms of his actual words being recorded in the gospels. The

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[104] Maren R. Niehoff, "New Garments for Biblical Joseph," in *Biblical Interpretation: History, Context and Reality* ed. Christine Helma (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 33-56.

[105] Flavius Josephus *The Works of Josephus* trans. William Whiston [1737] www.sacred-texts.com/jud/josephus/ [accessed 14 July 2013]

[106] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 33.

[107] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 16.

town of Nazareth, where Jesus lived as an adult craftsman, was located near Sepphoris, a Hellenistic city being built by Herod Antipas. Jesus could have been employed there. In fact the building of Sepphorus may have been a reason for Joseph, who was a craftsman, to move to Nazareth in the first place.[108] Also, Nazareth was located near the Roman road to Jerusalem.[109]

Despite the commonality of the Greek language at the time it is unlikely the gospel writers had the advanced learning in Greek classics that some of the upper class Jews enjoyed. But, given the environment, it is likely people in general had some knowledge of classical writers such as Homer (8th to 7th century BCE), and Plato and Aristotle (5th century BCE). Also, people were familiar with a common philosophy like that of the Stoics.

In his book *Christ and the Cynics,* F. Gerald Downing shows there are in fact close parallels between the teachings of the synoptic Gospels and the philosophy of the Greek Cynics.[110] which was an early strand of Stoicism.[111] The Cynic approach called into question the artificiality of the upper classes. It was reflected in the lifestyle and preaching of itinerants who travelled around with minimal possessions. Downing points out that parallels drawn between the Cynics and early Christian preachers have often been dismissed by scholars as irrelevant. But he says insufficient notice has been taken of the actual writings of the Cynics.[112] He also points out that the Gospels were mainly

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[108] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 17, 34.
[109] Bible History Online, "Nazareth," *Cities of Ancient Israel,* (Vancouver: Bible History Online)
 http://www.bible-history.com/geography/ancient-israel/nazareth.html [accessed 14 July 2013].
[110] F.Gerald Downing, *The Church and Jesus: A Study in History, Philosophy and Theology ,* Studies in Biblical Theology - Second Series 10, ed. C.F.D. Moule et al. (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1968).
[111]F. Gerald Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 90.
[112] Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*, 33. 89 F. Gerald Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 72.
[112] Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*, 23.

written for people who had a command of the Greek language and they largely come from a pagan background. Such people would have been familiar with this strand of Greek philosophy and would have associated it with Gospel preachers. Thus Paul would also have been aware of the association being made between himself and the Cynics. [113]

Downing points out the Cynics developed their preaching in terms of discussion and he suggests that this was how the basic stories of the Gospels were evolved as well. Thus, in the process of oral questions and answers there would have been a process of choosing or deleting stories about Jesus according to what interested the listeners. The ordering of these stories could have been determined by mnemonics, that is, the stories were put into a pattern that could be easily memorised by the preachers and listeners. The use of parallels, for example in Mark's gospel, would have suited this purpose.

Paul's letter to the Galatians (a letter most scholars agree was written by Paul), shows a definite Cynic approach. For instance he chides the Galatians for their adherence to laws that were redundant.   He   advocates   breaking   free   from   social convention.[114]   But at the same time it appears that Paul exercised discretion as to the extent to which he used the Cynic approach. In his dealings with the Corinthians he was appalled by the behaviour of someone who was living with his Father's wife (1 Cor 5.1-2). This was considered to be incest, even by pagan standards. Apparently the Corinthians, who had accepted this situation, could have been acting in terms of the "free from social conventions" attitude of the Cynic.[115]   But Paul, in his reprimand of the Corinthians in his warning them about this behaviour, appears to switch from the Cynic approach to that of

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[115] Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*, 85-6.

the more conservative Stoic approach regarding personal morals and the observance of convention.[116] Thus, as with other Jews in this period, Paul was prepared to use thought structures and approaches that had been developed from the Hellenistic Cynics. But he exercised discretion as to the extent that he used their ideas.

