

# **Jesus and his Two Fathers**

The Person and the Legacy

**Uri Wernik**

**Series in Philosophy of Religion**



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To the memory of Dr. Clara Bertuola, a child neuropsychiatrist and student of theology, who could discuss my unorthodox ideas with an open mind, and taught those who knew her how to live, love, and die.



And call no man your father on the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven (Matthew 23:9)



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Jerusalem, September 2019



# Introduction

The music of Johann Sebastian Bach's St. Matthew's Passion ended at the concert in the Dormition Abbey on Jerusalem's Mount Zion, located near the site of the Last Supper. The performance moved me deeply. As I left the church, I thought to myself that Jesus, the most famous person to ever walk the earth, at least in the western hemisphere, was not a victorious hero in his life, nor his death. Yet, like Socrates before him, his defeat and crucifixion continue to leave their mark. Jesus' influence goes far beyond his being the heart of Christianity. It is impossible to imagine our culture without him. Some of the highest achievements in music, art, and architecture are all intrinsically homage to him. Our history, for better or worse, would not have been what it is today without the Church and the divisions and revisions of its creed. One needs only to think about the Crusades, the Inquisition, holy wars and anti-Semitism.

This book asks who Jesus was in real life, and what molded the person that he became? How did it transpire that a new religion and Church evolved from him? In other words, I will relate to two groups of questions: the first concerns "Jesus of history," as reflected in some reported facts about his life, spanning from his family background to his social and religious development; from his attitudes and traits to decisions that led him to the cross. The second group of questions aims to understand the evolvement of the "Christ of faith," comprised of the beliefs in the miraculous birth, the resurrection, the eschatological expectations of his second coming, and ultimately the creation of a world religion.

Many renowned thinkers and scholars have dealt with these questions and have written about them before me and will continue to do so in the years to come. I was curious to know just how many books exist about Jesus. I went to *Amazon.com* and checked the number of results with the word "Jesus" in the title. Books in print alone (as of October 2017), numbered 261,782 and this number continues to grow exponentially.

Before we say anything about the above issues, we must address some preliminary issues. First, should we approach Jesus and the New Testament from the perspective of a believer or of an objective scholar? Second, we must position ourselves in the long line of thinkers who wrote about the historical Jesus and delineate how we differ from them. Third, we need to evaluate the nature of the data we have: the Scriptures and texts from other sources. Finally, to what extent can archaeological findings enrich our understanding?

## Receiving and Questioning

Some believers conceive their religion's Holy Scriptures and their authorized interpretations by priests, pastors, rabbis, imams and ratified scholars, as absolute truths dictated by God, and accepted without questions or doubts. Such textual inerrancy and literalism, the fundamentalist way, was common in Jesus' times, as it is today. Others, believers, and non-believers alike feel that they must examine religious and textual claims and make up their minds. They either tend to understand the written word in naturalistic-scientific terms, as they would read texts on non-religious matters; or in a metaphoric, poetic non-literal manner, as they would contemplate a piece of art. In either way, they reject doctrinal declarations or heavenly powers as valid explanations. The naturalistic perspective raises the danger of relinquishing pure (or blind) faith altogether. A man I know, who grew up in an ultra-orthodox Jewish home and community, described the very moment he lost his belief. He was seven years old, in a religious school and learning about the exodus from Egypt. The teacher explained how the sea parted, allowing the Israelites to pass through safely and then closed, drowning the Egyptians who pursued them (Ex 14:21-29). Trying to imagine the scene of a dry path with walls of water on both sides, he said to himself "this is impossible."

It is not a matter of blind belief versus enlightened rationalism. I am referring to something I would call spiritual or poetic realism. All persons dear to me have or have had a material existence, but also a personal, internalized representation within me, which continues to exist after they are gone. Such individuals can be religious figures, thinkers and artists, deceased parents, or beloved teachers. I cannot know for sure whether the Biblical Abraham or Moses existed historically; I cannot determine whether the lost continent of Atlantis ever existed geographically, yet they exist in our consciousness and imagination and continue to influence us, and we continue to pass on their memory to the next generations. Poetic realism, also discussed in terms of analogical imagination by David Tracy<sup>1</sup> is called for when we relate to the "Jesus of faith." We can then ask what do the messages intend to tell us, and how they could change us. From this perspective, for the interested readers, the Resurrection happened, and Jesus was the Son of God. I am returning to the twelfth-century idea of Averroes, the great Muslim scholar, of "double truth," that independent and contradictory, philosophical and religious truths can co-exist.<sup>2</sup>

