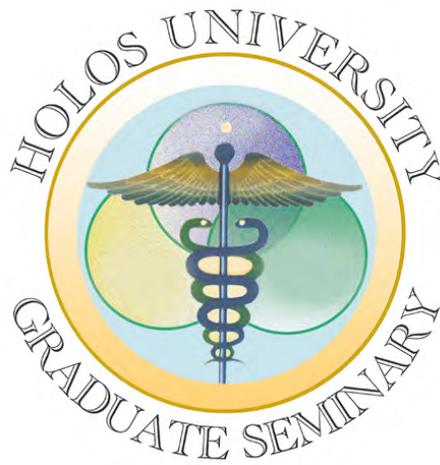


**The Therapeutic Psychosomatic Effects
of the Philosophy of the Historical Jesus of Nazareth**

by
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Dissertation
submitted to the Faculty of
Holos University Graduate Seminary

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF THEOLOGY

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The work reported in this thesis is original and carried out by me solely, except for the acknowledged direction and assistance gratefully received from colleagues and mentors.

James Arthur Gaither

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ABSTRACT

The Therapeutic Psychosomatic Effects of The Philosophy of the Historical Jesus of Nazareth

Objectives: (1) To explore the possibility that Jesus could be classified as a philosopher by comparing “authentic sayings” of Jesus to philosophies of his era. (2) To test for effects of listening to sayings attributed to Jesus on peripheral skin temperature and self-reported emotional states.

Design and setting: Jesus’ “authentic sayings” were compared in content and style with the Greek philosophical schools of Cynics, Stoics, and Pythagoreans, as well as with the Chinese philosophies of Taoism and Moism. Jesus’ philosophy was examined for elements related to research in holistic health methods. The study recorded peripheral skin temperature while participants listened to recordings in church office spaces and used a pre-test and post-test administration of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory and Profile of Mood States (Brief form).

Participants: Adult volunteers (N = 68) from two Unity Churches, 64% females and 36% males.

Results: Clear similarities in content and style were found between Jesus’ philosophy and the philosophies of Cynicism, Stoicism, Pythagoreanism, Taoism and Moism. Parallels were found between Jesus’ philosophy and holistic therapy methodologies. Peripheral skin temperature of participants increased significantly ($p < .01$) while listening to recordings, indicating some had relaxation responses. Self-reported anxiety traits decreased significantly ($p < .01$) after listening to recordings, especially for those who

listened to recording of “Authentic sayings of Jesus.” Self-reported anxiety states and other negative emotions similarly decreased after listening to recordings, but not to a statistically significant degree.

Conclusions: Preliminary evidence suggests that (1) Jesus could be classified as a philosopher whose philosophy had therapeutic effects and (2) listening to the “authentic sayings” of Jesus and possibly other types of literature can help reduce anxiety states and induce stress relieving meditation states. Results indicate that research into effects of listening to different types of wisdom literature could produce methods beneficial to emotional and physical health.

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Introduction

The New Testament gives accounts of healings apparently related to paradigm shifts in consciousness. Those shifts are traditionally called “having faith”; faith is a state of consciousness. Not as widely known as the New Testament healing stories are accounts from before New Testament times of healings produced by philosophers. The Pythagorean¹ and Therapeutae philosophers² were regarded as healers. The philosophers Empedocles³ and Apollonius of Tyana⁴ were reputed to have healing powers. Recently historians and biblical scholars have noted the similarities between sayings of Jesus and sayings of Cynic philosophers. Was Jesus a philosopher whose philosophy had therapeutic effects? My thesis is that the answer to that question is “yes.”

My dissertation consists of two aspects: a case for classifying the historical Jesus as a therapeutic philosopher and research into the effects of Jesus’ philosophy on physical relaxation and mood changes.

Jesus’ philosophy may have had a healing effect on the emotional nature of his audience and his parables and aphorisms may have induced altered consciousness states in his listeners similar to states induced by meditation methods. Professor Stevan Davies has made a strong case that Jesus’ sayings and parables are similar to methods used by hypnotherapist Milton Erickson to quickly induce trance states.⁵ Some of Jesus’ sayings are reminiscent of Zen koans. The koan “what is the sound of one hand clapping?” is akin to Jesus’ saying, “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Matthew 6:3 and Thomas 62: 2). Zen Buddhist teachers use koans as a device to induce

meditative states in the quest for satori, which is sometimes described as a state of “non-dual” consciousness.

Could some of the stories of healings in the Gospels constitute memories of actual cases?

The following case was reported in a book published in 1986 by a respected physician and medical professor at Yale:

A woman with extensive cancer was no longer responding to treatment and so went home to die. Several months later she returned to her doctor’s office and her doctor discovered that her cancer was completely gone. When asked what she had done, she simply replied, “I decided to live to be a hundred and leave my troubles to God.”⁶

Is there any way to explain the woman’s ability to simply decide to let go of concern and the consequent healing of an apparently terminal illness? Or did the woman make her decision and then merely coincidentally experience a spontaneous remission?

Undoubtedly the woman’s seemingly simple decision to “live to be a hundred and leave my troubles to God” was related to other beliefs she had prior to her decision; perhaps her decision was supported by her whole belief system. Beliefs have emotional content and emotions have correlating physiological states. Clearly then belief systems are related to physical states. Changes in consciousness can produce changes in the body.

One’s belief system may include religious beliefs but also includes one’s overarching philosophy of life: purpose, self-image, attitudes toward the world, ethics, metaphysics *et al.* Perhaps a shift in consciousness that results in healing is something that can be “induced” by working at changing one’s belief system.

A 42 year old woman entered a holistic research clinic in Copenhagen. She had been diagnosed with cancer but did not want to rely entirely upon surgery, radiotherapy and chemotherapy. She wanted to do something herself to battle her illness. Her physician helped her work through some of her forgiveness issues. In conversation she revealed that she felt hopelessness and powerlessness. Her physician then had a conversation with her about surrendering to God and about the parable of the lilies of the field and the birds of the air. They talked about the idea that life is good and will “carry” us. As they continued their discussion on philosophy of life suddenly, much to the physician’s surprise, the cancer lump began to get measurably smaller.⁷

The physician who reported the above incident of “spontaneous remission” was part of a research team which discovered that working with cancer patients on “life philosophy” significantly lengthened the patients’ lives. While the patients in a control group all died within four years, some patients participating in the “life philosophy” intervention were still alive after 10 years and in complete remission.⁸ The authors of the article wrote:

“We know that spontaneous remission of cancer is seen with almost all kinds of cancer and we know that it often happens after a spiritual breakthrough. The spiritual breakthrough is almost always about being more alive, knowing oneself and the purpose of life better, stepping fully into personal character, realizing talents and how to use them.”⁹

The holistic physicians were not teaching religion but truly discussing philosophy; not philosophy as abstract theorizing but rather philosophy of life. Philosophy of life is concerned with happiness, self-knowledge, purpose, and ethics. At the same time, any philosophy of life has metaphysical subtexts and is sometimes explicitly tied to

metaphysical theory. In their article on “inducing spontaneous remission” the physician authors ventured briefly into their own metaphysical subtext. After acknowledging the role of biochemical theory in medicine the authors stated: “we believe that cancer is caused from our consciousness, when we repress emotions and place them in the tissues of the body. We therefore also believe a cure of cancer to come from fundamental shifts in our consciousness and state of being.”¹⁰ The statement suggests that being is more than matter; that there is an element of being called “consciousness” which is not reducible to body chemistry.

It is striking that in the cases cited above the elements of “life philosophy” in the treatments were elements present in the teachings of Jesus: faith, “surrender to God,” forgiveness, “considering the birds of the air and lilies of the field” and “realizing talents.” The fact that elements of modern holistic therapy are also in the teachings of Jesus suggests that Jesus taught a therapeutic “life philosophy.” He influenced people to change their minds and hearts – to shift their consciousness. Might not some of those shifts in consciousness have “induced spontaneous remissions”?

The factors that can affect human health are widely acknowledged to include diet, lifestyle, stress, spirituality, environment, genetics, bacteria, and mental attitudes. Since the time of Pythagoras (ca. 500 BCE), there have been those who believe that consciousness, music and other “energy vibrations” can also affect health and healing. Insofar as stressors on health include interpersonal relationship and workplace challenges, it is clear that practically everything and anything can affect health. The *whole* of a person’s experience and responses to experience affects that person’s state of health. The holistic nature of experience requires holistic approaches to health.

A person's philosophy of life is the ground of the person's mental attitudes, choices, actions, and feelings about events. An individual's philosophy of life includes how one sees oneself in relation to: the universe as a whole (spirituality and metaphysical concepts), nature (ecology and diet), others (ethics), and the human economy. A person's philosophy of life affects the person's lifestyle, relationships, career, financial state, stress levels and responses to changing conditions. An individual's philosophy of life provides a holistic foundation for that individual's experience, including states of health and recuperative powers.

If one's state of health is an *effect* of holistic experience and philosophy of life is a primary holistic *cause* of responses to experience, then it follows that philosophy of life is a significant causative factor in a person's well-being.

On the hypothesis that a person's philosophy of life is a significant health factor, the question arises, "which kinds of philosophies are health productive and which are health inhibitive?" Another related question suggested by the same hypothesis is "could a paradigm shift in personal philosophy, in and of itself, produce cures for illnesses?"

My thesis that Jesus was a philosopher is not opposed to believing in Jesus as a religious personage. A few philosophers in his era also came to be seen as "divine beings," e.g. Pythagoras and Lao-Tzu. Philosophy of life and religion are often nearly co-extensive in an individual's consciousness. Traditions are labeled "religions" more as a matter of "family resemblances" than as a matter of a definitive set of rules.

There are distinctions and similarities between religion and philosophy. Philosophy is rational inquiry into the nature of the universe and historically that has included thinking about morality, immortality and the existence and nature of God. Most

religions have doctrines about morality, immortality and God. Religions usually have sacred books. Philosophy generates books, but philosophy books are not considered sacred. Religions have community ritualistic meetings; some philosophies such as Pythagoreanism have had communities with rituals. A philosopher can be religious; a religious person can be philosophical. Christianity is a religion which has included philosophers. I shall argue that Jesus was a philosopher whose followers constructed a religion about him.

Religion often provides for the believer the philosophical factors of metaphysics and ethics. When a person claims to be healed by means of religious conversion, that claim is essentially the same as affirming that a paradigm shift in the person's *philosophy* of life produced the cure. A number of such claims are recorded in William James classic lectures *The Varieties of Religious Experience*¹¹ and in publications of Christian Science, Religious Science, Unity, and various Christian Churches.

HYPOTHESES

Scientific research has indicated that meditation reduces stress.¹² Biofeedback studies have shown that a common indicator that an individual is in a meditative state is “the relaxation response.” One of the simplest measurements of the relaxation response is peripheral skin temperature. When peripheral skin temperature increases, the increase indicates that the person is relaxing.¹³ The relaxation response is also accompanied by increased amplitude of alpha brain-wave frequencies.¹⁴

If listening to Jesus' sayings results in the increase of peripheral skin temperature that would be an indication that those sayings could be used to induce meditative states.

Insofar as contemplation of Jesus' philosophy induces meditative states, a meditation method based on his philosophy could be therapeutic in the ways other forms of meditation can be therapeutic.

For comparison purposes I made a distinction between "authentic sayings" and "attributed sayings" of Jesus. The reasons for this distinction are explained in chapter 2: "*The Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith.*" In my experimental research those listening to "authentic sayings" were the experimental group and those listening to "attributed sayings" were the comparison group.

If both type sayings showed significant increase of peripheral skin temperature that would indicate both types of sayings could be used for meditation method. If neither type saying resulted in meditative states, the experiment will fail to reject the null hypotheses regarding inducing meditative states.

If the experimental group contemplating the sayings showed no significant difference from the comparison group in increasing peripheral skin temperature, the hypothesis regarding the distinction between "authentic" and "attributed sayings" would not be supported by that aspect of the research.

The participants were also tested using the "Profile of Mood States" (POMS) and "State Trait Anxiety Inventory" (STAI), before and after listening to the sayings. The POMS and STAI instruments were used to investigate whether or not contemplating Jesus' sayings contributes to diminishing stressful states and moods such as anxiety and anger. If contemplation of Jesus' sayings diminished stressful emotions that would indicate that such contemplation has a therapeutic value.

The hypotheses tested by my dissertation research and experiment were as follows:

Hypothesis 1:

The sayings and ideas of the historical Jesus are similar to the sayings and ideas of philosophers of his era (500 BCE to 200 CE) and therefore he was a philosopher.

Null Hypothesis 1:

The sayings and ideas of the historical Jesus are not similar to the sayings and ideas of philosophers of his era and therefore he was not a philosopher.

Hypothesis 2:

Listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus has the effect of producing the lowered sympathetic nervous system arousal in participants as measured by an increase in peripheral skin temperature.

Null Hypothesis 2:

There is no significant statistical change in peripheral skin temperature while listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus.

Hypothesis 3:

Listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus increases the peripheral skin temperature significantly more than listening to the attributed sayings of Jesus.

Null Hypothesis 3:

There is no significant difference in peripheral skin temperature increase from listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus compared to listening to the attributed sayings of Jesus.

Hypothesis 4:

Listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus results in significant reduction of health-counterproductive emotions (e.g. tension-anxiety, depression-dejection, anger-hostility, fatigue-inertia, and confusion-bewilderment).

Null Hypotheses 4:

Listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus has no significant effect on health-counterproductive emotions.

Hypothesis 5:

Listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus results in significantly greater reduction of health-counterproductive emotions than listening to the attributed sayings of Jesus.

Null Hypothesis 5:

There is no significant difference in effect on reduction of health-counterproductive emotions between listening to authentic sayings of Jesus and attributed sayings of Jesus.

If the null hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 and/or 1, 4 and 5 are rejected, then the hypothesis that Jesus can be classified historically as a therapeutic philosopher is adequately demonstrated.

CHAPTER 1: HOLISTIC PRAGMATISM - METHODOLOGY FOR IDENTIFYING THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Jesus of Nazareth is a venerated, controversial and important figure in world culture. It seems nearly everyone in the world has an opinion and feelings about him. He is worshipped by Christians, venerated as a prophet by Muslims, venerated as a spiritual master by Hindus, recognized as Buddha-like by many Buddhists, and respected by some within Judaism. On the other hand, there are those who do not esteem Jesus. Despite abundant historical evidence of Jesus' existence and impact, a few people even contend that Jesus is an entirely fictitious character. The existence of hundreds of Christian denominations indicates disagreement among them about the meaning and message of Jesus. New Testament scholars debate each other regarding what the "historical Jesus" said and did. These facts of Jesus' importance and controversial nature in world culture are sufficient reason to try to discern the truth about him.

There are several *practical* reasons to seek a better understanding of Jesus as a historical figure. The primary reason and focus of my dissertation is that if Jesus was in fact a healer, we may be able to derive some insight regarding alternative healing methods by seeking to understand him and his message. Also a better understanding of Jesus' philosophy will help us better understand how he became such a pervasively influential historical figure. Finally, a better understanding of the historical Jesus could have a unifying and beneficial effect within Christianity and between Christians and non-Christians.

There are two reasons for applying a holistic and pragmatic epistemology to the quest to understand the historical Jesus. First, biblical scholarship alone is inadequate for understanding Jesus. Second, a holistic and pragmatic epistemology has the greatest potential to reveal something of the nature of Jesus' mind and the probable effects of his mind on those who encountered him.

The reason biblical scholarship is inadequate for understanding Jesus is that its scope is limited to investigating what Jesus said and did. While his words and actions are crucially important information for understanding Jesus, if we would understand him and his impact on the world we need to know what he *meant* by what he said. We need to understand him in the context of global history and thought, not merely in the context of followers' "Gospels." We need ways to identify and interpret his philosophy from his words. We need ways to infer his inner mental states and perspective. We need ways to infer his effects on those he encountered.

A holistic and pragmatic epistemology may well reveal what biblical scholarship cannot. First I will explain what I mean by "holistic" and "pragmatic." Then I will attempt to show how "holistic pragmatism" might lead us to a better understanding of Jesus of Nazareth's place in world history, the nature of his mind, and whether or not we can learn something about healing by understanding him better.

Holistic Pragmatism

What we call "truth" consists of descriptions and statements we evaluate as true. True descriptions help us adapt to and shape our world in a wide variety of ways. Mathematical truths help us keep financial accounts, build skyscrapers and launch spaceships. Molecular truths help us develop medicines, synthetic substances and

explosives. Historical truths help us understand our present in terms of our past, avoid making mistakes and develop plans for a better future. Some truths help us predict or cause future events. The list of how truths help us is practically endless.

William James gave the pragmatic definition of truth as “*True ideas are those that we can assimilate, validate, corroborate and verify. False ideas are those that we cannot.* That is the practical difference it makes to us to have true ideas; that, therefore, is the meaning of truth, for it is all that truth is known-as.”¹⁵

The pragmatic theory of truth affirms that the helpfulness of true descriptions is not only their value to us but also is what *makes* the descriptions *true*. As William James wrote:

“Any idea that helps us to *deal*, whether practically or intellectually, with either the reality or its belongings, that doesn't entangle our progress in frustrations, that *fits*, in fact, and adapts our life to the reality's whole setting, will agree sufficiently to meet the requirement. It will hold true of that reality.”¹⁶

Richard Rorty, a modern pragmatist, states the pragmatic meaning of truth more succinctly by noting that the pragmatist “drops the notion of truth as correspondence with reality altogether, and says that modern science does not enable us to cope because it corresponds, it just plain enables us to cope.”¹⁷

Statements of fact are not the facts themselves but rather statements of fact connect our minds in a practical way to facts. Language constitutes our “map” of the universe; that “map” is not reality but helps us “navigate reality.”