11.   Environment of the Gospel Writers e.g. the Jerusalem Library

Herod the Great not only built the Jewish Temple which, by the standards of the time was one of the largest and most magnificent in the Graeco-Roman Empire.[117] He also established a library. It was his intent to "Hellenise" the Jews or at least equip them with the advantages of Hellenism.   Herod's library would necessarily have contained the Greek classics such as Homer's *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These were the oldest and amongst the greatest of the Greek classics.   People visiting Jerusalem annually for over several days at a time would have had at least some access to such a library. They could have picked up at least some rudimentary knowledge about Homer, even if this was at second or third hand. For instance in the 2nd century BCE Cicero made a joke about Homer's structural use of *chiasmus* (circular parallels) "I'll be like Homer and put the cart before the horse."[118]   Homer also used extended chiasmus, or *hysteron proteron* for instance the whole structure of his poem the *Iliad* consists of an inverted (ABCDDCBA) parallel.[119]

Regular Jerusalem visitors could also have had a basic knowledge of Plato's *Republic* and the debate between himself

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[116] Downing, *Cynics, Paul and the Pauline Churches*, 82.
[117] Levine, *Judaism and Hellenism in Antiquity,* 44.
[118] Cicero, *Letters to Atticus* ed T.Page and W.Rouse, Trans. B.Winstedt (London:William Heineman, 1919)
http://archive.org/stream/letterstoatticus01ciceuoft/letterstoatticus01ciceuoft_djvu.txt
[119] Cedric H. Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958). 97.

and his student Aristotle who had left a collection of city constitutions.[120]   Jerusalem visitors (or residents) could easily have been aware of Plato's dislike of Homer and other poets. "We shall ask Homer and the other poets not to be angry if we delete these and all similar passages." [121]

As with other Jewish writers, the writer of the first gospel would have exercised discernment as to what Greek literary models would have suited his purpose. Thus while Mark's gospel was on the one hand unique to its time, so it could be expected to "echo" the established process of discernment.

If Mark and other gospel writers were building a critique of Judaism and Hellenism into their gospel structures, one could expect to find there an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of Plato and Aristotle's teachings. Given there was common ground between these two philosophers, that is, the division between spirit and matter and reliance on rationalism, a gospel assessment of them would likely be set out in terms of a continuum line. If Mark, the first writer, was concerned with definitions of Judaism and Hellenism, he could have left such a continuum line to be `taken up by another gospel writer such as Luke who was well educated in Greek ideas.[122]

Leading into the first century Jewish writers were trying to work out what would make for the most viable type of society. They knew Plato and Aristotle had been caught up with this subject centuries before, Plato put his approach into his *Republic* and Aristotle with his collection of city constitutions, put his ideas on the subject into *Politica*. Thus in one sense Mark was carrying

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[120] Aristotle, *Politics with an English Translation,* trans. H.Rackham (London: Heineman, 1932, 1967 reprint).
[121] Plato, "Censorship and the Formation of Character," *Plato's Republic: Book One*, California: State University Stanislaus
http://www.csustan.edu/Philosophy/Tuedio/OtherItems/RepublicI-IV.html [accessed 16 July 2013].
[122] Hengel, *The "Hellenization of Judaea in the First Century after Christ,* 26.

on a preoccupation of both the Greek and Jewish writers. But he was also assessing and incorporating these ideas around the person of Jesus. Also, like other Jewish writers, Mark would have exercised his own freedom in using or ignoring the Greek literary models. Insofar as he may have adopted a Homeric structural model, this itself would be a statement that he was not prepared to 'blindly' accept all of Plato's opinions, for example his opposition to democracy. [123]

Reasons for Mark's possible use of chiasmus would be similar to those of Homer's reliance on this literary model. Homer's poetry was meant to be publicly recited or read and Mark's text would have been used in a similar way. Thus in Homer's *Odyssey,* when for instance a number of questions were being asked (as when Odysseus met his mother in the underworld in the *Odyssey*) an audience was more likely to remember the last question first when it was answered.[124] Also the use of chiasmus allowed for repetition. It provided balance, interest and a geometric structure. It also assisted memorisation for oral preaching. Not all of the *chiasmus* constructions and parallels in Homer are clear cut or tidy. But the writer could still be relying on this for the general shape of his material. John Welch says:

> Where the inversion is less than perfect, some might contend that this is evidence that no inversion was ever intended by the writer at all. Rather, this might better be explained as evidence that the author simply took some liberty with the form, not adhering mechanically to the form for its own sake, but still choosing to operate

[123] Creighton University, "Comments on Plato's Apology," *Critical and Historical Introduction to Philosophy* (Nebraska: Creighton University) 3
http://www.puffin.creighton.edu/eselk/intro-phil_on.../apology-crito_pg3.htm [accessed on 16 July 2013].