## The Quest for the Historical Jesus

Exploring Jesus and the rise of Christianity from a naturalistic, empirical, rational or common-sense perspective; the way one explains the rise of leaders, social movements and parties, is often entitled "the quest for the

historical Jesus.” I began my quest four decades ago, with a master’s thesis and my first publication on the psychological investigation of the Christology in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> I am now returning to the subject that has never ceased to intrigue me.

The quest for the historical Jesus has a history too, beginning with Baruch Spinoza (1632 – 1677) who laid the groundwork for the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and modern Biblical criticism. I will use the common scholarly division into three stages of the quest. In other words, I will commit the sin of over-generalization, disregarding the uniqueness, and the differences between those thrown together into one box. In England, John Toland (1670-1722), argued in his book *Christianity, not Mysteriorious* (1696) that the supposedly divine revelations of the Bible contain no real mysteries. A properly trained, reasonable person can quite easily understand and explain them by natural principles. Thus, he proposed that Jesus did not raise people from the dead but had merely brought them out of a coma and that he walked along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, but the fog made the disciples imagine that he walked upon the water. Thomas Woolston (1670-1730), an Irishman, in his *The Moderator between an Infidel and an Apostate* (1725) argued that only an allegorical-spiritual understanding of Jesus’ prophecies, miracles, and resurrection, is tenable.

In Germany, the quest for the historical Jesus began with H. S. Reimarus (1694-1768), who wished to extrapolate the real person from the text, using objective historical study, and avoiding theoretical considerations and ecclesiastical control. In France, Charles-François Dupuis (1742 –1809) and Constantin-François de Volney (1757–1820) denied the existence of a historical Jesus altogether and argued that he was a mythical character and that Christianity is a merger of several ancient mythologies. The French deists rejected the miracles as sheer inventions: Voltaire (1694 –1778) acknowledged that Jesus might have been a prophet, while Rousseau (1712-1778) saw him as a Hebrew sage. A modern version of their approach grants that Jesus existed, but due to the non-objective nature of the documentation of his life and deeds, we are left only with myths and stories about him, which are still of interest as such. The quest continued in the nineteenth century by David Friedrich Strauss, author of *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835), Ernest Renan, who wrote *Life of Jesus* (1863) and finally by Albert Schweitzer’s the author of *Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1909). Schweitzer concluded that the historical Jesus must be a “stranger and an enigma,” and that the depiction offered by scholars is no more than a fantasy made in their image. I am afraid that his conclusions are still valid, for others as well as for me.

The second wave of the quest began in the twentieth century, by Rudolf Bultmann who argued in *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (1921) and *Jesus*

*and the Word* (1926) that most of the Gospels' accounts of the life of Jesus grew out of the myths of the early Church. He concluded that it is practically impossible to separate history from theology. In response, Ernst Kasemann and others suggested a set of criteria for deciding what is historical in the Gospels, thus commencing the latest and third "new quest." In this wave, scholars attempted to reconstruct the life of Jesus, using historical methods and critical analysis of the New Testament's writings, taking into consideration the cultural context in which Jesus lived. Members of the Jesus Seminar were quite prominent in this wave. They emphasized Jesus' humanity and not his portrayal by the early Church as Christ. They saw him as a Jew in a particular culture; focused on his sayings and legitimized the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas, as an authentic "fifth Gospel." The different authors, however, varied on the depiction of the role he played: a Rabbi, a healer, a philosophical teacher of life, or an apocalyptic prophet who announced the coming of the Kingdom of God.<sup>4</sup>

### Far Echoes

In the year that I started writing this book, the centennial of WWI was marked, with many new publications and documentaries. Today, a hundred years later, we know more than people who fought in that war or witnessed it. They were aware only of a narrow sector, a point in time and space. We, on the other hand, have access to testimonials and filmed materials covering every front, and all the governments and armies involved. People, who knew Jesus, the person, could count on their fallible memories, so long as they lived. Once they started to tell others what they remembered, these memories received a new life, developing in different directions, as stories do. A few generations later, only far echoes and blurred hearsay remained.