An important factor in the pragmatic theory of truth is *coherence*. An incoherent statement must be evaluated as meaningless and therefore not true. For a hypothesis to

be evaluated as true, it must “work” in the sense of being compatible or consistent with already accepted knowledge. Coherence is a necessary but not sufficient condition for truth. If a statement or theory is coherent with an established knowledge base, it still requires verification – significant supporting empirical evidence or logical proof - to be evaluated as true.

There are two types of coherence, weak coherence and strong coherence.

A theory that is neither logically nor empirically proven but which does not contradict accepted knowledge has *weak* coherence. For example, belief in the existence of God can have weak coherence if the specific concept of God is plausible and does not *contradict* principles of logic or scientific evidence. A theory with weak coherence can be considered reasonable, plausible or *possibly* true.

A theory consistent with empirical knowledge has *strong* coherence. For example, evolution and quantum theories have strong coherence; the theories are compatible with and explain the evidence. A theory which fits newly discovered facts better than a previous theory also has strong coherence and supplants the previous theory; relativity is an example of such a theory. A theory which is logically true, which can be deduced logically or mathematically from established principles or facts, has strong coherence. A theory or statement with strong coherence can be considered *probably* true and the probability of its truth increases relative to its utility and the scope of supporting evidence. A theory with strong coherence but with minimal supporting evidence generally remains widely controversial until sufficient evidence is obtained for either acceptance or rejection.

The coherence factor indicates that a sound pragmatic approach to knowledge requires holistic considerations when the knowledge sought cannot be logically deduced from accepted premises or demonstrated by scientific experiment. Scientific method makes use of experimentation, inductive reasoning, deductive reasoning and mathematics. The fields of metaphysics, ethics, theology, and history are examples of knowledge quests beyond the reach of scientific method; yet each of those fields can have propositions which are coherent with scientific knowledge.

History may seem to be based upon direct observation, but in fact finding historical truth involves a complex process. Direct observation and eyewitness reports provide some evidence for historical research but historians must usually draw *inferences* from historical context, archaeology, anthropology, psychological theory, analysis of multiple and possibly contradictory documents, etc. Historical method provides a good example of holistic and pragmatic epistemology.

A holistic theory of truth affirms that every idea of truth is related in some way to every other idea of truth just as the meaning of every word in a language is part of an interconnected matrix of all other meanings in that language.¹⁸

Holism implies that while we describe the universe in terms of levels, the descriptions and levels are interrelated. Commonly these levels are thought of in terms of scale of *size*, the celestial bodies and their motions being the largest or “macrocosmic” level and subatomic particles and their motions being the “microcosmic” level. In between the macroscopic and microscopic levels are the atomic, molecular, biological, human, global and other “mesocosmic” levels. Each level has its own categories and formulas for description and truth value.

However the common practice of thinking of levels in terms of size is somewhat misleading, for no matter how large the object of observation the “smaller” levels are still present and operative everywhere *within* the larger object. The microcosmic, mesocosmic and macrocosmic levels of the universe are co-extensive so in that sense the microcosmic universe is no “smaller” than the macrocosmic. It would be more accurate to think and speak of these description levels in terms of more “internal” and more “external” rather than “larger” and “smaller.” At the “macrocosmic scale” we can directly observe and describe a star in terms of mass, heat, light and gravity. Within every area of a star there are inferable quantum level events (microcosmic scale) which cannot be directly observed and which must be described in terms of probabilities. The quantum events are “inside” the entire area of the star, more “internal” but no “smaller” in area than the external heat, mass and gravity.

Categorizing levels of description in terms of internal/external opens the way to connecting “subjective experience” (our thoughts, intuitions and feelings) with the perceptions we take to be “objective” experience. For example, when I think the phrase “level of description,” the thought could be described in both internal and external terms. External to my subjective thought would be the physiological events in my brain, nervous system, etc. External to those events the thought would “appear” as my posture and facial expression. External to that would be how anyone observing me might be affected by looking at me while I’m thinking “level of description.” The most external description of the thought would be in terms of the effect of the thought on the whole universe, which of course would be so minimal as to be negligible.

My subjective experience of the thought “level of description” is more internal than the simultaneously occurring observable brain and body phenomena. My subjective thought is not in any way observable by others and cannot be inferred from even microscopic or quantum events. The subjective experience of thinking must be considered “internal” in relationship to observable phenomena, for all that is “observable” by me is external to my most immediate experience of thought and feeling. Even more internal than conscious thought and feeling is subconscious mind containing memory, unconscious motivations, and unconscious processes. The fact that internal and external levels of description are co-extensive and inextricably related suggests that subjective experience *could* be co-extensive with the macroscopic universe. In other words, subjective consciousness *could* be “spread out” throughout the universe.

We can reasonably think of the internal/external relationship of description levels in terms of cause and effect. But in which direction does causation flow among those levels? Do my subjective thoughts *cause* brain action or does brain action cause my subjective thoughts? Do the motions of the planets *cause* my subjective thinking? Do the thoughts that precede space exploration *cause* perturbations in the universal energy field affecting the universe as a whole as well as *causing* subsequent actual efforts to explore outer space?

If we think outside the box of linear paradigms and instead adopt a holistic perspective, it becomes clear that causality is an appropriate concept *within* a given level of description, but may not always be appropriate as a concept *between* levels. In practical terms, we can act and operate *within* given levels in a causal way and when we do so all levels have *corresponding* changes. If some internal action such as thinking

proves to be a necessary or sufficient condition for some physiological change, it is appropriate to assess the internal action as causal in relationship to the external change. Likewise if some external event in the physical realm is necessary or sufficient condition for a subjective event such as a thought or feeling, it is appropriate to assess the external as causal in relationship to the internal change. Causality flows in both directions between internal and external levels of the universe.

To employ a holistic and pragmatic epistemology is to draw upon different and appropriate levels of description to arrive at knowledge. Biblical scholarship is to some extent holistic, in that scholars employ knowledge from archaeology, anthropology, geography, historical documents and methods such as “source criticism” drawn from historians and literature scholars. Here I will expand the holistic and pragmatic scope of biblical scholarship to include insights and methods from physics, psychology, psychosomatic research, comparative religion, and philosophy in an attempt to infer the nature of Jesus’ consciousness and the possible influence of his consciousness on his followers. If this approach arrives at useful knowledge concerning how Jesus facilitated healing, it will meet the pragmatic test of truth for discerning the mind of Jesus.

Here a few words must be said about the term “consciousness” and how one person’s consciousness could influence others. In our everyday experience we speak of people as having “presence” and “energy” which we can intuitively detect when they walk into a room. We can, in some sense, feel the “calmness” or “anger” of a person, without that person having said or done anything to convey their state of mind. Undoubtedly some of this “feeling a person’s energy” is the result of unconsciously picking up on nonverbal clues in facial expression and body language, but I think there

may be something more involved in our intuitive feelings. That something might be described as “energy” or what I think may be more accurately described as “consciousness.”

Ken Wilbur is one of the most influential philosophers among those who are interested in a theory of consciousness and his descriptions of consciousness are sufficient to get at what I mean by “consciousness.” Wilbur describes consciousness as having functions, structures, states, modes and development from prepersonal to personal to transpersonal.¹⁹

In referring to Jesus’ consciousness and the influence it might have had on his followers, I am referring especially to what Wilbur would call Jesus’ states of consciousness. I am suggesting that Jesus had a consciousness *developed* to a *transpersonal* or *superconscious* state which also in Wilbur’s terminology would be “nondual” and “causal.” I am suggesting that such a state of consciousness could directly influence others physically, psychologically and behaviorally. I would think such influence of consciousness could be *causal* but not necessarily always *sufficient* cause for changes in others. I assume that some individuals would not be sensitive or receptive to influence of consciousness; that environmental, psychological and physiological conditions would play a part in causality of consciousness.

Holistic Pragmatism Applied to the Mind of Jesus

I have applied a holistic and pragmatic method for discerning and interpreting the historical Jesus by seeking to answer the questions: (1) what did the historical Jesus say and do? (2) What role or function did he perform in the context of his era? (3) What were his basic ideas? (4) What does his philosophy imply about his consciousness

(attitudes, feelings, perspectives, beliefs and intentions)? (5) What response do people today have to Jesus' philosophy?

(1) What did the historical Jesus say and do?

Biblical scholarship has made a great deal of progress especially in the past century in uncovering what the historical Jesus actually said.

The reason the question of what Jesus said was raised in the first place was the pervasively inconsistent Gospel records of what he said and did. A simple comparison of Jesus' words in the earliest Gospel (Mark) with the last Gospel written (John) reveals the widely divergent versions of the kinds of things Jesus said and the way he said them. The differences between the Jesus of Mark and the Jesus of John are so stark that the authors seem to be speaking of two completely different people.

I have not attempted to "reinvent the wheel" regarding identifying the historical Jesus' words; instead I have relied heavily upon the conclusions of the "Jesus Seminar." The Jesus Seminar consisted of over 70 highly qualified biblical scholars and historians from seminaries and universities all over North America. The scholars built upon work done by their predecessors in the field by presenting and discussing papers and voting on sayings in the four canonical gospels plus *The Gospel of Thomas*. They published their findings in *The Five Gospels* which provides a concise history of New Testament scholarship and the five gospels with Jesus' sayings marked in red (*Jesus said this*), pink (*Jesus probably said something like this*), grey (*he probably didn't say this*) and black (*he did not say this*). While the work of the Jesus Seminar is controversial, their methods and findings are academically sound and the closest thing to a scholarly consensus available on the subject of the historical Jesus.

I would add that the Jesus Seminar and historical studies of the Gospels in general apply a method that is holistic. Marcus Borg noted this new holistic approach:

“Lately, largely in the last ten years, Jesus scholars (and biblical scholars generally) have begun systematically to use insights and models gleaned from the history of religions, cultural anthropology, and the social sciences. These not only provide comparative material and theoretical understandings, but also models constructed from either empirical or historical data which can then be used to illuminate historical periods for which we have only fairly scanty data.”²⁰

I have evaluated Jesus’ philosophy based primarily upon the “red” and “pink” sayings. When commenting on sayings not included in those categories, I have briefly explained how the sayings are consistent with those selected by the Jesus Seminar. I believe this approach provides an adequate overview of the historical Jesus’ philosophy.

(2) What role or function did he perform in the context of his era?

Historical knowledge is crucial for understanding any significant historical person. This would seem to be a trivial tautology, yet when for example we watch a play by Shakespeare we may not be familiar with the historical context of his work. We might still enjoy the play, but without the historical context we cannot fully understand or appreciate what Shakespeare intended to convey to his audience. We cannot fully understand and appreciate Shakespeare without knowing the historical context in which he wrote.

The scholars of the Jesus Seminar took into account historical knowledge found outside of the canonical Gospels. I have used historical factors relevant to: classifying Jesus in the context of his times; identifying what he said; and understanding what he

said. The Jesus Seminar was primarily concerned with the *identifying* what he said. My primary concerns are *classifying* Jesus and *understanding* what he said. Consequently some of the historical factors I have brought into the discussion are different from those considered by the Jesus Seminar.

(3) *What were Jesus' basic ideas?*

Identifying Jesus' basic ideas begins with a thematic and systematic consideration of his sayings. The sayings are not arranged according to a system of thought in any of the Gospels. For that reason I have extracted the sayings from the narrative contexts and grouped them according to the central topics, ideas and concerns of the sayings. I have attempted to order the sayings so that the first sayings present general ideas providing context for understanding those discussed later.

To *interpret* the sayings for meaning and intention requires more information. The role Jesus played in the context of his culture and comparison of his views to those of his culture must be taken into account. In addition Jesus' *style* of expression is important for identifying his meaning and intention. Religious figures, philosophers, literary figures, historians and other types use styles of expression appropriate to their intentions. By identifying which styles Jesus' teachings most closely resemble it is possible to gain insight into his intentions. For example, if his style resembles a comic saying we can deduce that his intention was to be humorous. If his style resembles the rabbinical style of the era we can deduce his intention was to teach and interpret Judaic law. If his style resembles philosophical styles of his era, we can deduce that his intention was to philosophize.

(4) *What does his philosophy imply about his consciousness (attitudes, feelings, perspectives, beliefs and intentions)?*

(5) *What response do people today have to the types of ideas Jesus advocated?*

It is useful to look at Jesus' teachings in light of psychology and comparative religion in order to understand Jesus' consciousness and the responses people might have to his ideas.

Psychology can be useful for providing insight into Jesus' psychological character as well as for assessing the likely effects of Jesus' message on others. Psychology provides knowledge of which states of mind are "psychologically healthy" and conducive to happiness and physical health. Psychological knowledge can help us assess the "healthfulness" of the attitudes and perspectives promoted by Jesus and so provide insight into his mental states and mental states he may have induced in his audience. As will be seen, Jesus' style of expression in many sayings is comparable to methods employed in hypnotherapy and other forms of psychotherapy; that may provide insight into his effect on others. As part of my exploration of the possible effects of Jesus' philosophy I conducted an experiment using the psychological tools "Profile of Mood States" (POMS) and "State Trait Anxiety Inventory" (STAI) to test for shifts in consciousness of participants after listening to sayings of Jesus.

Comparative religion provides information from a *global* perspective relevant to assessing Jesus' words, consciousness and influence. Judaism provides the most proximate context for assessing Jesus, since Judaism was the prominent religion where he lived. Since Jesus was the fountainhead of a world religion distinct from Judaism it is also appropriate to look for parallels between his message and the messages of other

founders of religion. The mystical traditions in different religions would seem especially relevant to the study of one who came to be regarded as “one with God.” In addition comparative religion identifies “types” which must be considered in classifying Jesus: priests, prophets, saints, shamans, seers, etc.

Science provides some tools for testing effects of Jesus’ philosophy and assessing coherence of his philosophy with a scientific model of the universe. Science has developed technology to measure the “relaxation response” which is a correlate of altered brainwave states or internal concentration. Various forms of self-hypnosis and meditation have been correlated with measurable brainwave changes and other physiological measurements, including changes in heart rate, galvanic skin response, and peripheral skin temperature. I tested the hypothesis that the types of sayings attributed to Jesus can have the effect of inducing “relaxation response,” which accompanies meditative states. I used peripheral skin temperature (PST) technology to measure (within the limitations of the instrument) for the relaxation response and the possibility of altered consciousness states produced by listening to sayings of Jesus. PST measures arousal of the sympathetic nervous system. Increase in PST has been correlated with physiological relaxation and the altered brainwave frequencies associated with meditation practices.

Regarding the scientific model of the universe I have asked and attempted to answer a number of questions, including: is there a concept of God that is coherent with the scientific model of the universe? Is Jesus’ concept of God coherent with a scientifically coherent concept of God? By exploring these questions I considered the possibility that Jesus’ ideas are consistent with a modern understanding of the universe.

With regard to Jesus' philosophy I have also explored the questions: *could* his teachings have had healing effects from a scientific perspective? Would the attitudes he encouraged and his method of teaching be therapeutic in some way? *Could* Jesus have been a healer from what we can know of his consciousness? Could his consciousness have had a direct healing effect upon those he encountered?

Philosophy seeks to understand nature, mind, ethics, and the nature of knowledge. For most of its history, philosophy has been interested in questions of God's existence and nature. Metaphysical systems seek to encompass principles that apply to the nature of being. Beginning with Pythagoras, some philosophers had reputations as healers and wonder-workers. I compared Jesus' message to philosophies of his era to note parallels and contrasts. I used logic to interpret his sayings with regard to metaphysical categories and ethical ideas. In these ways the history and methods of philosophy are crucial in my quest to understand the mind of Jesus.

To recapitulate, my intention is to produce an accurate description of Jesus' philosophy and show its therapeutic possibilities by using a holistic and pragmatic approach. For this project holistic pragmatism includes the application of knowledge and methods from biblical scholarship, history, psychology, comparative religion, science, and philosophy. Each type of knowledge will be applied to appropriate questions, as described above. For each question raised and each saying interpreted I have applied multiple descriptive paradigms. In this way I believe I have arrived at a fuller understanding of Jesus of Nazareth's place in world history, the nature of his mind, and whether or not we can learn something useful about healing from his philosophy.

CHAPTER 2: THE JESUS OF HISTORY AND THE CHRIST OF FAITH

Consider the following scenario:

Matt, Mark, Luke and John report different versions of what Jay said. A group of professors want to discover what Jay said. At best one and only one of the reports can be 100% accurate. At worst, all four reports could be entirely fictitious. Fortunately although all four reports are different, they do have some shared elements. The professors analyze the reports to identify the shared elements.