[124] John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the New Testament," *Chiasmus in Antiquity,* Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship (Hawaii: Brigham Young University) http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=111&chapid=1293 [accessed 30 June 2013}.

within the general framework of an overall chiastic or related scheme.[125]

By ignoring such a structure, interpreters, whether of Homer or of such possible literary constructions in Mark, can miss out on a central point, that is being made in the text.[126] In the case of Homer for instance, the use of extended chiasmus in *Odysseus* enables him to highlight the decision of Penelope to 'abide by the test of the bow'. (This is at the centre of a concentric circle). In terms of Penelope's relationship with the gods this is a key point in the meaning of the story.   But only the detection and appreciation of an extended chiasmus literary structure will uncover it.[127]

The fact that Homer, the most revered writer in Hellenism, used the chiasmus structural model, should give cause for more reflection about the possible use of extended chiasmus in the gospels, especially in Mark's introductory, definitive text. Cedric Whitman observes "Homer's *Iliad* consists of one large concentric pattern, within which a vast system of smaller ones, sometimes distinct and sometimes interlocking, gives shape to the several parts of extended chiasmus."[128]   Mark could have used the model for example to define the basis of Judaism, the basis of Hellenism and then the basis of interaction between the individual and their wider social environment.

Other New Testament writers used extended chiasmus. A closer look at Paul's letters, show that he uses the device in letters such as Galatians. According to Welsh the letter to Timothy is clearly chiastic. But on the other hand in other letters such as to Titus Paul does not use this structure.[129]   In the case of the *Book of Revelation* a case can be made that there is an extended *hyperon*

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[125] Welch, "Introduction," *Chiasmus in Antiquity*.

[126] Welch, "Chiasmus in Ancient Greek and Latin Literatures." *Chiasmus in Antiquity.*

[127] Welch, "Chiasmus in Ancient Greek and Latin Literatures." *Chiasmus in Antiquity.*

[128] Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition,* 97.

[129] Welch, "Chiasmus in the New Testament" *Chiasmus in Antiquity* .

proteron over the whole of this work and at the centre of this is the fall of Satan, a key theme in the book.[130] Once again in the New Testament, it is apparent the writers did not feel 'bound' to use the chiastic method, but would only do so in terms of whether or not it suited their intentions.

12. Extended Chiasmus and Four Assumptions in Interpretation

The use of extended chiasmus would enable Mark to develop 'under meanings' to the story of Jesus, unify whole sections of his text and also show his work to have permanent relevance in defining the reality of social life itself. Writing of the time did not have paragraphs as such.[131] But each step in the extended circle (for example the name of a place where Jesus went) could provide a new "paragraph," or group of connected sentences, as also a heading. It should also be noted that the use of places to form such a circle would provide an objective test of a detected circle. That is, two places either are the same or they are not. This is a simple yes/no test of science. The yes/no approach would meet a requirement of credibility as pointed out by John Welch.[132]

In such a striving for objectivity, it is reasonable to expect significant repetitions would be readily apparent and the overall system would be well balanced. Thus the second half of a parallel system should tend to repeat the first half in a recognizable way. The juxtaposition of the two central sections should be marked and highly accentuated. Welch also says "Key

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[130] Welch, "Chiasmus in the New Testament" *Chiasmus in Antiquity* .

[131] John W. Welch, "Introduction", *Chiasmus in Antiquity,* Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship (Hawaii: Brigham Young University) http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=111&chapid=1293 [accessed 30 June 2013}.

[132] John W. Welch, "Introduction," *Chiasmus in Antiquity,* Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship (Hawaii: Brigham Young University) http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/books/?bookid=111&chapid=1293 [accessed 30 June 2013}.

words, echoes and balancing should be distinct and should serve defined purposes within the structure."[133]

If the names of places were used as focal points for parallels, there would be a Homer-like dramatic effect given to the text and a sense of urgency and the sense of a "hero" going into battle. This would also recall the funerary urns of Athens that apparently influenced Homer.[134] In the case Mark, Jesus sets out to establish the rule of God.[135] One could assume that intrinsic to the "rule of God" would be the clarification of what the viable type of society being established is based upon. With the use of the *hysteron proteron*, structure the narrative of Jesus could be told on one dimension while, as described by the Pontifical Commission, a "form of logic and meaning (would) underlie the narrative and discursive organisation of all discourse."[136]

Because interpretations of Scripture in the first century CE assumed the texts were cryptic, perfect, relevant and the Word of God,[137] Mark the writer could assume his readers would look for such an underlying line of logic. Consider:

a. A structure using *hysteron proteron* (extended inverted parallels) could be **cryptic**, that is, not mentioned explicitly in the story, but to be found within the text.

b. Extended circular structures in the gospel could be working through points of on-going **relevance** involving the dialectical tension between two quite different types of society. In the situation of Mark this was Judaism and Hellenism.

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[133] Welch, "Introduction," *Chiasmus in Antiquity.*
[134] Whitman, *Homer and the Heroic Tradition,* 99.
[135] Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark's Gospel*, (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2008), 8.
[136] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," 504.
[137] Kugel, *The Bible As It Was, 552.*

b.　　The use of extended chiasmus in Mark's gospel would be particularly helpful in keeping a basic unity and geometric proportion to the text. It would demonstrate its "**perfection"** which is the third assumption in scripture interpretation.

d.　　Because the extended circles would help to develop universal themes this would tie in with the authority of the text as being the **Word of God.** The text would be dealing with social reality at its deepest levels.