In our desire to acquaint ourselves with Jesus, we can only rely on ancient written accounts of three kinds: firstly, the New Testament's Gospels and epistles. Secondly, texts that remained or were fortunately discovered later (such as the *Nag Hammadi* library, found in Upper Egypt in 1945), which for various reasons, the fathers of the early Church rejected. Thirdly, we can find written background materials in Jewish and Greco-Roman writings of the period. However, it is entirely possible that such texts were later amended to reflect their writers or editors' pro (in the writings of Flavius Josephus) or contra (in the Talmudic literature) feelings about Christianity.

In any case, nothing we find in these texts would be acceptable as evidence in court. Those who knew Jesus and witnessed some of the events transmitted most of the information. Over time, this became hearsay, and like a rumor, with each retelling, it changed to accommodate the needs of the narrators and listeners. Elizabeth Loftus demonstrated illusions of memory in many studies,

showing that people often have memories of seeing things or doing things which they never saw nor did and that it is not difficult to manipulate their memory and convince them to remember things that never happened. By the first decade of the twenty-first century, DNA analysis proved that hundreds of imprisoned individuals were innocent and wrongfully convicted due only to faulty human memory.<sup>5</sup>

Who were the writers: Jews, Hellenistic Jews, Greeks, Romans, or members of other nationalities and religions? What was the motivation of the authors and editors of these texts? Did they want to record historical events? Were they copy-editors who aimed to convert the recipients to a new religion? Were they apologists who penned polemics to attack objectionable positions, or contradict the charges of various detractors? Was it a devotional aggrandizing collection of the words and deeds of the righteous leader? Alternatively, was it a political ploy to solidify the power position of some local messenger or leader of a congregation? We cannot be sure, and furthermore, mistakes and modifications took place in the oral and written processes of transmission and translation of the information, according to the changing needs (from Hebrew to Aramaic to Greek, to Latin, and back). The texts were also repeatedly copied, and each copying might have added mistakes and modifications. The process of “improving,” actually corrupting the texts, continues in our times, sometimes with good intentions to avoid offensive, politically incorrect expressions. One example will suffice: in the Gospel of John, according to the NRSV, the scribes, and Pharisees, who argued with Jesus, distinguished themselves from him, boasting, “We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself” (8:39-55). However, the concept of a child's illegitimacy relates to civil rights under Roman law and does not exist in Judaism. The older KJV was correct in saying, “We be not born of fornication.” All translations have their problems, as the Italians say *traduttore, traditore!* (translator, traitor !). I will usually use the New English Translation (NET), and when it is over-modernized, one of the older translations. I assume that some of my readers will check the verses in their preferred translations. This is an opportunity to recognize and appreciate some of the resources on the web that were helpful in my work: *Biblegateway.com*, *Biblehub.com*, *Bible.oremus.org*, *Semanticbible.com*, *Jesusdatabase.org*, *Jewishencyclopedia.com*, and *Earlychristianwritings.com*.

Eventually, there existed different versions of events and sayings, written in different times and places, with the various communities swearing by their renderings, and disqualifying those of others. Affiliation with religions and sects is defined by what believers do, what they do not do, and by how they differ from others. In those days and areas, syncretism was prevalent, as is evident in the words of the Biblical prophets, admonishing the Israelites not

to worship idols and foreign gods. Thus, people were not necessarily only Jews or Christians. They could still have their mix of Judaism and Christianity and one of the Hellenistic, Egyptian or Persian religions and other local cults. Only in the fourth century, this variability and flexibility ended; the fathers of the Church formulated essential dogmas and edited the selected documents and arranged them together in one standardized book.

Incidentally, this point helps us to put in perspective the different theories about the “Mythological Jesus,” namely that he never existed and that the stories about him were adopted from various pagan sources, mythologies, and cults. I prefer the hypothesis, that in this case, as with all cognitive activity, people understand new information by incorporating it into old schemes. Members of the early Church in Jerusalem incorporated Jesus into their ancient Jewish world-view; adherents of the different Mediterranean cults in the Pauline movement integrated him into theirs. The alternative hypothesis that someone somehow concocted a new religion begs the question as to why the text was left with many contradictions, as forgers would have been careful to cover-up the inconsistencies. You will see later (Chapter 8), that I have more compelling reasons to reject the myth hypothesis.