The analysis reveals that Matt, Mark and Luke have significant overlap, but John's report is almost entirely different. The professors recognize that it is more probable that Matt, Mark and Luke are more accurate than John than that John alone is accurate. They further discover that in all cases of differences, Mark agrees with Matt against Luke or with Luke against Matt, but Matt and Luke never agree against Mark. From this the professors deduce that Matt and Luke used Mark's report as a basis for their own reports.

Further analysis reveals that Matt and Luke both report certain sayings not found in Mark. From this the professors deduce that Matt and Luke used another "lost" report as a basis for their reports. The professors call the "lost" report "Q" (from "quelle," the German word for "source"). In addition, Matt and Luke each have reports of sayings unique to them.

Including Q, now the professors have five reports to examine. They notice that four of the five reports show particular and unusual styles and themes in Jay's sayings. John alone does not report sayings with the styles and themes of Jay. The professors

deduce that Jay did in fact speak in the styles and themes reported in four of the five reports.

After drawing these conclusions, the professors come across yet another report which includes many of the sayings found in Matt, Mark, Luke and Q. The new reporter, Tom, also includes new sayings with the same styles and themes as the other four. The professors use Tom's report as a sixth source for comparison.

The professors look for instances of sayings appearing in two or more reports. These sayings form a "core list" which the professors hypothesize consists of the most probable and best verified account of Jay's sayings. Using their "core list," the professors re-examine instances of single reports which are most like the core list. The resulting list satisfies the professors as being well-authenticated sayings of Jay.

The above scenario is a simplified descriptive summary of the long process of Gospel scholarship that culminated in the Jesus Seminar's work reported in *The Five Gospels*. The book would be more accurately called "The Six Gospels" since "Q" figured significantly in their deliberations. "Jay" of course stands for "Jesus of Nazareth" and the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Q and Thomas are the six reports.

The history of the process of Gospel scholarship leading up to the work of the Jesus Seminar stretches back to the 18th century when Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) contended that what gospel authors said about Jesus could be distinguished from what Jesus himself said.²¹ Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) was one of many distinguished minds to explore the "quest for the historical Jesus."²² David Friedrich Strauss (1808-1874) had a powerful influence on the development of New Testament scholarship

through his book *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835), in which he distinguished between “myth” and the history in the Gospels.²³

In 1838, Christian Hermann Weisse first concluded that Mark was the earliest Gospel. That same year, a more thorough argument for Mark’s priority was published in “The Earliest Gospel” by Christian Gottlob Wilke.²⁴ The theory that the Gospel of Mark was a source for Matthew and Luke was widely accepted among scholars by the beginning of the 20th century.

The theory of “sayings Gospels” upon which the canonical Gospels were based was suggested in the early 19th century. The theory of the “Q” gospel (from the German “quelle” meaning “source”) was substantially supported by H. J. Holtzman’s extensive analysis in 1863. Burnett Hillman Streeter demonstrated that the theory that *Matthew* and *Luke* independently used *Mark* and *Q* as sources best accounted for both the agreements and the variations in *Matthew* and *Luke*.²⁵ Streeter’s theory is accepted by practically all mainstream Bible scholars today. When the *Gospel of Thomas* was rediscovered with other ancient manuscripts in Nag Hammadi Egypt, a whole new phase for exploration opened up. The *Gospel of Thomas* verified the existence of “Sayings Gospels” such as the hypothetical Q, which probably circulated among early Christians, before Mark wrote his Gospel.

The Jesus Seminar

In 1985 the Jesus Seminar was initially established by 30 scholars under the auspices of the Westar Institute; eventually more than 200 scholars participated. The participants were reputable and well qualified scholars connected with a wide range of educational institutions. The Jesus Seminar consisted of academics with doctorates in

areas relevant to the project of identifying the sayings of the historical Jesus. In addition, many participants had done special studies in Institutes in Jerusalem and Europe. The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar consisted primarily of professors from Catholic, Protestant and state colleges and universities, including: DePaul, Notre Dame, Loyola, St. Olaf College, Wesleyan University, Texas Christian University, the School of Theology at Claremont, Eden Theological Seminary, Emory University, Xavier University, Oregon State, Southern Illinois University, University of Minnesota, University of California-Berkeley, California State University, Vassar, Vanderbilt, Marquette, Rutgers, University of Toronto, University of Alberta, and University of South Africa. Many of the participants were graduates of Cambridge, Harvard, Oxford, Yale, Cornell, and Princeton.²⁶

Based upon careful comparison and analysis of the gospels, scholars have made a number of observations about how the authors of the gospels constructed their books. The Jesus Seminar called these observations “rules of evidence” and used the information to sort through sayings attributed to Jesus. The “rules of evidence” are recorded in *The Five Gospels*²⁷ as:

“The evangelists frequently group sayings and parables in clusters and complexes that did not originate with Jesus” (p. 19). By “the evangelists” the Seminar means the various gospel authors.

“The evangelists frequently relocate sayings and parables or invent new narrative contexts for them.” (p. 19)

“The evangelists frequently expand sayings or parables, or provide them with an interpretive overlay or comment.” (p. 21)

“The evangelists often revise or edit sayings to make them conform to their own individual language, style, or viewpoint.” (p. 21)

“Words borrowed from the fund of common lore or the Greek scriptures are often put on the lips of Jesus.” (p. 22)

“The evangelists frequently attribute their own statements to Jesus.” (p. 23)

“Hard sayings are frequently softened in the process of transmission to adapt them to the conditions of daily living.” (p. 23)

“Variations in difficult sayings often betray the struggle of the early Christian community to interpret or adapt sayings to its own situation.” (p. 23)

“Sayings and parables expressed in ‘Christian’ language are the creation of the evangelists or their Christian predecessors” (p. 24). “Christian language” just means terminology and doctrines that were formulated by Christians *after* the crucifixion.

“Sayings or parables that contrast with the language or viewpoint of the gospel in which they are embedded reflect older tradition (but not necessarily tradition that originated with Jesus).” (p. 24)

“The Christian community develops apologetic statements to defend its claims and sometimes attributes such statements to Jesus.” (p. 24)

“Sayings and narratives that reflect knowledge of events that took place after Jesus’ death are the creation of the evangelists or the oral tradition before them” (p. 25). The assumption here is that it is more likely that Gospel authors attributed predictions to Jesus *after* the fact than that he made such predictions himself. It is of course possible that Jesus made accurate predictions about the future, but the sayings that most probably

originated with Jesus by the other criteria do not indicate that Jesus was interested in predicting specific future events.

Since Jesus himself did not write anything, what he actually said would have to have been remembered by his disciples. The sayings would have to have had a *memorable* form. Based upon these facts, the Seminar also used what they called “rules of oral evidence” in their deliberations:

1. “Only sayings and parables that can be traced back to the oral period, 30-50 C.E., can possibly have originated with Jesus.” (p. 25)

2. “Sayings or parables that are attested in two or more independent sources are older than the sources in which they are embedded.” (p. 26)

3. “Sayings or parables that are attested in two different contexts probably circulated independently at an earlier time.” (p. 27)

4. “The same or similar content attested in two or more different forms has had a life of its own and therefore may stem from old tradition.” (p. 26)

5. “Unwritten tradition that is captured by the written gospels relatively late may preserve very old memories.” (p. 26)

Rules 2-4 help objectively identify the material older than gospels. Rule 5 recognizes that some traditions may go back to the “oral” period even when strong written attestation is lacking.

From study of transmission of sayings in oral cultures, the Seminar added the following rules:

6. “The oral memory best retains sayings and anecdotes that are short, provocative and memorable – and oft-repeated.”

7. “The most frequently recorded words of Jesus in the surviving gospels take the form of aphorisms and parables.”

8. “The earliest layer of the gospel tradition is made up of single aphorisms and parables that circulated by word of mouth prior to the written gospels.” (28)

The Seminar’s “rules of evidence” provide sound objective criteria for identifying the sayings that most probably originated with Jesus and the sayings that most probably were invented or drawn from other sources. Very similar criteria could be applied to discern sayings of other historical figures known only through an oral tradition, such as the historical Socrates or the historical Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha).

The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar deliberated regarding every saying found in the five Gospels and ultimately voted (and sometimes re-voted) on each verse. The voting process used different colored beads: red for “Jesus said this,” pink for “Jesus probably said this or something like it,” grey for “Jesus probably did not say this” and black for “Jesus did not say this.”

An example of a saying considered authentic (part of the core list) is “the mustard seed parable” which is found in Mark, Q and Thomas (in slightly different versions); of the “Five” gospels, only John does not include it. Some parables and sayings found in only one gospel were still overwhelmingly considered authentic, due to style and content consistent with “core” list of sayings which did have multiple attestations. Only four sayings received 90% or higher vote from the fellows: “turn the other cheek” (Matt. 5: 39), “sued for shirt . . . give your coat as well” (Matt. 5: 40), “blessed are the poor” (Luke 6: 20) and “go the extra mile” (Matt. 5: 41). Fifteen sayings received “red” votes (over 75% agreement); another 75 sayings received “pink” votes (over 50% agreement).

From the resulting database, the Jesus Seminar concluded that Jesus' sayings: "*cut against the social and religious grain*"; "*surprise and shock*"; "call for a reversal of roles or frustrate ordinary expectations"; "are often characterized by *exaggeration, humor, and paradox*"; use images that are "*concrete and vivid*"; and are "customarily *metaphorical and without explicit application.*" (pp. 31-32)

The methodology and conclusions of the Jesus Seminar are sound enough that the resulting list of "red" and "pink" sayings are worthy of consideration as originating with Jesus. That is why I have chosen to use those sayings as the basis for exploring my thesis that Jesus' philosophy had therapeutic effects upon his contemporaries and can have a similar effect today.

The "Eschatological" vs. "Non-eschatological Jesus"

There are respected and accomplished biblical scholars who disagree with the methods and conclusions of the Jesus Seminar. For the most part those scholars advocate the theory that Jesus was an "eschatological prophet" and reject the "non-eschatological" Jesus of the Jesus Seminar. The claim of the "eschatological" school of thought is that Jesus' words must be interpreted as reflecting his belief in the immanent resurrection and judgment day and in his own role as the "Son of Man" who would return in the clouds on that day. The dispute about the "eschatological" Jesus versus the "non-eschatological" Jesus is the primary current controversy among New Testament scholars.

Attempting to resolve the eschatological controversy is beyond the scope of this paper. Jesus had a philosophy for living in the here and now and it is that philosophy with which I am concerned. His beliefs about an after-life, resurrection and judgment day are mostly peripheral to the hypotheses of this paper. However I believe it is

appropriate here to offer a few thoughts about the “eschatological Jesus” school to indicate why I find the Jesus Seminar approach more persuasive.

The “eschatological school” is founded in Albert Schweitzer’s classic work *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.²⁸ Schweitzer contended that a choice had to be made between viewing Jesus as an eschatological prophet or as non-eschatological. Schweitzer attributed the discovery of that choice to Johannes Weiss. Regarding Weiss’ work, Schweitzer wrote:

“His ‘Preaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God,’ . . . has, on its own lines, an importance equal to that of Strauss’ first Life of Jesus. He lays down the third great alternative which the study of the life of Jesus had to meet. The first was laid down by Strauss: *either* purely historical *or* purely supernatural. The second had been worked out by the Tubingen school and Holtzman: either Synoptic or Johannine. Now came the third: either eschatological or non-eschatological! Progress always consists in taking one or other of two alternatives, in abandoning the attempt to combine them.”²⁹

I believe that the choice Schweitzer offers is not necessarily sound. Human beings are capable of having different sides to their personalities and holding opinions which are not easily reconciled or even of holding logically contradictory views. As a human being, Jesus *could* have advocated ideas unconcerned with the immanence of “judgment day” and also at other times he could have “predicted” that day. Furthermore, as long as we are alive in this world we need ways to cope with this existence; at the same time we may have beliefs about the future and an “after-life.” Plato discussed both his beliefs about the best way to live the good life and his beliefs about the after-life. It is not necessary to categorize Plato as *either* a philosopher of the here and now *or* a

philosopher of the after-life; he was both. In that respect, choosing sides is not necessarily the only way to arrive at an accurate idea of the historical Jesus, even though modern scholars seem to have taken one side or the other.

Ironically, if Schweitzer were correct then the most certain thing we would know about Jesus is that he predicted the day of resurrection and judgment would occur within the life span of some of his followers. In other words, the most certain thing we would know about Jesus was that he was mistaken. The irony is that many of the “eschatological Jesus” scholars are Christian clergy.

This brings me to one of the primary criterion used by “eschatological Jesus” scholars: the “criterion of embarrassment.”³⁰ The “criterion of embarrassment” holds that gospel authors would not include events or words of Jesus which were “embarrassing” to the author and early church unless the sayings were well known to be authentic to Jesus.

First of all that criterion assumes that modern historians could know what would have been embarrassing to the early church. Affirming knowledge of embarrassment assumes knowledge of the feelings of early church members. Historically Christian church leaders seem to have been fairly oblivious to “embarrassment.” How else explain that, for example, the obviously divergent genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke were retained in the official New Testament by church leaders? Not only are the genealogies contradictory, but they also trace the lineage of Jesus’ father Joseph which contradicts the doctrine that Jesus’ mother Mary was made pregnant by God and not by man. The bishops who chose to include the glaringly contradictory genealogies when they could have left out one or both were clearly oblivious to the obvious “embarrassing” contradictions.

Secondly, the criterion of embarrassment assumes that gospel writers would not dare to leave authentic sayings out of their gospels. Yet nothing could be more obvious than that the gospel authors felt free to add or delete words of Jesus. Matthew and Luke felt free to modify sayings they found in Mark and Q. The earliest manuscripts of Mark had different endings. The earliest version probably ended with the women fleeing from the empty tomb; later versions added differing stories of resurrection appearances of Jesus. Matthew reports that Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” while Luke reports Jesus said, “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.” Either Matthew added the interpretive phrase “in spirit” or Luke deleted the phrase. Either the blessing was originally “the kingdom of heaven” or “the kingdom of God”; one or both authors changed something. The point is that the gospel authors did not feel any obligation to include anything that did not support their own perspectives and sometimes put their own words into Jesus’ mouth. There is no reason to believe the authors ever included anything that was embarrassing to *them*. The criterion of embarrassment seems to be a fairly weak criterion for authenticity. Most scholars recognize the weakness of the criterion of embarrassment and so only use it when it can be supported by other stronger criterion.

Another problem with the approach of the “eschatological Jesus” scholars is related to Mark’s “Messianic Secret.” Mark is the single source of the story about Peter recognizing that Jesus is the Christ. In Mark, Jesus never *publically* proclaims that he is the Messiah. In *private*, Jesus affirms that he is the Christ but tells the disciples to tell no one (Mark 8: 30). The only other place in Mark where Jesus proclaims he is the Christ is before the priests after he was arrested. But since the disciples were not present, how

could they know about *that*? Since Jesus' supposed messianic mission was a "secret" during his life, it is entirely possible that the disciples did not actually get the idea from Jesus. The stories of Jesus affirming his messianic mission could easily have been invented *after* the crucifixion and *after* his disciples believed and proclaimed that Jesus was the Christ.

Proponents of the eschatological Jesus sometimes argue that since John the Baptist was an eschatological prophet and the apostles also proclaimed an eschatological message, Jesus - as link between John and the apostles - also must have proclaimed an eschatological message. The argument seems reasonable on the surface. However the underlying assumption is that it is valid to deduce an individual's sayings from a contextual generalization. The problem with that approach can be seen from an analogous argument:

There is a controversy about whether or not Mark Twain was a racist. Suppose I argue that from the 19th century until the mid-20th century, most white Missourians were prejudiced against African-Americans. I note that Mark Twain was born and raised in Missouri in the 19th century and that Twain was loved and admired in Missouri during the 19th and 20th centuries. Therefore, I conclude, Mark Twain *must* have been prejudiced against African-Americans.

It seems reasonable, except that anyone familiar with Twain's body of work and the fact that he gave college scholarships to African-Americans would know that Twain was *not* prejudiced (even if he was not up to the "politically correct" standards of the 21st century).

It is dangerous to assume that one can deduce an individual's beliefs from cultural context. Cultural contextual information is useful for understanding why a person behaved in certain ways and how the person might be viewed by others within a culture; but cultural context is not useful for *deducing* individual beliefs. It is especially dangerous when the individual in question is known to be exceptional. Exceptional people are often counter-cultural; that is one way they stand out from the crowd.

I should mention that at least one scholar of the eschatological school reluctantly recognizes the similarities between Jesus and philosophers of his era. John P. Meier is one of the most accomplished scholars to tackle the quest for the historical Jesus and one who sides with Schweitzer and others on the eschatological question. Yet Meier wrote: "As a religious figure within the Greco-Roman period, Jesus not surprisingly bore some resemblances to other philosophical or religious teachers of his time . . . while Jesus' resemblance to wandering Cynic philosophers has been greatly overemphasized, one should not deny all similarities to philosophers in the broad Cynic-Stoic stream, mixed as it sometimes was with Pythagorean traits."³¹

The Jesus of history is the subject of the inquiries and conclusions of scholars on both "eschatological" and "non-eschatological" sides. The phrase "Christ of faith" is used by theologians to mean the Christ of the traditional creed and the Christ as experienced by the believer. In the actual world of Christians it is truer to say that the Christ is whatever believers believe about Jesus. Considering the abundance of Christian denominations, we can only conclude that there are many "Christs of faith." Perhaps there are as many "Christs of faith" as there are individual Christians, each believer with a slightly different idea of the nature of the Christ.