If the whole of Mark's introductory gospel fitted into a tight "under-structure" that was geared towards clarifying the differences between a society based on law (Judaism) and a society based on order (Hellenism), other gospels would be likely to follow suit, given they are of the same basic literary genre and written for the same overall purpose. The whole of these later gospels would also fit into a tight structure which was geared towards this kind of clarification and assessment. Whether or not later gospel writers set out their "under-structure" using *hysteron proteron* would be another question. But if Mark was following the Greek practice of providing abstract definitions, one could suspect that he would use circular literary constructions.

13.　　The Historical Situation of Mark

The use of chiasmus was not in fact peculiar to the Hellenistic culture and it can also be found in Hebrew poetry.[138] Some suggest that the Greeks originally picked up this literary method of writing from the Semitic culture.[139] But insofar as Mark copied Homer's approach his choice of a literary model would have been related to the historical situation.

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[138] Welch, "Introduction," *Chiasmus in Antiquity.*
[139] Welch, "Chiasmus in Ancient Greek and Latin Literatures," *Chiasmus in Antiquity.*

Many scholars believe he wrote his gospel at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem and a sizeable piece of his text (chapter thirteen), appears to relate to this terrible crisis. Rome was taking an extreme position of wiping out the centre piece of Judaism altogether. Christians had already been suffering persecution under the Emperor Nero from 64 CE For their own survival they needed to clarify their identity, both in relation to Judaism and in relation to the Graeco Roman Empire.

Thus re-telling the story of Jesus was important. But it was also of paramount importance at the time to re-tell the story to show that the movement that Jesus had started, did not reject Hellenism as such. Rather it incorporated it. What better literary method could there be in presenting this message than to use the literary structure of the oldest and most revered classical writer in Graeco-Roman culture, that is, Homer.

14.   Early Gospel Interpreters
e.g. Origen and Augustine

Some scholars argue that the shape of a society can in itself give testimony to the interpretation that has been given to the Scriptures the society has been based upon. For instance in the case of the Jews there has been an evolution of the idea, that the expected "messiah" may be the community in itself, rather than a single individual person. [140]

The way the Christian church developed also gives some indication of how the gospels were being interpreted from the time they were written. An abstract understanding of God, based on Greek philosophy, was being formulated by the Church Fathers. Of particular interest here is the work of Origen who had great influence in the early years of the Church. Origen was

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[140] Marvin A. Sweeney, "The Democratization of Messianism in Modern Jewish Thought," in *Biblical Interpretation: History, Context, and Reality* ed. Christine Helmer (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 87-112.

steeped in Greek learning and was convinced of the incorporeality of God (c/f abstract Greek principles). However the Scriptures, including the Gospels, did not appear to support his position on this. Origen used the assumption that Scripture was cryptic in order to provide an allegorical interpretation of it. Thus he demonstrated that the passages in the gospels that appeared to present God in anthropological terms did in fact mean that God was incorporeal (without a body).[141]

The fact that his interpretation was accepted by the early Church demonstrates that his method of allegorical interpretation was being accepted as well. In terms of the other three interpretation assumption mentioned above, his work was also seen to follow the established tradition of interpretation. He showed that all the apparently anthropological presentations of God were united and perfect in that they could all be interpreted allegorically to show God was incorporeal. Also because his understanding of God was based on abstract principles (c/f Greek philosophy) it would continue to have relevance. When the church established its Scriptural Canon and the Word of God, Origen's interpretation and his method of interpretation was established as well.

The task of interpreters in clarifying the distinction between Judaism and Hellenism was also continued on in the years of the early Church. This can be seen in *The City of God* that was written by St Augustine in the C5th CE Augustine talks about the City of God and the City of man. It cannot be claimed that his distinction was a direct outcome of the work to be found for example in Ben Sera on Jewish/Hellenistic tensions. But he does explore a tension between two different types of societies and he does claim that both are valid in their own right.

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[141] Christine Helmer, ed., *Biblical Interpretation: History, Context, and Reality* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), 10-11.

Augustine was writing at a time when the Roman Empire was in decay and some people were blaming the Empire's adoption of Christianity for its demise.[142] However Augustine demonstrated that Christianity had incorporated the most sophisticated aspects of Greek culture. Also the fact that he was trying to hold two differing understandings of society and two differing world views in a dialectical tension shows how he and others of the time were interpreting what they saw to be in the Gospel texts. The total validity of their interpretation is another matter.