There are many theories, speculations, and debates among students of these texts, concerning authorship (is the author the one whose name is given, or is it a false attribution?), and originality (was the text written in Greek or was it translated from Aramaic?). There are also questions about authenticity (is it a primary text or an adaptation and amendment of older text or texts?), timing (was it written close to the reported events, or generations later?), and reliability (does the text describe historical facts or fanciful-slanted claims?). In short, we are like archaeologists who excavate a site, in which different periods, layers and objects are intermingled. In this site, things are not necessarily what they seem to be. Sentences spoken by Jesus might have been his own living words, a modification of his words, or later addition to show that his words and deeds fulfilled earlier Biblical prophecies. Besides, such saying could have been a false attribution, made to support this or that theological position against another one.

Jesus’ last words on the cross were, “*Eli Eli lama sabachthan?*” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34). These heartrending words in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke, sound highly authentic, and though the reader can sense the pain, suffering, disappointment, feelings of desertion and betrayal, he might subsequently wonder how the editors of the Gospels agreed to preserve them at all. However, this sentence is also a quote, one of many, probably made to prove that Christ fulfilled the Scriptures’ prophecies “A Psalm of David. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of

anguish?" (Ps 22:1). It is hard to believe that a flesh and blood person would have bothered, then and there, with literary quotes, and it is hard to decide how to deal with such instances: disregard a statement for being a later addition, or treat it as an authentic one, as if no doubts exist about it.

To use another example, in the three synoptic Gospels (so-called because they mostly include the same material, in a similar sequence and wording), it is told that while Jesus was addressing the multitudes, he was informed that his mother and brothers came to him. He disregarded them and explained, "Whoever does the will of My Father who is in heaven, he is My brother and sister and mother" (Mt 12:46; Mk 3:31; Lk 8:19). Should we understand this description, as reflecting a problematic family constellation, or as an expression of extreme dedication to a cause? Once we realize that Paul, the messenger to the Gentiles, who claimed that Jesus revealed himself to him, and James the brother of Jesus, who headed the Jerusalem community, contested who was the true heir-representative of Jesus, we can understand the report differently. Namely, that a Pauline editor was interested in having Jesus himself declare that belief supersedes blood ties. I admit that my solution to the dilemma is self-contradictory. On some occasions, I will apply the old Latin maxim *Cui bono* [for whose benefit], which suggests looking for the hidden agenda, the hidden interest, especially when each of the Gospels reports an incident or a saying differently. Yet, on other occasions, I will treat it as it appears, as a statement of fact, and then examine its implications. The reader will have to be the final judge.

From all the available texts, imposing their often arbitrary rules of admission and rejection, the different commentators and scholars draw bits and pieces, implicitly deciding which ones to disregard and which ones to declare as later additions. They then put them together to produce a picture, claiming that it is the one true to life. Hence, using the ploy of the selection of texts and rejection of statements as later additions, authors who believe in the myth of Jesus, can make a convincing case, as can proponents of the historical Jesus. Although I do the same, I at least try to make my rules of inclusion or exclusion of verses explicit. On the positive side, considering the vast thirst for knowledge about Jesus, this very ambiguity and the coexistence of varied depictions and often contradictions in the New Testament and their many interpretations, motivate attempts to continue the quest and set the record straight.

### **The Jesus' Family Tomb Debate**

Can archeologists supply us with some tangible evidence, and was the burial site of Jesus' family discovered? During construction in the early 1980s in Jerusalem's neighborhood of East Talpiot, workers uncovered a tomb dated to the end of the Second Temple-Herodian period. Ten ossuaries (bone collecting