There are some who do not believe we can know anything about Jesus historically and that the historical Jesus doesn't matter; for them all that matters is the "Christ of faith."³² Those who oppose the historical investigation of Jesus are satisfied with their own "Christ of faith." Yet historians have their "Christs of faith" too; the only difference between non-historian and historian is that the historian's "Christ" must *include* the historical Jesus, as far as he can be known. It is my hope that this study will make some helpful contribution to the quest for the historical Jesus, suggest a new dimension for the Christ of faith, and provoke some pragmatic insights for believers and non-believers alike.

CHAPTER 3: STYLE AND CONTENT OF THE JESUS PHILOSOPHY

Hypothesis: The fundamental themes in the philosophy of Jesus are:

- (1) Metaphysical Cosmology (the nature of God and God's government of the universe);
- (2) Ethics consistent with that cosmology (love, justice, forgiveness, et al.)
- (3) Personal and social transformation consistent with the ethics; and
- (4) Human potential in light of metaphysics.

Soon after his crucifixion, Jesus of Nazareth was proclaimed by his disciples to be the resurrected Messiah ("Christ" in Greek). However during his life before his crucifixion, Jesus could have been seen by some as a philosopher and his way of life and message fit that categorization. I will describe his message under four philosophical categories: metaphysical cosmology, ethics, personal and social transformation, and human potential. The last two categories mentioned would today fall under the categories of sociology, political science and psychology, but in Jesus' era that distinction was not yet made.

Fundamental Themes in the Philosophy of the Historical Jesus

I collected the sayings of Jesus which the Jesus Seminar voted as most probably originating with the historical Jesus (colored red and pink in *The Five Gospels*). I then attempted to identify a few basic themes into which the sayings could be categorized and related to philosophical categories. What follows is an interpretation of the sayings based upon the thesis that Jesus was a philosopher. The discussion of Jesus as a philosopher in the context of his era is in the following section titled "Jesus as Philosopher and Therapist."

Philosophical Definition of Terms: God and Kingdom of God

Since Jesus' philosophy was God-centered, consideration must be given to concepts of "God" and "the kingdom of God." The word "God" can mean different things to different people, so it is important to have a working definition of "God." By "definition" I mean a meaningful starting point for inquiry; I do not mean that God is to be conceived as limited by the definition.

In order to discuss Jesus' idea of God in rational terms, the definition must meet two requirements: (1) it cannot be mere affirmation of dogmas established after Jesus; (2) it must be rationally meaningful in relation to what is known about the universe.

(1) The definition should not merely affirm dogmas (e.g. the Trinity) established by later Christians. The dogmas are not quotations from Jesus; the dogmas are a result of ecclesiastical debates which occurred hundreds of years after Jesus. Jesus did not articulate those dogmas; they are not words of Jesus about "God." It *could* turn out that the dogmas are consistent with what Jesus said, but it cannot be *assumed* that the dogmas *define* what he meant by "God."

(2) The definition of "God" must be meaningful in relation to what is known about the universe. Jesus' ideas about God cannot be assessed rationally and philosophically if we begin with an irrational or meaningless definition of "God" unrelated to anything known. The word "God" must refer to some meaning that can be rationally related to the known universe; otherwise the discussion can only remain at the level of concepts devoid of significance.

God cannot be defined as an "unknowable being outside of the universe" since such a definition concedes that nothing can be known about God. If God is defined as unknowable, it is the same as saying that God is not known. To say God is not known is

to admit that God is not known to exist. To say that God is not known to exist is to admit that one cannot even truly affirm that “God is unknowable.” The statement “God is an unknowable being outside of the universe” signifies nothing. To discuss God in a meaningful way requires that “God” is defined in terms that are subject to rational inquiry.

Before attempting philosophical definitions of “God” and the “kingdom of God,” a few words must be said about the word “kingdom.” The Greek word “βασιλεια” (“basileia”), usually translated into English as “kingdom,” can also be translated as “domain,” “realm” or “rule”; “basileia” does not specifically signify a geographical territory ruled by a king.³³ As will be seen, Jesus thought of God as ruling all of nature, so the words “rule” and “realm” are appropriate translations of “basileia” in his sayings. In the quotations from Jesus I will use either “*realm*” or “*rule*” as the translation.

The Jesus Seminar translation added the adjective “imperial” to “rule” and “domain” in order to signify how the term would have been understood in Jesus’ time. The Greek word was only used to refer to the “imperial rule” of Rome and not to the smaller “kingdoms” within the Roman Empire. I’ve dropped the modifier “imperial” because the word carries the connotative baggage of “imperious” which is not implied in Jesus’ sayings about God as the loving Father.

A philosophical idea of God needs to be based upon conventional meanings of the word “God,” otherwise the idea is not meaningful related to the word as generally used. Therefore my working definition of God is based upon two conventional meanings: (1) “Supreme Being,” (2) “Sovereign of the universe.” In addition since God is generally

described in religion as “Omnipresent” I will take the phrase “kingdom of God” to mean the (3) God as *omnipresent* in the universe as a whole.

(1) The word “God” is understood to mean “Supreme Being.” St. Anselm’s definition of God as “that than which nothing greater can be conceived” is one reasonable philosophical definition. However Anselm’s definition by its very nature can only lead to a *concept*; what was missing in his argument for God’s existence was a step from concept to a *reality* signified by the concept. He tried to smuggle in “existence” as part of the meaning or “essence” of “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” My conceiving that something exists, even in the context of defining the greatest possible concept, does not indicate that the “something” exists. Analogously, Anselm’s argument was like arguing that the greatest conceivable evil would have to exist in order to be the greatest conceivable evil; or the greatest conceivable apple would have to exist in order to be the greatest conceivable apple.

Anselm was trying to show that God’s existence is logically necessary. Aristotle and later Aquinas were trying to demonstrate the same thing with their “First Cause” and “Unmoved Mover” arguments. The flaw in such arguments is subtle. The nature of anything that exists is never a matter of logical necessity. Either a thing exists or it does not exist; deduction has nothing to do with it. Reasoning cannot show that it is logically necessary *that* some entity exists. Reason *can* show the necessary conditions *for* some existent entity to exist or actual event to occur. Necessary conditions are the only logical necessity that can be shown relative to existing objects.

As Supreme Being, the word “God” can refer to “that which *must logically be real and is necessary for the existence of the universe* as we know it.” It *could* be the

case that only physical energy and physical laws are necessary conditions for the existence of the universe. However there is a metaphysical concept that stands in logical relation to actual forms, motions and events. That concept is *potential*. The distinction between potential and actual is a necessary distinction, e.g. in physics. Physics makes the distinction between potential energy and kinetic (actualized) energy. Potential energy is real; otherwise it could not be actualized. Potential is real but not actual. The actual is defined by space-time dimensions; the actual has potential “within” it and at the same time potential is the not yet actualized in space-time. Actual things have real potential; real potential can become actual energy, events and things. For any forms or motions to occur, there must *logically* be a *real potential* for them to occur. By “potential” I mean more than mere logical *possibility*; by “potential” I mean a real latent power that can be actualized, e.g. there is real potential energy in any object with mass and that potential energy can be actualized. If there is not a *real* potential for something to occur, the occurrence is not “really” possible.

Since real potential is a *necessary* condition for actual occurrences, there must be a real potential for the universe as a *whole* and for all *forms, motions* and *consciousness* that occur within the universe. “God” may be understood as referring to *the real potential for and of the whole universe*; in that sense God can be seen as logically and eternally prior to the universe and so “Creator” of the universe. God is “logically prior” because logically there necessarily must be *potential* for an event in order for that event to *actually* occur. God as potential is “eternally” prior to time because time began only once there was the first actual event. God was the potential for and present in “the big bang.” God is the potential in and of every individual and every space-time “coordinate.”

What psychologists call the “unconscious” stands in relation to our conscious mind as *potentialities*. Hence the “unconscious” or “subconscious” must be considered an example of real potential and may be considered as at least part of what “God” is. When I use the phrase “Divine Potential” I am referring to the idea of God as the real potential for and of the universe; the real potential in every individual.

This concept of God as Divine Potential does not imply that God is an *actual* person *existing* in or outside of space-time. Rather it implies “*Real Being*” transcending space-time yet also “within” space-time as real latent power, potential and possibilities. Divine Potential is hidden but real, formless yet actualizing in and through form. Divine Potential is both “no thing” and “all things.” It is fundamentally paradoxical because It is not confined to or limited by actual conditions. If we take “God” to mean “potential” and if by “exist” one means “is real,” then God “exists.” God has not been proven to “exist” if by “exist” one means “an actual person or thing in space-time.” If God is an “actual person in space-time” then God *could* be found, as one could find a star; but that hasn’t happened.

The nature of God as Divine Potential is compatible with a variety of mystics’ concepts of God. Mystics in many traditions have spoken of their experiences of mystical union with God as transcending space, time and form. The Taoists speak of the Tao as “empty.” The influential Christian mystic known as “Pseudo-Dionysius” spoke of God beyond concepts: “not this and not that.” Medieval Christian mystic Meister Eckhart spoke of God as “no-thing.” The language of transcendence found in mystical literature is descriptive of what it would be like to experience “pure potential” rather than descriptive of experiencing an actual person.

Mathematician and philosopher Alfred N. Whitehead's concept of "Primordial Nature of God" is equivalent to the idea of God as Divine Potential. Whitehead's concept of the "Consequent Nature of God" is roughly equivalent to the scientific theory that no information in the universe is ever lost.³⁴ I would include Whitehead's concepts of God within my philosophical definition. I would add the idea that has been expressed by some scientists that the "Mind of God" consists of the laws of the universe. All unconditionally true ideas (e.g. true mathematical concepts) would also be constitutive of the Mind of God.

(2) "God" also means "sovereign of the universe." In other words God is "that which *rules motion in the universe*, to the extent that motion in the universe is ruled." Whatever collectively or as a unit rules motion in the universe is "sovereign" and in that sense *is* "God" as "sovereign of the universe." This definition neither presupposes nor excludes the possibility that some motion is freely chosen at the level of individual actual conscious entities. "That which rules" may possibly be conceptualized as force, energy or laws (rules) or some combination of the three. "What rules the universe?" is a question for both physics and metaphysics. It may also be a question for psychology if "rules," "laws" or "principles" of psychology can be identified.

When I use the phrases "Divine Law" or "Divine Ideas" I will be referring to the idea of God as "that which rules the motion of the universe."

(3) The universe considered as a *unit and a whole*, in dimensions known and unknown, being "ruled" by God is the *realm of God*. The universe as a unit and whole is the universal *actualization* of the universal potential. As such, the universe may be seen as God actualized. God, as potential, actualization and law, can reasonably be considered

both potentially and actually omnipresent as omnipotence. Under this conception of God, the word “Universe” may be considered a synonym for “God” as long as it is understood that “Universe”: (a) is not confined to human perceptions; (b) includes all dimensions known and unknown; (c) does *not* mean “*each* thing and event”; and (d) *does* mean “only that which can be truly said of the whole.”

Whitehead’s concept of “Consequent Nature of God” included the idea that God “evolves” with the universe. It is important not to confuse evolving human concepts of God with God’s evolving as conceptualized by Whitehead. Human concepts of God have evolved from animism and polytheism to monotheism and deism to God as the Mind of the Universe. Whitehead does not claim that God evolved from many gods into the one God “Yahweh” of the Hebrew Scriptures and then into the “Father of Jesus” and “Holy Trinity,” or any other such scheme of changing human concepts. Whitehead’s “evolving God” consists of the preservation of the totality of events in the universe. As the universe evolves, the information of that evolution is preserved. If that information were not preserved in some way, there would be no evidence of the “big bang” or the evolution of life on earth. Whitehead’s “evolving God” could be called “the memory of God.”

(4) The usual concept of God includes the idea that God is a conscious intelligent being, distinct and separate from the physical universe; a God who “hears and responds to our prayers” in a human way. Is it plausible to hypothetically attribute a mind to God when “God” is defined as “Divine Potential, Law and the Universe considered as a whole”?

The human mind is the only mind we know in a direct way and so we can only speak of God as having a mind or as being Universal Mind by analogy with the human

mind. The human mind is more than its conscious experience and thinking; there is a subconscious dimension as well. An individual's subconscious responds to the person's conscious thought in a variety of creative ways. The use of hypnosis is intended to influence the subconscious. Since it is evident that each individual has a subconscious realm of mind which responds to conscious thought, it is not irrational to consider the idea that the Universal Mind also responds creatively to the processes and desires in human consciousness. The Universal Mind could be linked to the subconscious level in the same way that the subconscious is linked to the conscious level.

I realize that conceiving of God as "Universal Potential, Actualization, Law and Mind" is not what everyone means when referring to God. However that concept of God can work as a representation of "Supreme Being" and "sovereign of the universe." That concept of God as universal Potential-Actualization-Law has roots in and affinities with the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus, the "process" metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead and the metaphysics of the "New Thought" religions. Furthermore thinking of God as the "Divine Potential" is consistent with many teachings of mysticism in which God is described as beyond form, no-thing, etc.

God considered as "Universal Actualization" and "Divine Law" also implies actualized intelligence and consciousness. God can be conceived as the *total* actual consciousness in the universe. Universal Laws are more like "ideas" than things. Where ideas are present, mind must be; for ideas are constitutive of mind.

I acknowledge that these definitions of God are not proofs of the existence of the God of religious dogmas. Rather, the definitions provide a conceptualization of what *can*

be meant by the word “God” in a way that does not contradict the scientific understanding of the universe.

I also acknowledge that it is highly unlikely that Jesus thought of God in just these terms of “Divine Potential,” “Universal Actualization” and “Divine Law.” Nevertheless his idea of God as Father is compatible with the concept of “Divine Potential” and “Universal Mind”; his descriptions of the “realm of God” are consistent with ideas of universal actualization and laws. Conceptualizing God in terms of potential, law, universal actualization and mind is useful for giving serious consideration to Jesus as a philosopher. I shall attempt to show at various points that Jesus’ ideas are congruent with this definition of “God.”

CHAPTER 4: THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

(1) Metaphysical Cosmology: The nature of God

In the first century God was understood to be the Supreme Being who created and governs the universe. Jews believed in only one God, but many also believed in angels which were, in effect, supernatural divine beings. The polytheistic religions of the era generally believed in one Supreme God and various lesser deities. An important exception to polytheistic beliefs among non-Jews was the philosopher Parmenides. He was the most radically monistic of thinkers before that era; he argued that there can only be one being and that multiplicity, sensory appearances and “voids” are illusions. His views had a strong influence on Plato and subsequent philosophy as well as upon the development of science and mysticism.³⁵

Jesus as a Jew believed in only one God. If not as metaphysically monistic as Parmenides, Jesus seemed to have “non-dualistic” insight for he frequently juxtaposed ordinarily oppositional images and concepts. For example the suppositional opposites of “love” and “enemy” in his saying “love your enemies.” Another example of juxtaposed oppositional images is his admonition to be “wise as a serpent and simple as a dove.”

Jews and philosophers such as Socrates and Plato believed that the Supreme God was truly good and wise and Jesus undoubtedly also believed the same. There is some reference to God as “Our Father” in the Jewish tradition and also in the beliefs of the Stoic³⁶ philosophers before Jesus. For Jesus the idea of God as our Father was primary and central. In Jesus’ philosophy “our Father God” is primarily concerned with supporting life in and through nature, in contrast to the common religious emphasis on

God as primarily concerned with obedience to commandments, sacrificial offerings, and the fate of nations.

“Don’t worry about your life - what you’re going to eat and drink - or about your body - what you’re going to wear. There is more to living than food and clothing, isn’t there? Take a look at the birds of the sky: they don’t plant or harvest, or gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. You’re worth more than they, aren’t you? Can any of you add one hour to life by worrying about it? Why worry about clothes? Notice how the wild lilies grow: they don’t slave and they never spin. Yet let me tell you, even Solomon at the height of his glory was never decked out like one of them. If God dresses up the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into an oven, won’t God care for you even more, you who don’t take anything for granted?”
(Mt. 6: 25-30)

In this saying Jesus expressed clearly part of his concept of God: God is our Father who cares and provides for animals, fields and humans. The concept of God as “Father” is congruent with the philosophical idea of God as “Divine Potential,” for potential may be considered the invisible source of our being and supportive of our being. Seeds contain the potential for food and clothing. The more fully one’s potential is actualized the more one thrives.

The concept of God presented in the saying is also congruent with the idea of the benevolence of God found in both the philosophies and religions of the era. However the idea of divine benevolence in that era, and to a great extent in our era, centered upon the *justice* of God. Judaism and Greek philosophy were both primarily concerned with ideas of justice and so portrayed God as one who rewarded the righteous and punished the wicked. One could pray or sacrifice for mercy and favors from God, but it was

understood that while a “righteous” person might hope for a positive response to prayer or sacrifice, a “wicked” person had no hope of divine reward.