15. The Damaging Effects of Salvation History

In light of C20th research into history and archaeology the likelihood of a critique of Judaism and Hellenism in the gospels may appear to be self-evident. But in terms of the history of biblical scholarship one could argue the search for a critique of social models in the gospels has been largely overlooked. A bruising example of a failure to consider these could be pointed out in terms of the German scholar named Gerhard Kittel.[143] During the Second World War he, and a number of other German theologians, were members of the Nazi party.[144] Kittel considered himself a moderate but he argued in favour of the ban against Jews from participating in public life. [145] Given all his scholarship in the history of the Jews and the scholarship of his father, one must wonder how he could reach such a position. Kittel argued that Christians were the rightful heirs of the Old Testament promises of God and the Jews were now redundant. He held that the roles of Hellenism and Judaism in the formation of Christianity were "asymmetrical" and could not be used as

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[142] Saint Augustine *The City of God,* Vol. 1, ed. R.V.G. Tasker, trans. J Healey (London: Everyman's Library, 1947).143-178.
[143] Wayne A. Meeks, "A Nazi New Testament Professor Reads His Bible: The Strange Case of Gerhard Kittel" in *The Idea of Biblical Interpretation: Essays in Honor of James L. Kugel*. Edited by Hindy Najman and Judith H Newman (Leiden: Boston: Brill, 2004), 513-541.
[144] Meeks, "A Nazi New Testament Professor Reads His Bible," 516.
[145] Meeks, "A Nazi New Testament Professor Reads His Bible", 539.

interpretive alternatives.[146] In the tradition of Luther he believed that Jews had been 'accursed.'[147] He also believed the propaganda that they had plans for world domination.[148] Because he thought they had been historically 'sidelined' he considered this sort of domination would be a retrograde step.

Had there been a more sociological approach to Gospel interpretation prior to the Nazis and had there been a more discerning clarification between Judaism and Hellenism, the political position taken by Kittel could have been challenged more readily. However an added problem at the time was that his position reflected an attitude that permeated the world of biblical studies and theology. Bultman for instance, one of the most influential theologians of the C20th, had a characterisation of Judaism similar to Kittel's, even if Bultmann disdained the Nazis,[149] and stayed out of politics.[150]

Kittel was editor of *TDNT* (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament)* which became a standard text book throughout the seminaries of the world. Yet despite its popularity and status, the same attitude can be seen threaded throughout this reference book.[151] According to Wayne Meeks "Very few of the users of that work are aware of the paradoxes in Kittel's career and of the fundamentally anti-Jewish structure of *TDNT* itself."[152]

In contrast to the interpretation of Kittel and some of the early C20th scholars, there appeared to be in the first century CE, a general recognition that both types of society were based on universal principles and yet both were separate. As Martin Hengel pointed out, even though the impact of Hellenism

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[146] Meeks, "A Nazi New Testament Professor Reads His Bible," 516.
[147] Meeks, "A Nazi New Testament Professor Reads His Bible," 531.
[148] Meeks, "A Nazi New Testament Professor Reads His Bible",533.
[149] Meeks, "A Nazi New Testament Professor Reads His Bible", 541-2.
[150] Meeks, "A Nazi New Testament Professor Reads His Bible", 542.
[151] Meeks, "A Nazi New Testament Professor Reads His Bible", 538
[152] Meeks, "A Naza New Testament Professor Reads His Bible", 513.

continued to increase and surrounding cultures were merged into it, very few Jews rejected the heritage of their own law.[153]

With Jews, the distinction between themselves and other eastern cultures lay in the way they exercised choice as to what they would adopt or reject from their Hellenistic environment. Against this sort of background it would have been a logical development on the part of Christians to see themselves as inheriting a hybrid of both societies. In fact one of the first pictures given of the emerging church is a scene of tension between the "Hebrews and the Hellenists."(Acts 6:1). Also, in the early understanding of Christ's "kingdom" as pointed out in John's gospel , they understood there was a multiplicity in the oneness (John 14:2).

It would appear that Kittel and others like him, were influenced by the "Salvation History" idea of the Old Testament to the extent that they thought only in terms of the one pure society being inherited by Christianity.

A sociological interpretation of the gospels could explore whether or not Christians in fact inherited a hybrid society of Judaism and Hellenism which were (and remain) valid societies in their own right.

16.   Characteristics of a Hellenistic type of Society

The Pontifical Commission points out some of the risks involved in applying a sociological approach to exegesis. Given that the work of sociology "consists in the study of currently existing societies, one can expect difficulty when seeking to apply its methods to historical societies belonging to a very distant

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[153] Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism,* 312.

past."[154] However one may not have to "apply methods" to a distant society in the search as to whether or not the gospel writers were providing a critique of the elements of two types of society that existed in their own time.