boxes), were found, one of which somehow disappeared, or perhaps was discarded or stolen. Six of the ossuaries had names inscribed on them: Jesus son of Joseph, Jose, Maria, Judas son of Jesus, Matya (Matthew), and Mariamane Mara. The first five inscriptions were in Aramaic, or possibly in Hebrew, and the last one in Greek. In 2007, the Discovery Channel aired a documentary, "The Lost Tomb of Jesus," which was accompanied by a book about the tomb authored by Simcha Jacobovici the director, and Charles Pellegrino, his co-author.<sup>6</sup> They announced that they had found Jesus' family tomb, which held the remains of Jesus, Mary his mother, Mary Magdalene his wife; and Judas their child. A statistician determined that the probability of finding such a collection of names in one tomb is at least one in 600 (with a wide range of odds from 50-50 to more than 1 in a million). In 2010, the same director and other experts explored an adjacent tomb, known now as the Patio tomb. It held seven ossuaries, with engraved symbols typical of Early Christianity, and an inscribed message that mentioned the rising of the dead. Another ossuary, found in the 1970s and publicized in 2002, had the inscription "James (Ya'acov) son of Joseph brother of Jesus." Jacobovici made another documentary about this finding, titled "The Brother of Jesus," in which he argued that the ossuary was somehow taken from the Jesus' family tomb.

All these discoveries have not yet changed history (as Jacobovici claimed), but certainly became controversial, with arguments, books, and articles by theologians, statisticians, geologists, geneticists, archeologists, historians, epigraphists (the study of ancient inscriptions), and lawyers too. The antique dealer, who held the James ossuary, successfully fought in court the charge that he had forged part of the inscription; the film's director sued an archeologist for libel and won his case. Debates about the reading of the inscriptions, the statistical analysis, the interpretation of the symbols, and other questions, continue to appear on websites, and in scholarly and popular writings.<sup>7</sup>

With complicated and value-loaded issues like this, just as with the conceptualization of Jesus, I believe that people do not make up their mind based on dry facts. They would rather prefer to keep their preconceived notions, their structure of beliefs, and only then decide which interpretation of the facts to favor. Tabor and Jacobovici concluded, in a second book about the tomb, that "Mara" is an honorific title equivalent to Lady. However the combination "Mariamne Mara," can also stand for two different women interred in the same ossuary, or one woman with a double name, the second of which is in the contracted form, similar to "Alexa Mara mother of Judas Simon her son" inscribed on another ossuary found in Jerusalem.<sup>8</sup> Why did her name appear in Greek and not in Aramaic or Hebrew like her supposed husband and all the others? A DNA analysis of the bones, found in the ossuaries of Jesus and Mariamne, suggests the existence of a familial

relationship between them. If so, she might have been unmarried or married to Matya, the other male buried there. Why was Yehuda not identified as Jesus' younger stepbrother, but rather as his son? Incidentally, if Jesus had a son, and named him Yehuda (Judas), this very naming could support my contention that Judas was Jesus' best friend and most loyal disciple (Chapter 7). Why was the title "mother of Jesus," not inscribed on Mary's ossuary, while "brother of Jesus" was inscribed on James'? In addition to the Alexa-Mara ossuary, two other ones mentioned a woman's son "Sabatis mother of Damon," and "Shlamsiyon mother of Yehoezer."<sup>9</sup>

What historical evidence, besides Gnostic sources, do we have that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene and had a son? The Gnostic gospels are heterodox mystical writings and not historical documents. Hence, portraying Mary Magdalene as Jesus' wife, reflects the Gnostic upside-down world, where God is evil, the world is a prison, and sin and sex are virtues. According to them, the snake in the Garden of Eden tried to save Adam, and Eve rightfully tempted him, and females, degraded in a patriarchic society, were elevated as the source of wisdom.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the marriage of Jesus and Mary could have symbolized the unity of the male and female aspects of the Deity and at the same time presented the opposite of Early Christianity's view on marriage and portrayal of a Jesus as a celibate.

In Hasidism (Jewish pietistic movements), the names of righteous Rabbis, their parents, and spouses are often commemorated by giving their names to newborns. Thus, the name Nachman is very popular among followers, especially neophytes, of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov.<sup>11</sup> We know that in the period of the Second Temple, "in choosing the names for their children, members of the general public might have preferred the names of high priests, aristocrats, and priests."<sup>12</sup> The early Jewish-Christians must have felt the same about the names Jesus and Mary, which we can assume they gave more frequently to their children, compared with the general population. In this case, a recalculation of the probabilities of these combined names would be advisable. A name is a cultural product, carrying a message given by the parents, expressing values, aspirations, and identities, especially in historical periods of transition and crisis.<sup>13</sup> The early Christians in Jerusalem, still under the impact of the crucifixion, lived in such a period. To conclude, the discoveries are certainly fascinating and prove that an Early Jewish-Christian community with a burial ground existed in Jerusalem. It is possible, but not certain that the archeological site is in effect the Jesus' family tomb. Hence, besides some physical remains, archeology cannot help us learn who the living person was.