Jesus indicates that divine benevolence extends to all without regard to human “goodness.” Another saying makes the point in a straightforward way: “*God causes the sun to rise on both the bad and the good, and sends rain on both the just and the unjust.*” (Matt. 5: 45) The God concept here is not one of a Supreme Judge or King who rewards and punishes, but rather of a benevolent Being intimately concerned for and supportively involved in our lives. The concept is of a Being with the power and will to bless and prosper us.

The saying is characterized by reasoning, imagery, and humor. In form the saying begins with an imperative (“don’t worry”) which flows into *suggestive* unusual imagery and questions. In addition the saying includes a rational argument for *letting go of worrying*. To that extent that worrying is counter-productive to health, the saying also contains a *therapeutic suggestion*. If any of his listeners were persuaded by the argument or receptive to the suggestion, the saying might have relieved them of some degree of stress. The saying is *optimistic* about life and the universe. The saying introduces us to the therapeutic elements Jesus imparted to his audience: cultivation of faith through reason, letting go of worry, therapeutic suggestion, humor and optimism. The therapeutic value of those and other elements will be examined later in chapter five “Review of Literature.”

The passage about the Father providing for the birds indicates that Jesus believed that God was concerned with the well-being of *all* creatures and especially humans. Another saying emphasizes the relatively higher value of humans in God’s sight:

“What do sparrows cost? A penny apiece? Yet not one of them will fall to the earth without the consent of your Father. As for you, even the hairs on your head have all been counted. So, don’t be timid: you’re worth more than a flock of sparrows.” (Mt. 10: 29-31)

The passages about birds and wild lilies indicate that Jesus looked to nature rather than history as reason to trust “the Father” to care for humanity. In the Bible writers almost always urge people to have faith based upon references to biblical events rather than with references to nature. For example in chapter 11 of the New Testament book “Hebrews” the author urges his readers to have faith by citing biblical stories of God’s works.

Jesus may have arrived at his view of God and nature through a process of reasoning. He used an *a fortiori* argument to persuade his listeners to trust rather than worry. His use of the argument illustrates a philosophical turn of mind:

God provides for the birds and fields.

You are worth more than birds and grass.

Therefore there is an even stronger reason to believe that God will provide for you.

The saying has logic within it yet at the same time it is humorous. Jesus is taken so seriously that it may seem irreverent to suggest that he had a sense of humor. Nevertheless, *forms* of humor are found in his sayings. In the passage in question the form of satire is present: the saying gently mocks a human tendency. The human tendency to worry about life, food and clothing is compared to the apparently relatively easier existence of other creatures. Birds do not have to farm to survive – why should

we? The second illustration borders on absurdist humor: fields of grass are “decked out” with lilies but of course humans cannot *grow* clothing on their bodies. On the other hand, there is a sense in which we do grow clothing, for we make clothing from plants such as cotton and flax. Jesus’ point is serious but also humorous when seen in terms of the *form*.

Jesus’ idea of God as “our Father” was foundational to his ethical ideals and his ontological concepts of humankind. He always refers to God as Father, never as Creator. He saw humans as valued *offspring* of God rather than as disobedient *creations* of God. Jesus generally expressed his ideas in metaphorical terms. Because he had a metaphorical way of thinking it is likely that Jesus’ idea of humans as God’s offspring was a “spiritual idea” rather than a literal and physical concept. As will be seen, Jesus had an idea of God as *permeating* nature rather than as supernaturally *intervening* in nature.

The “parable of the prodigal son” is one of the best known of Jesus’ parables. We cannot assume that any character in any parable is intended to allegorically represent God. However the father in the prodigal son story is consistent with the character ascribed to the Father God portrayed in other Jesus sayings. The father in the parable expresses unconditional love toward both sons. It is probable that Jesus intended this parable to illustrate the nature of the “heavenly Father”:

“Once there was this man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that’s coming to me.’ So he divided his resources between them. Not too many days later, the younger son got all his things together and left home for a faraway country, where he squandered his property by living extravagantly. Just when he had spent it all, a serious famine swept through that country, and he began to do without. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to feed the pigs. He longed to

satisfy his hunger with the carob pods, which the pigs usually ate; but no one offered him anything. Coming to his senses he said, 'Lots of my father's hired hands have more than enough to eat, while here I am dying of starvation! I'll get up and go to my father and I'll say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and affronted you; I don't deserve to be called a son of yours any longer; treat me like one of your hired hands."' And he got up and returned to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was moved to compassion. He went running out to him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and affronted you; I don't deserve to be called a son of yours any longer.'

But the father said to his slaves, 'Quick! Bring out the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Fetch the fat calf and slaughter it; let's have a feast and celebrate, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and now is found.' And they started celebrating.

Now his elder son was out in the field; and as he got closer to the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servant boys over and asked what was going on. He said to him, 'Your brother has come home and your father has slaughtered the fat calf, because he has him back safe and sound.'

But he was angry and refused to go in. So his father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'See here, all these years I have slaved for you. I never once disobeyed any of your orders; yet you never once provided me with a kid goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours shows up, the one who has squandered your estate with prostitutes - for him you slaughter the fat calf.'

But the father said to him, 'My child, you are always at my side. Everything that's mine is yours. But we just had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead, and has come back to life; he was lost, and now is found.'"

(Luke 15: 11-32)

The parable found in Luke has a general theme and structure similar to a riddle attributed to Jesus in Matthew's gospel. While the Jesus Seminar concluded that the

riddle in question could not be attributed to Jesus, the vote was close to even. Matthew's parable again has a father and two sons:

"A man had two children. He went to the first, and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.' He responded, 'I'm your man, sir,' but he didn't move.

Then he went to the second and said the same thing.

He responded, 'I don't want to,' but later on he thought better of it and went to work.

Which of the two did what the father wanted?" (Matt. 21: 28-31)

Understood in the context of the culture of the time, in both stories each son *both* honors and dishonors the father. The commandment to honor one's parents was understood to mean in both word and deed. In the prodigal son story, the younger son dishonors his father by leaving home and wasting his inheritance, but then upon return honors the father by acknowledging his sin and offering to do the father's will as a hired hand. The elder son first honors the father by doing his will, but at the end of the story dishonors the father by refusing his father's request to join the celebration. In the parable the father reaches out in compassion to both his sons despite their temporary disobedience. In Luke's story the honor/ dishonor dichotomy is expressed in terms of actions. In Matthew's riddle, the honor/dishonor dichotomy is drawn sharply in terms of saying and doing. The son who at first says he will go to work honors the father with his words, but dishonors the father with his actions. The son who at first refuses to do his father's will, dishonors the father with his words, but honors the father with his actions.

It is possible that both Luke's parable and Matthew's riddle go back to the same orally transmitted original parable by Jesus. If that is the case, then Luke and Matthew may have edited the original parable. One of Luke's concerns in the book of Acts (Luke

and Acts were by the same author) was the conflict between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Luke may have added the younger/ elder son distinction to support an *allegorical* interpretation of the prodigal story as being about the Gentile Christians (younger sons) and the Jewish Christians (elder sons). Luke may also have added a few details to expand the story for effect.

Matthew was concerned to show that Jesus was the *Jewish* Messiah, i.e. that Jesus kept all the laws and fulfilled the prophecies. Consequently, Matthew may have been uncomfortable with a parable suggesting that God loves and “embraces” even those who break the commandment to honor one’s parents. Matthew might have turned the parable into a riddle to make it about how to honor one’s parents with action, thereby dropping the theme of the “Father’s” all-embracing love. There is no way of knowing if Matthew and Luke edited the same parable in different ways; we can only say that both included a story with two sons who both honored and dishonored their father in different ways. Luke’s “prodigal son” parable is probably close to the original. Jesus frequently had surprising twists in his parables, as we shall see, and the “prodigal son” has the surprise of the father’s embrace of the son who dishonored him. It also reflects Jesus’ idea of God as unconditionally supportive, as seen in the passage about the birds and lilies.

Jesus also departed from the prevailing idea in the Judaism of his time regarding the Kingdom of God. The prevailing Jewish belief about the Kingdom of God of his time was political, territorial, and related to future events and hope for divine intervention. Jesus’ idea of the Kingdom of God had deep roots in Jewish tradition but was not limited to political and territorial concerns. In Hebrew scriptures God is consistently portrayed as already ruling nature as well as intervening in human military and political affairs.

Jesus adopted that “God rules nature (including humanity) now” theme as his primary idea of the Kingdom of God but kept his illustrations in the realm of nature and everyday human behavior without direct reference to the politics of the time.

(2) Metaphysical Cosmology: God’s rule of the universe

The Presence of God’s Realm and Rule

There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed. (Thom. 5: 2; see Mt. 10: 26)

Jesus implied in this statement that he was concerned with knowledge: revealing that which is hidden. Viewed in that light, he was optimistic about discovery of truth and what he called “God’s realm.”

The historical Jesus spoke about the realm/rule of God not in terms of nations or future events but in terms of seeds growing and natural human interactions. He spoke of the realm of God as already present, although not “observed” by people. He stated forthrightly, according to the *Gospel of Luke*, that “*You won’t be able to observe the coming of God’s realm. People are not going to be able to say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or ‘Over there!’ On the contrary, God’s realm is within you*” (Luke 17: 21).

The idea of God’s realm “within you” is logically consistent with characterizing God as “Father.” Our human parents are “in us” in a biological and psychological sense; God can be said to be “in us” in a psychological and spiritual sense. Those who think at all about God, even those who deny that God exists, have a psychological relationship with the idea of God’s existence; in that sense God is psychologically within us. If we take “God” to signify the ultimate good and Creative Energy of the universe, God can be said to be “spiritually” within us as our moral ideals and creative aspirations. If we think our lives as emanating from God in some sense, then our very life and consciousness is

the presence of God within us. If we think of God as the Potential of the Universe, then the potential within us is also God within us.

According to the *Gospel of Thomas* Jesus said:

“It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, ‘Look, here! Or ‘Look there!’ Rather the Father’s realm is spread out upon the earth, but people don’t see it.”

(Thomas 113: 4) This passage reflects Jesus’ idea of God’s realm as “hidden” and affirms that God’s realm is present “spread out on the earth.” It is consistent with his idea of God supporting all life.

Also according to *Thomas*, Jesus said:

“If your leaders say to you, ‘Look, the Father’s realm is in the sky,’ then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, ‘It is in the sea,’ then the fish will precede you. Rather, the Father’s realm is within you and it is outside you.” (Thom. 3:

1-3) This saying was not selected by the Jesus Seminar as probably originating with Jesus. However it clearly has the same message as the passages from Luke 17: 21 and Thomas 113: 4. Furthermore the passage reflects Jesus’ style of satirizing conventional ideas using references to nature, as well as affirming the idea of Divine Presence everywhere.

Jesus’ naturalistic, non-supernatural and non-political sayings suggest a description of the way the universe works. The phrase “God’s realm/ rule” as Jesus used it is equivalent in meaning to what we would call the “universe.” The way the universe works is properly a *metaphysical* and *cosmological* topic, not a prophetic one. The way of the universe is first of all a *philosophical* concern even though cosmological assumptions usually enter into religious belief systems.

The idea of God's realm and rule as present rather than absent indicates Jesus was a mystic. The effect of mystical consciousness for healing is controversial and not sufficiently tested; nevertheless I suspect it is the most important and powerful aspect of Jesus as healer. Studies of the effects of prayer are the closest thing we have to substantiation of spiritual consciousness as being efficacious for healing. Some of that evidence will be examined in chapter five "Review of Literature."

A Friendly Universe: Ask and Receive

Based upon Jesus' concept of God as all-loving Father it is reasonable to say that Jesus held the position that the universe is fundamentally "friendly." His idea of the friendliness of the universe is reflected in his teaching that we get what we *seek*:

Ask - it'll be given to you; seek - you'll find; knock - it'll be opened for you. Rest assured: everyone who asks receives; everyone who seeks finds; and for the one who knocks it is opened. Who among you would hand a son a stone when it's bread he's asking for? Again, who would hand him a snake when it's fish he's asking for? Of course no one would! So if you, neglectful as you are, know how to give your children good gifts, isn't it much more likely that your Father in the heavens will give good things to those who ask him? (Mt. 7: 7-11; see Lk 11: 9-10)

Is this really the way the universe works? Do we always get what we ask for and find what we seek? Does every door we knock upon open up to us? One is tempted to modify the statement: *sometimes* we receive, find, and have doors open to us; *sometimes not*. That would seem to be a more reasonable expectation. Why does Jesus make an *unqualified* statement about ask-receiving, seeking-finding, and knocking-opening? Again his position is rooted in his idea of God as loving father: of course a good father would give his children good gifts when they ask.

Is there any way in which Jesus' radically optimistic position on asking-seeking-knocking can be justified, other than from his God-concept? One other way he justifies his concept is by proposing a human situation:

Suppose you have a friend who comes to you in the middle of the night and says to you, "Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine on a trip has just shown up and I have nothing to offer him." And suppose you reply, "Stop bothering me. The door is already locked and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything." - I tell you, even though you won't get up and give the friend anything out of friendship, yet you will get up and give the other whatever is needed because you'd be ashamed not to. (Lk. 11: 5-8)

The notion that anyone would give bread to a friend at midnight is based upon the mores of Jesus' culture. There was an expectation of hospitality connected with the honor/shame value of the time. It was considered honorable to do favors for friends and shameful to turn a friend away.

The illustration may be more than analogy; it may be that Jesus did not intend the "ask-seek-knock law" to be purely about asking in prayer but intended it to be applied in relation to fellow humans as well. Jesus was not literal minded; that is why he spoke in parables. He was not averse to exaggerated images, as will be seen. His absolute statements may simply have been his way of generalizing from his experience and observations.

In the larger context of his teaching, he advocated persistence and perseverance in "asking-seeking-knocking."

Once there was a judge in this town who neither feared God nor cared about people. In that same town was a widow who kept coming to him and demanding, "Give me a ruling against the person I'm suing." For a while he refused; but eventually he said to himself, "I'm not afraid of God and I don't care about people, but this widow keeps

pestering me. So I'm going to give her a favorable ruling, or else she'll keep coming back until she wears me down." (Lk. 18: 2-4)

This parable again shows Jesus' sense of humor. He sets up a confrontation between a powerful judge who cannot be intimidated by God or people and a widow. In prophetic writings "widows and orphans" are proverbially members of society who rely upon others for their well-being:

"Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow." (Isaiah 1: 17)

"Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless." (Isaiah 10: 1-2)

"I will be quick to testify . . . against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless." (Malachi 3: 5)

In a confrontation between a powerful judge and "defenseless" widow, the expectation would be that the judge would impose his will on the widow. Jesus reverses the expected outcome by having the widow nag the judge into giving her what she wants. By pure persistent asking, the widow receives. The story is humorous but not absurd. The proverbial "nagging wife" who always eventually gets what she wants is a standard comic character and probably has some basis in actual experiences. Any parent knows how persistent children can be in asking and how often the parent gives in. On a more serious note, civil rights movements have had significant success by persistently demanding justice. In the parable, justice is what the widow is demanding: she uses the Greek word "diké" which basically means "justice."

I don't believe that the "ask-receive law" is the kind of idea that can be proven or disproven scientifically; it is a proverb with some practical wisdom in it. If you seek

evidence that it does *not* work, you will find such evidence, and thereby “prove” the “law”: you found what you were seeking. Likewise if you seek evidence to prove the “law” *works* you will find it, again “proving” the “law.” The “law” is probably best thought of as a practical “rule of thumb” rather than as an absolute. What is pretty certain is you cannot get what you ask for if you don’t ask in some way; you cannot find what you seek if you don’t in some sense seek; doors won’t open in any sense if you don’t in some sense “knock.” It is another example of Jesus’ radical optimism.

One Jesus parable suggests that at least in some cases it is prudent to place a limit on persistence when seeking:

A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard; he came looking for fruit on it but didn’t find any. So he said to the vinekeeper, “See here, for three years in a row I have come looking for fruit on this tree, and haven’t found any. Cut it down. Why should it suck the nutrients out of the soil?” In response he says to him, “Let it stand, sir, one more year, until I get a chance to dig around it and work in some manure. Maybe it will produce next year; but if it doesn’t, we can go ahead and cut it down.” (Lk. 13: 6-9)

There is in this parable once again a humorous element in the form of reversal of conventional expectation. The person of superior position is the vineyard owner; the vinekeeper is a mere employee. The conventional expectation would be for the owner to know more or at least as much about farming as the vinekeeper. The owner is impatient with the fig tree because it has not borne fruit after three years. The vinekeeper suggests fertilizer and waiting just one more year. As it happens, fig trees take 3 to 5 years to produce fruit. Hence the vinekeeper takes a more knowledgeable and sensible position: give it another year. Presumably Jesus’ audience consisted mostly of people of the land who knew about fig trees; they would have gotten the humorous tweak of the impatient landowner.

The parable does not suggest being patient forever; rather if we generalize from growing figs to other projects the parable suggests that a certain amount of care and time is required for a project to bear fruit. Knowing “how long” depends upon what one is trying to accomplish. I suppose that for many projects, if one has been working on something “fruitlessly” for four or five years it might be wise to reconsider the wisdom of the project. For example, it usually takes four years to complete undergraduate or doctoral courses, U. S. Presidents are given four year terms to prove themselves, businesses and governments seem enamored of four or five year plans. There may be something cosmically or psychologically significant about the numbers four and five as times for completion of a phase of experience; certainly biblical writers were fond of 40 day or 40 year periods (the flood, the years in the wilderness, etc.).