In terms of a general description of Judaism for instance, the Jews of the present time still follow the essentials of their religion and social cohesion by their respect for and obedience to their *Torah.*

But the question remains. Do the essential elements of a Hellenistic type of society that existed at the time of the first century CE, exist at the present time? This question would need to be clarified before the exploration of a critique of Hellenism in the Gospels. Otherwise the exploration would have minimal relevance to the present time. As Kugel points out, the study of other types of ancient texts continues. But only Scripture interpretation carries with it the expectation that these texts will be relevant to the present.[155]

Would the critique of Hellenism possibly provided in the gospels continue to have relevance today? Very few would question whether or not the key Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle continue to influence present society. Parallels can still be found between Plato's *Republic* and western social structures at present. Aristotle's ideas in *Politics* continue to provide a basic model for democracies around the world.

In fact if one examines key social philosophers that have influenced Western societies down the centuries, parallels with either Plato or Aristotle can be found amongst them. A simplistic description of their key difference could be to say that those who based their thinking on Plato looked back towards the purest types of form at the base of existence. But those who

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[154] Pontifical Biblical Commission, "The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church," *Origins,* Vol 23, n.29 (Washington: C.N.S., 1994), 507.
[155] Kugel, *The Bible As It Was,* 19.

have followed Aristotle, have realised this position could result in a disdain for material being. So they have looked forward instead to potential development. For Aristotle an egg could have the potential to be a chicken. But it could also contain a a snake.[156]   In some senses the two points of view of looking backwards to pure form or forward to potentiality can be seen as presenting the two ends of a continuum line which continues on today.

17.   A Platonic Approach

To clarify a Platonic approach a closer look needs to be taken of *The Republic.* In this book Plato claims the administration of justice requires skill (Part I).[157]   It aims to enable every person to exercise. their own special skills and carry out the duties of their occupation.(Part I)   Guardians are needed to facilitate this (Part II).[158]   Guardians should be given a quality education which in its early stages provides music and poetry studies and provides training in arithmetic, geometry and physical prowess (Part III).[159]   Membership of the Guardian class should only be open to those with the ability to develop the skills and insights needed for their task. Guardians should be able to focus upon their role without the distractions of private property (Part IV).[160]   The harmony developed in such individuals is the same kind of harmony that should be reflected in the State (Part V).[161]   At the same time the informalities of family life would detract from this order. Men and women therefore should lead the same sorts of lives without the complementary differences found through family bonding. Breeding should be impersonal and selective (Part VI).[162]   The Philosopher Ruler of

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[156] c/f Aristotle, "Summary" *Book Theta,* ed. Spark Notes
http://www.sparknotes.com/philosophy/aristotle/section7.rhtml. [accessed 20 July 2013].
[157] Plato, *The Republic,* 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Classics, 1982), 24.
[158] Plato, *The Republic,* 24.
[159] Plato, *The Republic,* 129ff.
[160] Plato, *The Republic,* 184.
[161] Plato, *The Republic,* 218.
[162] Plato, *The Republic,* 241.

such a society would he trained in every branch of learning so that he could perceive the eternal reality beyond this world. Because of his clear vision, this person should have the final say (Part) VII.[163] Plato says the education of the Philosopher Ruler would be largely influenced by mathematics which, more than any other subject, reflects the eternal order (Part VIII).[164] He says other societies with different models of leadership are imperfect (Part IX. [165] So also are art forms (Part X).[166] In the final chapter Plato says the soul, as reflected so well in the Philosopher Ruler, has an immortality about it.

The Platonic Approach Repeated

When one reads philosophies after Plato, many appear to reflect a similar theme. There is for instance Augustine,. Luther, Machiavelli, Calvin, Hobbes, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Segundo and others. A closer examination of three of these could demonstrate this.

Augustine   put value on the transcendental order. He claimed that the City of God has a perception of the truth of God which is distinct from the more selfishly- minded City of the World.   Though Augustine accepted the worldly pursuits of secular work as being necessary, he saw this, as well as involvements of sexuality, as being less perfect than the pursuit of God in 'pure' truth.

Luther   who had been an Augustinian monk claimed the world of the church and the secular world should remain separate.   The secular prince should be allowed without hindrance, to establish order in his realm. His methods may contrast with the practice of love in the personal life of a

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[163] Plato, *The Republic,* 297.
[164] Plato, *The Republic,* 334.
[165] Plato, *The Republic,* 356.
[166] Plato, *The Republic,* 424.