## A Quest Unmentioned

At this point, to elucidate my approach, I must say a few things about Friedrich Nietzsche, whom psychologists usually disregard, and do not consider one of theirs, a misconception I have tried to correct elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> He is also unrecognized by students of the historical (and psychological) Jesus. Unfortunately, his “God is dead” proclamation made him suspect, and some readers understood his book *The Antichrist* as a rejection of Jesus, the person, and not as a criticism of an interpretation of him. Moreover, Nietzsche felt a deep identification with Jesus and his book has penetrating insights into his personality,<sup>15</sup> which will be considered later when we discuss the theme of father hunger.

I am mentioning him now for two other connected reasons, his views on knowledge, and his conception of the author-text relationship. He was honest enough to recognize, as Schweitzer discovered later, that any scholarly production is the story of the scholar’s biography. For this reason, he refused to play the game, or adopt the pose of “objective” detachment, in which one pretends that it is not what the author believes and feels to be true that matters, but rather actual clear-cut facts and robust reality. In this game, the author hides and creates a distance between himself or herself and the text, writing in the (humble) third person or the plural (grandiose) mode, qualifying statements with an abundance of references and footnotes.

Nietzsche was not like that at all. He wrote with his blood and heart<sup>16</sup> in short aphorisms, in the first-person mode, leaving future commentators to add explanatory footnotes. I intend to follow Nietzsche’s example: write in a more personal style and display the nature of my interest in Jesus (See, <https://vernonpress.com/book/835>). I will keep the usual academic style and disputation to the bare minimum, as everything nowadays can be easily googled. Nietzsche was very doubtful about our notions of truth and causality saying, “There are no facts, only interpretations.”<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, he was willing to consider only hypotheses that were amenable to examination, resulting in naturalistic explanations. Accordingly, whatever I claim in this book about Jesus, his family, and disciples, is merely an interpretation and in no way proposes to negate other interpretations and perspectives.

Nietzsche’s views on the author-text connection are not only relevant to those who write about the Jesus of history and psychology, but also to Jesus himself. We cannot know for sure whether he could read and write at all, or merely memorized and internalized many biblical verses, read aloud at synagogues. Nietzsche observed that one cannot not write about herself, and therefore, everything we say, says something about ourselves. This, I contend, is true for Jesus’ sayings as well. The personal factor will always remain in the

background; even when one gains much knowledge, even if one is as objective as possible, “ultimately he reaps nothing but his biography” (*Human*, IX, 513).<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche concluded, “Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir; also, that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant had grown” (*Beyond*, I, 6).<sup>19</sup>

This insight was shared by many others, among them Thomas Mann, who commented on the process of writing *Death in Venice* that, “The truth is that every piece of work is a realization, fragmentary but complete in itself, of our individuality.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, in this book, I will occasionally go back from Jesus’ intellectual-spiritual-religious messages, to hypotheses about him as a person, trying as much as I can to avoid wild speculations, and look for objective supporting data. Of course, your biography, the reader, and my biography, the author, enter the picture as well.

### **The Quest for Jesus of Psychology**

Interwoven in the quest for the historical Jesus, we can find explorations based on the discipline of psychology. My book belongs to this strand. The nineteenth-century great historian of Hellenism, J.G. Droysen, thought that “one important goal of studying history, for writers and readers alike, is to gain the ability to think historically.”<sup>21</sup> I feel that writing about the Jesus of psychology teaches how to think, and how not to think psychologically. Writing this book, I hope, will also make me a better psychologist.

I would like to suggest a metaphor for my approach. Imagine, if you will, a few progressively larger concentric rings, surrounding a common axis. Jesus is the axis, next comes his family and early life experience, and then his wanderings, disciples, and followers, followed by the early Jewish-Christian communities and their offshoots out of Jerusalem. Beyond it, in a more distant ring, we find culture, religion and the political situation in the land in which Jesus lived. Jesus came from the hilly region of the Galilee, part of the land called *Iudaea* by the Hellenic rulers, which the Roman authorities later annexed to the greater *Syria Palestina*. In the second century CE, the sages of the Mishna named the land “the Land of Israel.”<sup>22</sup> Beyond this circle, we have the larger milieu of the Greco-Roman world, and next to it, we find also the Pauline proselytizing of non-Jews, the emergence of the Church, not to mention some other chance, unaccounted ingredients. The hero of John Barth’s novel *The Floating Opera* said: “I think that to understand any one thing entirely, no matter how minute, requires the understanding of every other thing in the world.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, it is quite possible that had one of these elements been missing or different, and had not the clashes, mergers, and

interactions between all these figures and factors been what they were; we would not have the Christian religion and Church today.