Primarily the parable is about nurture and patience; secondarily it is about balancing persistence with prudence.

One last note on the fig tree parable: it is probably the basis of the strange story of Jesus cursing a fig tree and causing it to wither. As stories are passed along orally, story-tellers often modify, add detail or even transform the story. One story-teller may well have transformed the fig tree parable into a miracle story, in which Jesus becomes the impatient “master” and the patient vinekeeper simply disappears. The motivation for the change would have been to make a point about bearing fruit: if you don’t bear fruit, you will be cursed and destroyed. It is highly unlikely that Jesus advocated *that* idea, even though in another context he did suggest that if you don’t use your “talents” you will lose them.

Another parable of Jesus also illustrates the asking-receiving law as well as Jesus' emphasis on the importance of forgiveness:

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a toll collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed silently as follows: "I thank you, God, that I'm not like everybody else, thieving, unjust, adulterous, and especially not like that toll collector over there. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of everything I acquire." But the toll collector stood off by himself and didn't even dare to look up, but struck his chest, and muttered, "God, have mercy on me, sinner that I am." Let me tell you, the second man went back to his house righteous but the first one did not. (Lk. 18: 10-14)

The issue of the story is "what makes a man righteous?" The usual assumption of the audience at the beginning of the story would be that the Pharisee was the righteous man and the toll collector was a sinner. The Greek word rendered here as "righteous" is "δικαιος" (dikaioo). In this parable it is usually translated as "justified," but that word does not adequately convey the meaning in this story. "Dikaioo" is related to the word for justice and can mean "acquitted, freed, justified, or rendered righteous or just."³⁷ The story would shock and reverse the expectations of the listeners. The toll collector went home righteous but the Pharisee went home *not* righteous.

In the context of Jesus' teachings the conclusion of the story, however shocking, is perfectly logical. The Pharisee's prayer does not ask for righteousness; therefore, he does not receive it. In addition, the Pharisee condemns others; Jesus taught "condemn not and you will not be condemned." The statement implies that condemning others leaves one susceptible to being condemned. The toll collector's prayer asks for mercy; Jesus taught "ask and you will receive." Consequently, the toll collector would receive what he asked for: mercy or *forgiveness*.

A common anxiety of humans is a sense of sinfulness and guilt. The story in the context of Jesus' teachings provides a simple solution to be freed (another meaning of *dikaioo*) of guilt. For those who take the philosophy of Jesus as authoritative, the simple way to be freed from guilt and be rendered "righteous" is to ask for forgiveness – ask and you will receive.

This way of forgiveness is not what Christianity ended up affirming. The parable does not affirm the Christian doctrines of being baptized, accepting Jesus as Savior, repenting, confessing to a priest (in the case of Catholicism), doing penance, and participating in sacraments as the ways to forgiveness. Those doctrines may have value to the believer, but they do not reflect the much simpler philosophy of Jesus regarding the way to forgiveness: ask and receive or forgive and you will be forgiven (this point will be more fully discussed later). To the extent that relief from anxiety about guilt is therapeutic, this simple philosophy of forgiveness would have been psychologically liberating for Jesus' audience.

The "law of asking and receiving" can be related to the idea of trusting God to provide, as expressed in the "don't worry" argument (Mt. 6: 25-30) already discussed. The following statement was not identified by the Jesus Seminar as part of the list of "authentic sayings." However the saying is consistent with the teachings of asking, trusting and forgiving and therefore consistent with Jesus' philosophy even if not originating with him. The saying combines asking and trusting in an inspiring way:

Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours." (Mk 11: 22-25)

The saying affirms figuratively that one can “move mountains” through prayer. The idea of believing that you have *already* received is intriguing. How can one believe one has already received before one has actually received? Perhaps a clue can be found in some of the practices of sports psychology.

A number of studies have indicated that vividly imagining attaining certain results works as well or almost as well for improving performance as physical practice.³⁸ Imagination has also been used with positive effects in therapy for illnesses, including cancer.³⁹ If imagining affects results, then imagining might also be a way to “believe you have received” *before* one “actually” receives. The effects of imagination on belief and of belief on healing and accomplishment are certainly worthy of further research.

Prayer: What to Ask For

Jesus did not just teach “ask and receive” without offering guidance regarding what to request. Spiritual teachers almost inevitably create prayers, which are in effect guidance regarding what one ought to seek. This “ought” is connected to the teacher’s idea of piety and morality.

However a prayer can have a practical dimension as well. One can ask for things that are not ultimately beneficial to the seeker. One can ask for what seems good but proves to be troublesome. There is a story, possibly apocryphal, about a young man who came to Socrates for guidance. The young man was contemplating marriage and wondered if it was wise. Socrates reportedly replied: If you get a good wife, she will make you happy. If you get a bad wife, you will become a philosopher which is good for any man. Therefore by all means, get married.” But we all know that seeking a spouse

for the sake of being married can make a person miserable without making them a philosopher. Likewise a child can ask for harmful things such as too much candy.

Jesus' advice regarding prayer certainly can be seen as having dimensions of piety and morality. At the same time his recommended prayer can also be seen as ultimately practical in the context of his whole philosophy. The prayer as rendered by the Jesus Seminar is a bit shorter than the liturgical "Lord's Prayer" found in Matthew (See Mt. 6: 9-13 and Lk. 11: 2-4). The following is my own slightly altered version of the Jesus Seminar version:

"Father, let your name be revered. Let your realm arrive. Give us our daily bread. Forgive us to the extent that we have forgiven. Don't test us; deliver us from evil."

Each sentence of the prayer can be thought of separately as a distinct request; actually in terms of the mood of the verb, each "petition" is a *command*. In the context of Jesus' teachings, each "petition" can be understood as an affirmation of what Jesus held to be already true.

In Hebrew the word for "name" in some contexts can refer directly to God. Generally a name was thought to refer to one's "reputation" and therefore to the very nature of the person named. The Hebrew word for "hallowed" signified that something was dedicated to God and was pure or "clean." Hence what is generally translated as "hallowed be thy name" (here rendered "let your name be revered") suggests a description of God's nature: "Your nature is pure or sacred." The prayer "Father, let your name be revered" also suggests that "Father" is the appropriate name of God, describes God's character and is sacred. Thus the first prayer is a recognition of God's

nature as Father and pure; in meaning it is roughly equivalent to simply saying “Holy Father.” It is a way of bringing one’s attention to the nature of God. In effect Jesus was telling his disciples to ask for awareness of the “Holy Father.”

“Let your realm arrive” (“thy kingdom come”) is an invitation for God’s realm or presence to enter one’s consciousness. In effect Jesus was telling his disciples to ask for God’s presence and rule to enter their consciousness, which is practically the same as the first “petition.” The first two petitions or “commands” may be thought of as two ways to say the same thing or as one request which could be paraphrased as: Holy Father enter my consciousness. As we will see, Jesus affirmed that entering God’s realm (or having God’s realm enter our awareness) is an experience of joy worth more than any earthly good. If we take it that all people in all their seeking are really looking for happiness, then this prayer is the ultimate practical prayer from Jesus’ perspective. Find God’s realm and you will find the joy you seek.

“Give us our daily bread” is a command that God give us all we need; “bread” figuratively refers to sustenance and life itself. In the context of Jesus’ teachings, as we’ve already seen, Jesus believed that God supports our lives, provides for our need and for the needs of all creatures and even “clothing” for fields of grass. Hence the command is really an acknowledgement of what Jesus took to be a truth rather than a begging for some lack to be filled.

In much the same way “forgive us to the extent that we have forgiven” is affirmed elsewhere as a truth in Jesus’ philosophy: “forgive and you will be forgiven.” Again in the context of Jesus’ philosophy the prayer is an “asking for” something that is already a “given.”

What are we to make of the final “petition”: “*Don’t test us; deliver us from evil*”? Is it also a petition for something already given? The only “testing” (“tempting”) that occurs in the Gospels is the story of Jesus being tested/tempted by *Satan*. Nowhere does he suggest that *God* tests us. Perhaps the letter of James gives us a window into Jesus’ own belief on this point: “*When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.*” (James 1: 13-14) Furthermore in Jesus’ philosophy God is consistently portrayed as loving Father who provides all we need, even if we are “evil” or “unjust.” The most probable interpretation of the “petition” “don’t test us; deliver us from evil” is that it is again an asking for what Jesus takes to be a given.

To summarize: the “Lord’s Prayer” may be taken as guidance to request or command God to do what God already does. The prayer, though in the imperative mood, can be understood as being in the declarative mood, i.e. as a series of affirmations of what is already true. The best things to ask for are what the Father already gives. The prayer can be understood as saying:

“Holy Father, your realm and rule is present. You give us all we need. We are forgiven to the extent that we forgive. You do not test us; you deliver us from evil.”

Is there therapeutic value in praying as if one is affirming God’s will in contrast to praying as if one is petitioning God to do one’s own will? There is in fact a spiritual tradition which does treat prayer as affirmation of the truth about God. The related traditions of Christian Science, New Thought, Religious Science and Unity all teach “affirmative prayer.” The adherents of all those traditions claim that affirmations are

therapeutic spiritually, psychologically and physically. They further claim that one can use affirmations to help achieve success and prosperity. The evidence that affirmations “work” is primarily anecdotal, consisting of thousands of testimonials which can be found in the literature of the different organizations. This approach is known to the general public as “positive thinking.”

The claim here is not that Jesus taught people to use affirmations. A more accurate way to state the case is that Jesus incorporated into prayer what he believed to be true about God and God’s realm/rule. Hence the prayers he taught were, in *effect* if not in form, affirmations of what he already believed. He did not teach prayer as a way of *persuading* God to be good; rather, he taught prayer as a way of *acknowledging* that God is good.

Jesus on Exorcism

The synoptic Gospels have stories about Jesus casting out demons and there are a few sayings suggesting that he was accused of doing so by the power of Satan or Beelzebul. There is also a parable about “unclean spirits” which probably originated with Jesus. A close examination of Jesus’ sayings related to “demons” leaves one in doubt as to whether or not he performed exorcisms and believed in demons.

Most of the people in the Middle East in the first century believed in demonic possession. In the first century erratic behaviors which are today associated with a variety of psychological illnesses were believed to be caused by demons. Many people today also believe in demons and exorcisms, but probably most people do not. There are claims that exorcisms have been effective in modern times, but there are psychological explanations of such events which do not require belief in demons or in effectiveness of

exorcisms. Consequently today the world is divided between the scientific non-belief in exorcism and religious belief in exorcism. The world is divided on an ontological question: do demons *exist*? Some who are religiously conservative would answer “yes”; the scientifically minded would answer “no.”

Many cultures, going back to the earliest ones, have had “specialists” to deal with “demonic possession.” Such specialists have been variously named “shamans,” “priests,” and “exorcists.” The specialists used a variety of methods to “cast out demons” including prayers and offerings to deities, incantations and other rituals. If Jesus did use particular prayers, incantations, offerings or rituals to cast out demons, it is surprising that his methods were not recorded. Even incantations of doubtful effectiveness have been recorded in detail in Jewish, Zoroastrian, and other religious traditions. The exorcism stories about Jesus (originating with Mark) have no special formulas. Generally speaking, without formula or ritual, Jesus just tells the demon to be quiet or to get out.

The synoptic Gospels report that Jesus performed exorcisms; the Gospels of *John* and *Thomas* make no mention of anything related to exorcisms. Also Paul’s letters, which are earlier than the canonical Gospels, make no mention of driving out demons or of Jesus casting out demons. Nor do any of the other New Testament epistles mention such things. The evidence that Jesus performed exorcisms is from only one book (*Mark*); *Matthew* and *Luke* copied *Mark’s* account. The report of one source out of many does not make a very strong case for that point. The case that Jesus was a healer is much stronger since all Gospels, including *Thomas*, agree that Jesus was a healer. If Jesus was a healer by some means other than “exorcism,” his contemporaries might still have

thought of him as casting out demons since they believed that illnesses were caused by demons.

However The Jesus Seminar concluded that the synoptic Gospels' reports of exorcisms were based upon actual events and that a few sayings related to exorcism were authentic.

The case for the authenticity of the "exorcism" *sayings* is solid. The main challenge with the "exorcism" sayings of Jesus is that a person who did *not* perform exorcisms could have truthfully made the statements. Two of the three sayings are responses to *accusations* that Jesus cast out demons by Satan or Beelzebul. The sayings record responses to accusations. In those two sayings Jesus makes conditional statements that neither affirm nor deny that he cast out demons. Instead, the statements propose logical dilemmas to his accusers. The third saying is like a parable and implies that it is better *not* to cast out demons. The nature of the sayings and the lack of support for *Mark's* tradition cast some doubt on the notion that Jesus performed exorcisms.

Jesus apparently was accused of driving out demons by the power of "Beelzebul." "Beelzebul" means either "Lord of heaven" or "Lord of the house" but the name is derived from a god worshipped by the Philistines: Baal-zebul "Lord of the flies." "Baal-zebul" and the Greek form "Beelzebul" were used by rabbis as derogatory names for "Satan," Baal worship and idolatry in general. Based on the preserved sayings of Jesus it is clear that at least some people accused Jesus of casting out demons by the power of a foreign deity or of Satan rather than by the power of the God of Israel. Jesus' responses to the charge were logical:

“Every government divided against itself is devastated, and a house divided against a house falls. If Satan is divided against himself - since you claim I drive out demons in Beelzebul’s name - how will his domain endure?” (Lk. 11: 17, 18)

This saying is found in both *Q* (*Matthew* and *Luke*) and *Mark*. *Mark* 3 follows the saying with the saying about a tying up a strong man. *Q* followed the saying with an additional response:

“Even if I drive out demons in Beelzebul’s name, in whose name do your own people drive them out? In that case, they will be your judges. But if by God’s spirit I drive out demons, then for you God’s imperial rule has arrived.” (Mt. 12: 29)

The response is subtle; it is not an admission or a denial. The statement implies that *if* Satan is casting out his own demons, there would be nothing to worry about since he would only be destroying his own power. The second part of the saying is conditional too: “*if* by God’s spirit.” When the two responses from *Q* are put together, we see that Jesus’ response to his accusers was to put them on the horns of a dilemma. The dilemma may be stated this way: “If I drive out demons, either I do it by the power of Beelzebul or by the power of God. If I do it by the power of Beelzebul, Satan is divided against himself and his house will fall; in which case there is no problem. If I drive out demons by the power of God, then God’s realm is here. Either way, there is no reason to object to my work.” Jesus adds to the dilemma an additional point: if he was doing the same thing as his accusers’ own people, then they were doing the same thing as he, “in that case they will be your judges.”

Jesus’ response logically and effectively refuted any objections his accusers could make regarding his driving out demons. Yet his response leaves open the question of

whether or not he was actually performing exorcisms. The “if” in his responses is not an admission; it is a hypothetical response. It is a little like a person accused of slander saying, “If I did say something that offended someone, I would apologize; but if what I said was true, why should I apologize?” That would be a non-apology without admitting or denying the charge. In effect, the speaker just changes the subject.

The following story, from *Q*, suggests a good reason *not* to drive out “unclean spirits”:

“When an unclean spirit leaves a person, it wanders through waterless places in search of a resting place. When it doesn’t find one, it says, ‘I will go back to the home I left.’ It then returns, and finds it swept and refurbished. Next, it goes out and brings back seven other spirits more vile than itself, who enter and settle in there. So that person ends up worse off than when he or she started.” (Lk. 11: 24-26)

If a person is *worse* off for having an “unclean spirit” leave, it would be clearly better for a person if the unclean spirit stayed. The story makes a case for *not* practicing exorcism. It is a strange thing for a supposed exorcist to say. It indicates that Jesus might have been *opposed* to “driving out demons.” The story could have been intended as a satirical criticism of the exorcism practices of the era.

The story is not told as factual; it is like Jesus’ other parables and could be seen as just a “fable” to make a point. If the word “when” at the beginning of the passage is dropped, the rest of the passage is sounds like a story rather than a description of supernatural phenomena. That *story* form is more like other sayings of Jesus.

What would the point of the story be? Perhaps the point could be something like “it’s sometimes better to let people be as they are, rather than trying to fix them.” If the

saying was intended as satirical criticism, the point would be something like “your exorcisms leave people worse off than when they had a so-called ‘unclean spirit.’”

Examining what evidence there is regarding Jesus and exorcism, it is difficult to be certain about whether or not Jesus performed exorcisms in the conventional sense.

Of course, if there are no such things as demons, then Jesus clearly could not have driven out demons. If he had some positive effect upon people who were thought to have demons, then that effect requires an explanation other than that “he cast out demons.”

No one has ever observed a demon; all that has ever been observed was aberrant and disturbing human behavior. What were called “demons” in those times today would be diagnosed as physical illness or psychological disorders rooted in traumas or maladaptive habits.