Christian. But it is better to allow him authority to impose order rather than suffer the disorders of different or 'impractical.' opinions.[167]

Marx followed the philosophy of Hegel to a large extent. In a way, similar to Hegel he claimed Reality only exists within the material world.[168] One's understanding of the world therefore is largely self-made. Such understanding can be changed to perceive the realities of the world more clearly.[169] He said insofar as some people accept a 'clearer' view they can impose rules on their society and the rest of the world to make it what they judge to be a fairer place. An elite, with a clearer view than the rest, would control the education of the young.[170] The State would oblige all individuals to be answerable to it (the State) rather than to sub-groups within it like the family.[171] The State would abolish private property with all its self interest.[172] It would abolish religious 'truths' as distractions from the 'pure' realities of the economy.[173] In a communist society the position would be held that the individual, in working for the State, would thereby be working for themselves.[174]

In Summary about a Platonic Stream

In some senses there is an urgency expressed by the writers mentioned above. Some of them were facing social chaos. They were concerned to stop violence and the exploitation of vulnerable people and communities. It seemed the imposition of order was the only way to do this. Yet an over-imposition

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[167] J. M. Porter, "An Open Letter on the Harsh Book Against the Peasants," in *Luther, Selected Political Writings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 89ff.
[168] Karl Marx, "Communist Manifesto," *Selected Writings* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), 236ff.
[169] Marx, "Communist Manifesto," 236ff.
[170] Marx, "Communist Manifesto," 235.
[171] Marx, "Communist Manifesto," 237.
[172] Marx, "Communist Manifesto," 237.
[173] Marx, "Communist Manifesto," 236.
[174] Marx, "Communist Manifesto," 238.

of order on a country results in totalitarianism. Ultimately it results, not in protecting the rights of people to go about their daily business, but rather undercuts this. When force is applied to protect and supply the material needs of people, their spiritual and personal needs for freedom are taken away. Words in common that emerge in a comparison between philosophies which have similarities with Plato include 'elite', 'see the truth', 'impose order', 'freedom from family ties', 'mathematics', 'the ideal ruler' 'skill', 'the enclosed state', 'individual and state' ''contract' 'blue print' etc.

On the other end of a "scale," in looking at a different series of philosophers who compare with Aristotle, it is likely problems of a different kind can be seen. If the followers of Plato tend to be over-bearing in applying a 'blue-print' of order, then an Aristotelian model can tend towards over-diversity in self-determination. Then, a Platonic model of government may emerge to protect the weak. Hence the suggestion of a 'continuum line' between the two approaches.

What are the strands and similarities in the Aristotelian tradition?

18.   Characteristics of an Aristotelian Type of Society

Aristotle wrote a great many works, though not in the same clear artistic style that Plato used. Aristotle tried to show how everything in the world was interconnected. He set up the first museum. His approach was largely influenced by his father who was a doctor. The world as Aristotle saw it, not only had a beginning. It was also going somewhere. Humankind in particular, was meant in the course of life to find happiness.

Aristotle sets out his view of society in his work on *Politics*.[175] Whereas Plato begins his major work *The Republic* with a dialogue on ideas about justice, Aristotle begins by saying people are by nature social. T h u s the household is the basis of society (Bk I). Private property, differences and families, endorse the authentic position of the social person and enable them to develop generosity. In contrast to Plato's view these things are to be valued (Bk II). Aristotle claims a wide range of people should have political power and they should act for the good of the state (Bk III).[176] Aristotle believed power should be shared by many people and especially by those in the middle class (c/f Bk IV). He said insofar as people want to gain power by a revolution and/or a change in government it should be in accord with an established constitution (Bk V). Aristotle allowed for a sharing of power in democracies that suited the people concerned (Bk VI). He held that people are destined by their practice and development in virtue, to find true happiness. Their virtue would develop in accord with their state in life. They would be helped towards such virtue by a general and useful education (Bk VII).[177]

The Aristotelian Approach Repeated

The Aristotelian approach has been repeated in the writings of social philosophers in succeeding centuries. To assess this one could consider the writings of Aquinas, Locke, Durkheim, Weber, Parsons and others. A summary of three of these writers is below.