I would like to clarify what I am talking about when I talk about Jesus. Due to the meagerness of information, and its contradictory nature, we cannot say anything inviolable about the real person called Jesus, be it the one of history, who died two thousand years ago, or the Christ of belief who became divine. Thus, I write about a figure that I have reconstructed from available texts. Still, I aim to write about a plausible figure, a person like you and me, who tried to live his life the best he could and find meaning in it. I want to show, if possible, a person in his historical and cultural background, but also beyond them, not as one acting this or that role only, but rather in a way that will make you feel that you could have met him today or someone, who in some respects, is like him.

I will consider Jesus' emotional experiences in the context of his family and the context of the psychological experiences and needs of his close circle of disciples. We cannot understand Jesus in isolation from them, as they mutually influenced each other's perceptions and calling. Hence, it will be more appropriate to describe my approach as the quest for the Jesus of psychology, and the book will open with a review of the previous psychological quests. Interestingly, I find that like the quest for the historical Jesus, they progressed in three phases-facets: first came attempts to diagnose Jesus in the context of the then-new discipline of psychiatry. Then, in the second phase, different psychoanalysis-oriented scholars conceptualized Jesus in terms of their various theories. I will review briefly some of these early and current contributions. My work belongs to the non-pathologizing, non-theory-bound, empirical third phase. In fact, my work about Christology appeared in a journal's special issue dedicated to non-psychoanalytical contributions to psychohistory.<sup>24</sup>

Just as I aim to portray Jesus as a living person, I see his disciples in human terms, not that different from fans and groupies of sports teams and rock stars, trying to outdo each other with expressions of admiration and devotion. Trying to understand the belief in Jesus' resurrection, should not be divorced from understanding Elvis Presley's fans who believe that he did not die, and fans who reported seeing him alive after the date of his supposed death ([www.elvissightingsociety.org](http://www.elvissightingsociety.org)). A person does not wake up one morning and decide that he is the Messiah for whom everyone has been waiting. One needs to enter a relationship and interactions with disciples and admirers, in which expectations are raised, doubts are resolved, and the realization of one's mission is born. I will thus describe the relationship that was developed and the mutual influence of a charismatic leader and his followers. I will later move on to the belief crisis, which the believers experienced after the

crucifixion of their much-admired fatherly leader, and I will elaborate on the processes that were set into motion.

Despite the uniqueness of Jesus and his transformation into Christ (the Messiah), interestingly, parallel developments took place in different areas and periods, and at least one is currently taking place today. In the Hassidic Orthodox movement of *Habad* (the Hebrew acronym of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge), a few groups of followers, believe that the late Rabbi Menachem Zalman Shneurson from Lubavitch, who lived in the Crown Heights neighborhood, Brooklyn, New York, is the living Messiah. This well-studied and documented phenomenon can teach us much about what might have transpired twenty centuries earlier.<sup>25</sup>

My book is titled *Jesus and his two Father* because in my eyes the theme of the father, recognized by other commentators to some degree (especially in his absence), as will be shown in the first chapter, is crucial for answering our questions about the person and the movement. The first father in the title refers to Joseph, Mary's husband, who as a foster-father, was or was not a father figure for Jesus. The second father is "Our Father in heaven," namely God. In addition to them, these pages relate to two other father figures. The third is Jesus himself, who became a father to his disciples and continues to be a father to his believers. The disciples and followers adopted the metaphor and rhetoric of fatherhood, calling the leaders of the early Church "fathers." The tradition continued in the Catholic Church, where priests are fathers, and the head of the Church is the Pope (Papa, father). The fourth and last father, the one I hope my readers will think about without my help, is the mortal father each one of us (readers and author) has or had, or wished they had, the one we sometimes call "dad."

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