There are a number of possibilities for how Jesus might have cured psychological disorders or gotten a reputation as an exorcist. It is possible that Jesus responded to aberrant behavior by using the power of suggestion, speaking directly to the person’s subconscious or “alternate persona.” It is possible that through prayer or “psychic ability” Jesus cured people who were thought to have demons. It is also possible that such behavior happened to stop when Jesus came upon it and his disciples interpreted the temporary cessation of aberrant behavior as Jesus casting out a demon. It could be that Jesus’ extraordinary empathy, peaceful presence and faith had a therapeutic effect on psychologically disturbed people.

In the end, we cannot be certain about how Jesus might have affected people with psychological disorders. Whether or not Jesus believed in demons is a matter of opinion; a case can be made that he made concessions to his listeners’ beliefs without directly

affirming his agreement with those beliefs. We cannot be certain whether or not Jesus thought of himself as an exorcist. What we can do is relate the ideas in his philosophy to modern understanding of healing and determine if his philosophy had and still has therapeutic value.

Principle of Expansion

One of the primary ideas in Jesus' concept of how the universe works is the idea of a principle of expansion.

Scientific knowledge indicates that expansion is at work in the universe, everywhere from the very beginning. Scientific theory posits that the universe expanded from a single point of energy and recent evidence indicates the universe continues to expand at an accelerating rate. Organisms likewise expand from tiny seeds into their full grown forms; in fact organisms expand from the invisible "seeds" of DNA molecules. Jesus compared God's realm and rule to examples of expansion in nature. He may not have known about the "big bang" but he observed expansion as ubiquitous in nature and identified expansion as the way God's rule works in the world. In that way he identified what can be called a "cosmological principle of expansion."

What does God's rule remind me of? It is like leaven which a woman took and concealed in fifty pounds of flour until it was all leavened. (Luke 13: 20-21)

Here we see Jesus' sense of humor again in the form of a surprising image that reverses a conventional metaphor. "Leaven" was conventionally used as a metaphor for *false* doctrines or being *unclean*. Unleavened bread was usually associated with the "clean" and sacred. Unleavened bread was associated with the Passover meal commemorating escape from Egypt.

“Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, but on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses; for whoever eats anything leavened from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.” (Exodus 12: 15, New American Standard Version)

Leavened bread was forbidden for some of the offerings in the temple:

“No grain offering, which you bring to the LORD, shall be made with leaven, for you shall not offer up in smoke any leaven or any honey as an offering by fire to the LORD.” (Leviticus 2:11)

In the New Testament the association of leaven with false doctrine or uncleanness continued. One saying in which leaven has its conventional negative implication is attributed to Jesus:

“And Jesus said to them, ‘Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’” (Matthew 16:6)

The saying probably did not originate with Jesus but was added later when the early Christians found themselves competing with the Pharisees for converts.

Paul uses the metaphor of leaven in his letters, with the common negative implication:

“Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?” (1 Corinthians 5:6)

Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened.” (1 Corinthians 5:7)

It is clear that Jesus’ use of leaven as a simile for God’s realm and rule is a reversal of common associations. Likewise his comparison of God’s rule to a woman’s work is unusual but not quite as shocking, since God’s Wisdom is referred to as feminine in Proverbs and other wisdom literature.

Another unusual use of imagery in the same simile is the amount of flour that the woman is leavening. Fifty pounds of leavened flour is enough to make about 100 pounds of bread. Since there were no preservatives in that time, people generally made only enough bread for one or two days. Clearly the woman in the simile is expecting to feed a lot of people that day! Mention of large quantities is typical in Jesus' parables; the exaggerated quantity was probably a device to help people remember the saying. In addition, by implication the parable fits another common theme in Jesus sayings: the theme of celebration. The large quantity of bread being prepared by the woman was suitable only for a great feast, some kind of celebration. Jesus' parables referring to celebration include the man who finds a lost sheep, the woman who finds a lost coin, the return of the prodigal son, the man who finds a treasure in a field, and the man who prepares a great feast.

Finally, by saying the woman "concealed" the leaven rather than "mixed" it, the saying suggests that God's realm is hidden from ordinary perception. The idea of God's hidden-yet-present realm is found in many of Jesus' sayings.

The fundamental meaning of the parable is a reference to God's rule as something expanding or as a principle of expansion. The parable does not explicitly say what expands in God's realm and rule. That ambiguity allows the listener or reader to reflect upon the idea of expansion and formulate applications. By inducing a state of reflection the saying in effect is a device to induce meditative states and at the same time an expression of a general principle.

The parable of the mustard seed is similar to the leaven parable in style, theme and meaning:

“It’s like a mustard seed. It’s the smallest of all seeds, but when it falls on prepared soil, it produces a large plant and becomes a shelter for the birds of the sky.”
(Thomas 20: 2-3)

In this simile, Jesus parodies a conventional metaphor: a tall tree as signifying power and/ or goodness. Nations were metaphorically referred to as trees; the larger the nation or empire, the larger the tree in the metaphor. Righteousness and wisdom were sometimes compared to trees. Here are a few examples:

“The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon.”
(Psalm 92:12)

“She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her; those who hold her fast will be blessed.” (Proverbs 3:18)

Chapter 31 of *Ezekiel* compares nations to trees. The size of the tree indicates the power of the nation; the greater the nation the taller the tree. It makes reference to the tall tree having birds in its boughs.

Chapter 4 of *Daniel* compares King Nebuchadnezzar to a mighty tree:

“which grew large and strong, with its top touching the sky, visible to the whole earth, with beautiful leaves and abundant fruit, providing food for all, giving shelter to the wild animals, and having nesting places in its branches for the birds - Your Majesty, you are that tree! You have become great and strong; your greatness has grown until it reaches the sky, and your dominion extends to distant parts of the earth.” (4: 20-22)

The mustard shrub of Jesus’ parable stands in stark contrast to Daniel’s metaphor of a tree “touching the sky.” The contrast could be compared to the common modern expression of a person’s “family tree” being humorously referred to as a “family shrub.” Nebuchadnezzar was compared to a tree so tall that it was visible to the whole earth;

Jesus compares God's kingdom to a common shrub that spread rapidly but didn't grow to conspicuous heights.

The theme of the parable is again the idea that God's realm and rule expands from something that is practically invisible. Is it a trivial coincidence that Jesus' description of the universe (God's realm) is a nearly perfect simile for the origin of the universe in the scientific "big bang theory"? Jesus' philosophy expressed elements of reason and observation. His insights are similar to the intuitions of mystics. On the basis of reason, observation and mystical insight Jesus may have intuited that the universe grew from a "God seed." That his seed metaphors express something fundamental about the universe is no more coincidental than that Heraclitus' notion of the universe as a process expresses something fundamental about the universe. Both Jesus and Heraclitus sought the general nature of the universe in observation of phenomena.

The philosophers of the era tended to favor primary metaphors for describing the nature of the universe. Heraclitus used fire and water as primary metaphors for his central idea of change or process as fundamental to the nature of the universe. Plato used shadows as his primary metaphor for describing the visible universe as a copy of a real realm of true and ideal forms. Jesus' fondness of seed parables suggests that seed growth was his primary metaphor for the nature of the universe.

Just what the mustard seed represents, beyond its general "likeness" to God's realm, is not specifically stated; hence many interpretations are possible. The expansion of God's realm could refer to Jesus' message or "spirit" spreading to others. It could refer to ideas or spirit growing within individuals. It could refer to both outer and inner expansion. The expansion could refer to how any idea or seed can grow into expression.

Because there are many applications of the metaphor, it is best understood as a general principle rather than as having one and only one referent. The parable “begs” to be used as a general statement about nature of the universe or the “way” of God in universe.

In other seed parables Jesus notes other aspects of the “expansion principle.” He notes that expansion is a process with phases. He notes that prevailing conditions influence how much seeds, consciousness, or ideas can expand. He notes that processes have cycles of beginnings and endings.

God’s rule is like this: Suppose someone sows seed on the ground, and sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and matures, although the sower is unaware of it. The earth produces fruit on its own, first a shoot, then a head, then mature grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, that farmer sends for the sickle, because it’s harvest time. (Mark 4: 26-29)

In general terms this parable identifies a process which goes through distinct phases, in which later phases “look” very different from earlier ones. It doesn’t take genius to notice that the growth of wheat goes through distinct phases. The genius was in using this as a metaphor for the universe (God’s realm). Process has beginning and end; process involves expansion. While clearly applicable to development of vegetation, distinct phases of process are also seen at every level of the cosmos: in animal growth from conception to maturity, in human society growth from tribe to nation to empire, in the cosmic expansion from the big bang to energy clusters to galaxies and solar systems.

Listen to this! This sower went out to sow. While he was sowing, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground where there wasn’t much soil, and it came up right away because the soil had no depth. But when the sun came up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered. Still other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, so that it produced no

fruit. Finally, some seed fell on good earth and started producing fruit. The seed sprouted and grew: one part had a yield of thirty, another part sixty, and a third part one hundred. (Mk. 4: 3-8)

The traditional interpretation as found in Mark is that Jesus is the sower, the seed is his word and the different types of soil represent different responses to the message. In that interpretation the seed's fruitfulness depends entirely upon individual response. This is a reasonable interpretation of the parable; it indicates that whether or not Jesus' words bear fruit is dependent upon the faith or consciousness of those who hear. However, if the interpretation does not originally come from Jesus but from Mark, as is argued by many scholars, then the parable could have many applications and interpretations.

Plants require certain soil and climate conditions in order to grow well and "bear fruit." The same could be said of animals, societies, businesses and ideas. The sower in the parable could be God, a teacher, a farmer or any individual who has a product or idea to sell. By other interpretations, the seed could represent people born in different environments. The parable could also be taken as an illustration of the nature of cause and effect. For any effect there must be both necessary and sufficient conditions. The necessary conditions for seed growth as illustrated in the parable are a sower and soil; but those are not sufficient conditions. The seed needs the right *kind* of soil to grow to maturity. Causation can be thought of as a conjunction of conditions which interact to produce something new.

In the leaven and seed parables Jesus was indicating a *general principle of expansion*; he left it to his listeners to interpret how that principle operated and in what cases beyond seeds and leaven it might apply. Besides the general principle, the parables

indicate that there are evolving distinct phases in expansion and the fruitfulness of expansion is partly dependent upon conditions. The parables reflect a principle in the physical world and at the same time are suggestive that the same principle applies in the individual mind and experience. Hence one could interpret the expansion similes in terms of words, ideas and actions being seeds which, when sown in receptive consciousness, expand into the world and bear fruit according to their kind.

On Love and Justice

While he advocated the idea of a generous God and friendly universe, Jesus also held an idea of law and justice in the universe. The two ideas of love and justice are held in a kind of creative tension in Jesus' parables and sayings. This has already been illustrated in the discussion of the parable of the Prodigal Son: the father's unconditional love of his sons is contrasted with the elder son's feeling that his father was not being *fair*.

Another parable illustrating the creative tension between justice and love tells the tale of a landowner who acts with fairness to some employees and with generosity to others:

“Heaven's rule is like a proprietor who went out the first thing in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the workers for a silver coin a day he sent them into his vineyard. And coming around 9 a.m. he saw others loitering in the marketplace and he said to them, “You go into the vineyard too, and I'll pay you whatever is fair.” So they went. Around noon he went out again, and at 3 p.m., and repeated the process. About 5 p.m. he went out and found others loitering about and says to them, “Why did you stand around here idle the whole day?” They reply, “Because no one hired us.” He tells them, “You go into the vineyard as well.”

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard tells the foreman: “Call the workers and pay them their wages starting with those hired last and ending with those hired first.”

Those hired at 5 p.m. came up and received a silver coin each. Those hired first approached thinking they would receive more. But they also got a silver coin apiece. They took it and began to grumble against the proprietor: “These guys hired last worked only an hour but you have made them equal to us who did most of the work during the heat of the day.” In response he said to one of them, “Look pal, did I wrong you? You did agree with me for a silver coin, didn’t you? Take your wages and get out! I intend to treat the one hired last the same way I treat you. Is there some law forbidding me to do with my money as I please? Or is your eye filled with envy because I am generous?”
(Mt. 20: 1-15)

As is typical of most of Jesus’ sayings, the parable does not present a didactic moral but instead suggests questions: was the proprietor fair in his dealings with those he hired first? Is fairness better than generosity or vice versa? Jesus’ sayings tend to be suggestive rather than directive. That style of suggestiveness indicates an intention to provoke contemplation rather than give rules for behavior. Suggestive stories and sayings provide a natural provocation for meditative states. Meditative states are much like non-directive hypnotic states in that they provide a condition in which the individual can see things in a new way and change old ways of thinking. It is therefore highly probable that generally Jesus’ intention was to help people change their minds and thereby change their lives.

It is important to remember that Jesus’ original audience would not have interpreted his sayings as being about Christian doctrine; when he spoke there was no Christianity and so no Christian doctrine. That point would seem obvious, yet most of Jesus’ sayings and parables are commonly interpreted as being about Christianity and

dogmas which were voted upon after the 4th century. For example the story of the proprietor and laborers is customarily understood as meaning: those who convert to the Church late in life receive the same reward in heaven as those who have long been Christians.

It is understandable that once a professional clergy was established, the clergy would interpret Jesus' sayings as supporting Church policies and doctrines. Nevertheless if we want to understand Jesus, we cannot assume he was establishing doctrine let alone supporting doctrines established hundreds of years later. The proprietor and laborers parable is not specifically about afterlife reward; it is specifically about the relative fairness and generosity of the proprietor and how the laborers felt about their treatment. It juxtaposes fair treatment (those who were paid what they previously agreed to) and generous treatment (those who were paid a full day's wage for a partial day's work).

This is not to say that the standard interpretation is "wrong," only that the standard interpretation is not the only or even most obvious meaning of the story. The ending shocks and provokes; it does not assert a moral. It raises questions about the relative "goodness" of fair treatment compared to generous treatment. It raises the question: would *I* rather be treated fairly or generously? It has implications for application of the "Golden Rule": if I prefer to be treated fairly, then I should treat others fairly; if I prefer to be treated generously, then I should treat others generously.

Jesus' idea of justice was simple and elegant: what you do comes back to you. That position is exemplified in this passage: *"Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven; give,*

and it will be given to you. . . . for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.” (Lu 6: 37-38)

This statement is the moral equivalent of the Newtonian third law of motion: the mutual forces of action and reaction between two bodies are equal, opposite and collinear. The law is more commonly stated: for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

The idea of justice was central in both Judaism and Greek philosophy. Jesus’ statement of “the measure you give will be the measure you get back” is about as simple and elegant way of defining justice as can be given. This idea of justice suggests a guideline for behavior in terms of expected outcome: give the measure you want to get back. The versions of “the Golden Rule” found in most religions and many philosophies provide guidance consistent with the guideline of getting back the measure you give. While “Golden Rules” are stated in the imperative mood, Jesus’ statement of justice is in the declarative mood. He does not say “you should do thus and such” but rather affirms in effect that what you do will come back to you. This is similar to the popular expressions: “you reap what you sow” and “what goes around comes around.”

Religions generally promise that justice and mercy are ultimately fulfilled as one’s “final reward,” meaning in effect “after you die.” That common teaching strongly suggests that justice is not fulfilled in this life; that an afterlife is necessary for justice to be fulfilled. The philosopher Kant made “afterlife justice” a key axiom in his argument for belief in immortality. Bertrand Russell nicely summarized Kant’s argument: “The argument is that the moral law demands justice, i.e. happiness proportional to virtue. Only Providence can insure this, and has evidently not insured it in *this* life. Therefore

there is a God and a future life; and there must be freedom, since otherwise there would be no such thing as virtue.”⁴⁰

On the other hand, Emerson affirmed that justice is not deferred to an afterlife but is fulfilled in the here and now: “Justice is not postponed. A perfect equity adjusts its balance in all parts of life.”⁴¹ “Cause and effect, means and ends, seed and fruit cannot be severed; for the effect already blooms in the cause, the end preexists in the means, the fruit in the seed.”⁴² (p. 74) Emerson could affirm present justice because he did not look only at outer conditions as “compensation” for actions; he saw that every act has an immediate and lasting impact in the “soul” of the actor. “In the nature of the soul is the compensation for the inequalities of condition.”⁴³ As examples of “unpostponed soul justice,” Emerson wrote:

“We feel defrauded of the retribution due to evil acts, because the criminal adheres to his vice and contumacy and does not come to a crisis or judgment anywhere in visible nature. . . . Has he therefore outwitted the law? Inasmuch as he carries the malignity and the lie within him he so far decreases from nature.”⁴⁴

In other words, the “evil act” diminishes the one who commits it and that diminishment is known and felt by the one who committed the act. Likewise, a virtuous deed expands the soul, the very act being felt as reward and pleasure in the actor, regardless of external results. It is through wise and virtuous acts that we express what we truly are: *“There is no penalty to virtue; no penalty to wisdom In a virtuous action I properly am; in a virtuous act I add to the world.”⁴⁵* Our actions make us what we are to ourselves; our sense of self-worth is the “reward” or “punishment.”

Jesus’ statement of justice neither affirms nor denies “afterlife” fulfillment of justice. There are no “authentic sayings” of Jesus that tell us what if anything he believed

about the afterlife. From his silence regarding an afterlife, it is entirely possible that Jesus thought more in Emersonian than in Kantian terms, i.e. justice occurs internally/psychologically as well as externally/circumstantially and is fulfilled in *this* life.