Aquinas re-presented the teaching of Aristotle to the Western World towards the end of the Middle Ages. Like Aristotle he

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[175] Aristotle, *Politica,* Bk. 2, Rev. Ed, ed. W. Ross, trans. B. Jowett (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1921), Chap. 3.
[176] Aristotle, *Politica,* 11-13.
[177] Aristotle, *Politica,* 13-17.

held that ordinary people can under-stand their duties in life by the exercise of their reason.[178] They should practice these duties by working for the common good. In this way they will find happiness.[179] People have the right to establish a Government which represents them.[180] The laws of such Government are binding in conscience, if they are in accord with natural and human law.[181]

Locke based his ideas about government on the premise that people in general can reason out a sane approach to government.[182] They have natural rights to peace and diversity.[183] They also have a right to property and to set up a government which is responsible to them.[184] As with Aristotle, Locke saw constitutions as being essential to a common sensed and fair government. Also like Aristotle, Locke had a medical background and tended to think of society in terms of a social organism.[185]

Weber   lived round the same time as Durkheim but they knew little about each other.[186] Weber followed Aristotle's approach of claiming that the intimate social links such as the family are basic to society. He called this sort of community, with its extensions, a 'Gemeinschaft' community.[187] He said this Gemeinschaft community is shown to exist when people are implicated in each other's total existence, usually over a long period of time.[188] He said

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[178] Thomas Aquinas, "The Political Ideas of St Thomas Aquinas," *Summa Theologia, 1-11* (C93, Art 6) ed. D. Bigongiari (New York: Hafner, 1953), 39ff.
[179] Aquinas, "The Political Ideas of St Thomas Aquinas," (C.990 Art. 2), 5 ff.
[180] Aquinas, "The Political Ideas of St Thomas Aquinas," (C. 90), 7.
[181] Aquinas, "The Political Ideas of St Thomas Aquinas," C.96, Art. 2, 4.
[182] *New Catholic Encyclopedia,* Vol. 8, 951-2.
[183] *New Catholic Encyclopedia,* Vol. 8, 951-2.
[184] *New Catholic Encyclopedia,* Vol. 8, 951-2.
[185] *New Catholic Encyclopedia,* Vol. 8, 950.
[186] Note: This is inferred in biographical sketches e.g. in T. Parsons, *Sociological Theory and Modern Society* (London: Free Press, 1967), 34, 37.
[187] Parsons, *Sociological Theory and Modern Society,* Ch. 4.
[188] Parsons, *Sociological Theory and Modern Society,* Ch. 4.s

this contrasts with 'Gesellschaft' which is an association brought about by an agreement about interests and goals but which is fairly temporal and impersonal.[189]

Weber showed that pre-existing social ideas, are basic to what shape a business world will take on.   To   illustrate.   A capitalist system of work has been developed from a group of people, who for religious reasons, wanted to p r o v e t h e y w e r e "saved" by putting priority on earning profits.[190]

Consider words in common here. Social philosophers with an Aristotelian   approach   use   words   such   as   'organic', 'constitutions',   'rights',   'fulfilment',   'virtue',   'character', 'happiness', 'nurture', 'family', 'creative', 'diversity', 'biology' etc.

19.   First Century Hellenism and Present Hellenism Compared

Just as there were changed circumstances over the centuries, so the emphases taken within a Hellenistic-type of society also changed. But similarities within the essential positions taken, have remained much the same. While these similarities can be discerned in a retrospect of two thousand years, one could wonder if the gospel writers could detect the same basic similarities and differences. In fact the Jews of the first century CE had already had three hundred years of interacting with Hellenism and had seen its manifestations in a range of ways, starting with the invasion of Alexander the Great in the 330's BCE. It continued through the administration of the Ptolemaic Dynasty 323-198 BCE through adjustments made to it via the Hasmonians c.140-116 BCE and even in the adaptations of King Herod 74-4 BCE There was arguably enough general knowledge

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[189] Parsons, *Sociological Theory and Modern Society,* Ch. 4.
[190] M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* eds T. Parsons and R. Tawney (New York: Scribner, c. 1930).

about Greek philosophy within "Hellenistic Judaism" to discern differences and weaknesses in the fifth century BCE approaches of Plato and Aristotle.

Given the urgency of the times after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE , the gospel writers were more compelled than ever to clarify what they were dealing with in the social forms of Hellenism, and then sort out and demonstrate the Christian incorporation of this.

Conclusion

Where does this sociological approach leave the left/right tensions in the Church of today? Does this consist of a Platonic versus Aristotelian approach? Or is there a more deep-seated tension between Judaism and Hellenism as these continue to co-exist to the present day? And where does the sociological interpretation find the Religious Orders of today? Has their role been overshadowed by what they have done, such as the setting up of institutions that no longer need them? Should their role be redefined in terms of a personal commitment to find a "balance" between the Judaic and Hellenistic approaches to society in the "Way" that Jesus has demonstrated.? Also, have the gospel writers set out the Judaic/Hellenistic positions in more cosmological terms, for example do they align the two world views in terms of a "time" as distinct from a "place" perspective? Probably it is only a sociological interpretation of the gospels that could clarify these questions.

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