Love and justice are cosmological principles in Jesus' philosophy. God the Father is portrayed as unconditionally loving; God's rule is portrayed as having both perfect justice and at the same time "grace." By "grace" I mean God's rule includes the qualities of compassion, generosity, and mercy. Jesus' parables often combine justice and grace in creative tension, leaving his audience to ponder that tension and decide which value is better.

The two cosmological concepts are central to his ethical ideas as well.

(3) Jesus' Ethical Ideas

In the 1960s Joseph Fletcher, an Episcopalian Priest and philosopher, proposed a moral theory called "situation ethics."⁴⁶ Fletcher argued for the idea that the only ultimate good was unconditional love for all people and that all other rules and principles were only useful guidelines for determining the most loving thing to do in a given situation. Fletcher's position was rooted in the teachings of Jesus and expanded upon with considerable philosophical sophistication. His theory comes very close to Jesus' ethical ideas, but Fletcher's concept of justice as "distribution of love" is not identical with Jesus' idea of justice. Furthermore, for Jesus doing the loving thing was not the *absolute* good but a *practical* good related to the ultimate and absolute good of finding the realm and rule of God.

Jesus' idea of justice was not "equal distribution of love," as per Fletcher, but rather (as noted in the previous section) a principle of "what you do comes back to you." By that concept, justice assures that whatever action one takes for good or ill is balanced by *consequences* equivalent to one's actions. Fletcher's idea of justice is about what we *ought* to do; Jesus' concept is more directly concerned with the *consequences* of our actions. In that sense, Jesus' ethic has some common ground with modern utilitarian or pragmatic ethics.

It should be noted that Jesus' concept of justice does not affirm that judging or condemning others *necessarily* results in being judged or condemned. He only affirms that eschewal of judging and condemning assures one will not be judged or condemned. That those who condemn are themselves condemned is *not* a logical inference from "do not condemn and you won't be condemned"; that statement leaves open the *possibility* of reciprocal condemnation but does not affirm it.

Ethics is primarily concerned with "ought" rather than "is": arguing how we *ought* to behave rather than describing how we *do* behave. Jesus' imperative statements regarding how we ought to behave are consistent with his understanding of God and how God's universe works.

Generosity and Inclusivity

God causes the sun to rise on both the bad and the good, and sends rain on both the just and the unjust. Tell me, if you love those who love you, why should you be commended for that? Even the tax collectors do as much, don't they? Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. (see Mt. 5: 45, 46, 48 & Lk. 6: 32)

"Perfect" morality in Jesus' mind would be to love and bless the bad and the good, the just and the unjust. While Matthew records Jesus as saying "be *perfect* as your

Father,” Luke records the same saying as “be *compassionate* as your Father.” This discrepancy could be explained by the fact that the Hebrew word “shalom” can be translated as meaning either “perfect” or “compassionate.” If the remembered saying of Jesus was in Greek but contained the word “shalom” (or its Aramaic equivalent), Matthew and Luke might simply have chosen different Greek words as the translation. This suggests the possibility that Jesus was bilingual, speaking Aramaic to some, Greek to others, and occasionally a mixture of the two languages. That would not have been unusual in his part of the world where the locals did business with Greek speaking merchants and officials. The situation was not much different from the modern situation in America where immigrants and migrant workers speak their native tongue amongst themselves and English in interactions with the English speaking community.

In any case, Jesus affirmed that the way to be like our Father God is to practice universal love, without partiality to ideas of “good” and “bad” people. He drew this conclusion from the universality and impartiality of natural blessings, rather than from a sacred text. The passage is another indication of Jesus’ philosophical approach. His advocacy of universal love is based upon observation of the ways of nature. His idea of love, as found in this passage, is to imitate God’s action of giving sun and rain to all. How we are to do likewise is not specific here; again the saying is suggestive, though it seems to be directive. This and other passages are undoubtedly the source of Fletcher’s idea that love is the only absolute moral imperative.

In a few sayings Jesus is a bit more specifically directive about what it means to love. He directs his disciples to give freely:

If you have money, don't lend it at interest. Rather, give it to someone from whom you won't get it back. (Thom. 95: 1, 2) (See Mt. 5: 42)

Give to the one who begs from you. (Mt. 5: 39-42)

The directive to give freely besides being a high moral ideal would be for Jesus practical wisdom, since he believed in a just universe: “give and it will be given to you.”

A saying in the *Gospel of Thomas*, while not in the imperative mood, pushes the idea of giving to the point of self-sacrifice for the sake of others. The saying specifically connects giving with happiness:

Happy are those who go hungry, so the stomach of the one in want may be filled. (Thom. 69: 2)

Jesus illustrated love as giving with a provocative parable. The parable was provocative for his original audience, but we are so accustomed to the expression “Good Samaritan” that the parable no longer shocks. In his time there was historically rooted animosity between Samaritans and Jews. Along with Pharisees, the Priests and Levites were the supposed models of religious piety. A Christian could imaginatively recapture the emotional impact of the story in a modern context by substituting a Christian for the man going to Jerusalem, a Catholic priest and a minister for the priest and Levite, and a Muslim for the Samaritan.

The parable suggests both generosity and inclusivity as high moral ideals. The parable shocks by being a realistic portrayal of behavior expected from Priests and Levites in contrast to what is held up as the model generosity of the Samaritan:

There was a man going from Jerusalem down to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and went off, leaving him half dead. Now by coincidence a priest was going down that road; when he caught sight of him, he went out of his way to avoid him. In the same way, when a Levite came to the place, he

took one look at him and crossed the road to avoid him. But this Samaritan who was traveling that way came to where he was and was moved to pity at the sight of him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring olive oil and wine on them. He hoisted him onto his own animal, brought him to an inn, and looked after him. The next day he took out two silver coins, which he gave to the innkeeper, and said, "Look after him, and on my way back I'll reimburse you for any extra expense you have had." (Luke 10: 30-35)

By saying the man who was robbed and beaten was going from Jerusalem, the parable strongly suggests that he was *from* Jerusalem, i.e. he was presumably a Jew. Jesus' audience would immediately identify with the Jewish man on his way to Jericho. What happens to him empathetically happens to the listeners in their imagination. They would imagine a friend or even themselves being beaten and robbed. The response of those passing by becomes a response to a loved one or to themselves.

In order to maintain ritual purity required for performing their functions in the Temple, priests and Levites were expected to avoid touching corpses. Seeing a man "half dead," the priest and Levite could not take the chance of that the man was "all the way dead." It was appropriate and to some degree understandable for them to avoid the man from their perspective; but this would not be comforting to the listeners. The Samaritan ignored the appearance of uncleanness and demonstrated generous compassion which most people in most places and ages would regard as admirable. The parable suggests that ritual purity is not identical with "holiness" and high morality. In this way the parable was originally more than an illustration of admirable behavior: it was a counter-example to conventional understanding of holiness and a sympathetic reframing of disliked Samaritans.

In his practice, according to the Gospels, Jesus associated and ate with Samaritans, Gentiles, “unclean” persons and “sinners.” That would have been socially unconventional behavior. In fact even today people associate and eat primarily with others of the same social and economic “status,” with the notable exception of individuals campaigning for public office. According to the book of *Acts* there was a controversy among early followers of Jesus regarding Jewish Christians eating at the same table with Gentile Christians.

Jesus told a parable about a man who broke the custom of eating only with one’s kind:

“A person was receiving guests. When he had prepared the dinner, he sent his servant to invite the guests. The servant went to the first and said to that one, ‘My master invites you.’ That one said, ‘Some merchants owe me money; they are coming to me tonight. I have to go and give them instructions. Please excuse me from dinner.’ The servant went to another and said to that one, ‘My master has invited you.’ That one said to the servant, ‘I have bought a house, and I have been called away for a day. I shall have no time.’ The servant went to another and said to that one, ‘My master invites you.’ That one said to the servant, ‘My friend is to be married, and I am to arrange the banquet. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me from dinner.’ The servant went to another and said to that one, ‘My master invites you.’ That one said to the servant, ‘I have bought an estate, and I am going to collect the rent. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me.’ The servant returned and said to his master, ‘Those whom you invited to dinner have asked to be excused.’ The master said to his servant, ‘Go out on the streets and bring back whomever you find to have dinner.’” (Thomas 64: 1-11)

The shocking twist at the end of the parable is the master inviting *anyone* who could be found. Luke’s version of the story is explicit about inviting people considered ritually unclean: the “maimed and blind and lame” along with “the poor.” (Luke 14: 16-

23) Like the parable of the “Good Samaritan” this parable sets forth moral ideals of generosity and inclusivity.

The use of shocking and surprising images in these and other parables serves a three-fold purpose: (1) it makes the parables memorable, (2) it provokes thought and feeling and may thereby induce meditative states and (3) it creates the possibility of laughter. The parables needed to be memorable because Jesus was teaching in spoken form, with no written text for disciples to consult. The second point, the provocative element, can (according to my thesis) produce in the one who contemplates the story a meditative state which can be beneficial to health and give access to deeper levels of consciousness.

The third point about laughter is not obvious. Yet if one thinks about how surprising and shocking statements of modern comics provoke laughter *even when the audience members would be offended in other contexts*, the claim that Jesus was “funny” may not seem so far-fetched. Modern comics say unconventional things about politics, relationships, society and religion, often using “vulgar” and “impolite” language. Satirists in earlier times used a similar approach. The *form* and *content* of some of Jesus’ sayings do the same thing (although apparently without vulgarities). That is not to say that all of Jesus’ sayings were intended to be humorous, but only that some were. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the effect of his humor would have been the same then as the effect of humor today: laughter. There is some evidence that laughter is therapeutic, which will be discussed in chapter 5: “Review of the Literature.” Since laughter is therapeutic, Jesus’ sense of humor may have been part of the holistic therapeutic effect of his consciousness.

How to Love Your Enemies

The inclusiveness of Jesus' philosophy invited his listeners to change their feelings and behavior toward people for whom they felt animosity. Jesus proposed an apparently paradoxical moral imperative: "*Love your enemies.*" (Mt. 5: 44)

The paradox in the statement is rooted in the Hebrew word for "enemy" which essentially means "hated one." "Love those you hate" seems self-contradictory. Judging by the history of Christianity this admonition has only rarely been taken seriously except by the earliest Christians. Christians whose doctrines were deemed heretical have been exiled and burned at the stake. Christians have mounted "holy wars" against "infidels" and "pagans." Even today some Christian groups hurl invectives against homosexuals, Muslims and even people with "liberal" political views. While hatred does not characterize Christianity, hatred of perceived "enemies" is still common if not normative.

Is it even humanly possible to "love enemies"? Jesus did not provide "technique" for changing one's feelings about persons one hates. He did however prescribe *actions* which could be deemed loving towards "enemies."

Don't react violently against one who is evil: when someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other as well. When someone wants to sue you for your shirt, let that person have your coat along with it. Further, when anyone conscripts you for one mile, go an extra mile. (Matt 5: 39-41)

To modern ears these admonitions may seem merely weak submission to others. Furthermore the second and third admonitions do not seem directly relevant in a modern context. Who today sues for a person's shirt? Who can conscript one for one mile?

Historical context provides rebuttal to the notion that the admonitions advocate merely weak submission. A slap on the right cheek would be a back-handed slap, which

culturally indicated the one being slapped was considered a “social inferior” such as a slave. While it would be insulting to be slapped on the *left* cheek, the one slapped would be on equal footing and would be therefore socially justified in returning the slap. Hence turning the other cheek would be a challenge to the “slapper” to see the one slapped as on equal footing. To slap the “other cheek” would be an admission that the one slapped was a social equal; not to mention it would set up the slapper to receive a return blow. All this would be immediately understood by Jesus’ listeners, but has to be explained today. To turn the other cheek would be to “turn the tables” in the situation.

I suppose an insult might be a modern equivalent of a “back-handed” slap. When someone says something insulting to you, there are at least 7 possible responses: (1) return insult for insult; (2) shout an angry reply; (3) physically assault the person; (4) ignore the insult with suppressed anger; (5) ignore the insult with emotional detachment; (6) ignore the insult with compassion for the person’s unenlightened consciousness; (7) reply in a surprising non-violent way, e.g. with a sarcasm such as, “How kind of you to say so.”

The first response (return the insult) could cause an escalation of hurt feelings or worse. The next three possible responses (some form of angry response) are probably counter-productive, if only because anger is not generally a healthy emotion. The fifth and sixth responses (detachment or compassion) would probably generally be considered idealistic, enlightened or spiritual responses. The seventh response may be closest to Jesus’ recommendation. Turning the other cheek was a subtle non-violent way of shaming the one who struck the blow. Turning the other cheek was not passive submission nor retaliation but an action asserting personal dignity and equality with the

one who struck the blow. The sarcastic response is not *literally* an insult so much as a way of highlighting the insulter's meanness with words that in their literal meaning express praise. On the surface the response would be kind; in effect it could be illuminating, bringing the other person into an awareness of a less than admirable behavior.

The "shirt and cloak" advice is another example of a way to respond to an "enemy" with love: with generosity. Like the action of "turning the other cheek," giving one's coat would also "shame" the person, because it would highlight that person's meanness. In those times all people wore was a shirt and coat; giving up both would leave a person naked. Obviously it would take some courage to so fully expose oneself in that way. The image is shocking and absurd; another example of Jesus' sense of humor. Perhaps he didn't mean it as literal advice but as comic light on the issue of lawsuits.

There is a case of a medieval youth who responded to a situation in a way very similar to Jesus' admonition to give an adversary all one's clothes. The story is told about St. Francis of Assisi that on his way to becoming a saint he began to give away his wealth to the poor. The problem was that it wasn't exactly *his* wealth; it was his *father's*. His father didn't have the same attitudes about wealth as Francis did. Consequently Francis' father went to the local priest and prevailed upon him to restrain Francis' generosity. When the priest and Francis' father tried to persuade him to stop using the father's wealth for charity, Francis agreed. Then he renounced his inheritance and all of his father's wealth. To make that renunciation complete, Francis literally gave the clothes off his back to his father and walked away in his "birthday suit." We do not

know exactly how the father and priest felt about Francis' renunciation, but no doubt it caused them both some discomfort and may have stimulated some contemplation on wealth and its uses.

It occurs to me that a similar strategy *could* be employed in modern times by folks whose homes are foreclosed by banks. Suppose your job was "downsized" and you couldn't pay your mortgage. Suppose the bank refused to renegotiate and foreclosed on your home. Not having a house you no longer need furniture. Suppose you decide to give your furniture to the bank and you begin to move your furniture into the bank lobby. Perhaps the bank has you arrested; at least you would have food and shelter. But the bank would have a public relations disaster; after all, they had you imprisoned for giving them gifts. Suppose others followed your lead. That might lead banks to consider more flexible lending and repayment policies. Just a thought. It is perhaps an absurd thought, but probably no more absurd than giving all your clothes away to someone who sues for your shirt.

The third bit of advice for "loving your enemies" is proverbial: "go the extra mile." That admonition would have applied only to the power of Roman soldiers, who could legally conscript any subject of the empire to carry their burdens – food, water, etc. – for one mile. To go an *extra* mile would be to, in effect, do the soldier a favor. In the context of Mediterranean culture, friendships were developed by doing favors. It was considered "shameful" to refuse to return a favor. Social pressure was applied to anyone known to refuse a favor. Consequently any subject who did a favor to a soldier by carrying a burden an extra mile could expect a favor in return. What is more, by doing a favor the subject would begin the conventional process of making a new friend. It may

be that early Christians took this advice literally and converted their new soldier “friends” to Christianity in the process. We know that many Romans became Christians; it does not stretch credulity to hypothesize that “going the extra mile” had something to do with that.

The three strategies of what is commonly known as “nonresistance” or “passive resistance” are neither truly “nonresistant” or “passive.” Each in its way resists oppression with non-violent action rooted in magnanimity. The three strategies address three types of oppression: social oppression (“back-handed slaps”), economic oppression (“suing for a shirt”) and military-political oppression (“conscripting to carry a burden for one mile”). These are strategies for loving, non-violent resistance to oppression - gentle strategies for *liberation*. They demonstrate that creative and magnanimous non-violent responses to oppression can effectively subvert oppression. The teachings also suggest the rather subtle point that loving one’s enemies can be *self-liberating*.

One other saying of Jesus expresses the idea of defusing adversarial relationships. This bit of advice is sometimes followed today:

When you are about to appear with your opponent before the magistrate, do your best to settle with him on the way, or else he might drag you up before the judge, and the judge turn you over to the jailer, and the jailer throw you in prison. I tell you, you’ll never get out of there until you’ve paid every last red cent. (Lk. 12: 58-59)

Most lawyers would agree that sometimes it is best to settle out of court. Jesus apparently advised that it is *always* best to settle out of court.

Deeper psychological ways to liberation through love, ways more central to Jesus’ ethic, are the practices of forgiveness and non-judgment.

Forgiveness and Non-Judgment

Forgive and you'll be forgiven. (Lk. 6: 37)

Reference has already been made to this saying in the discussions of Jesus' idea of prayer and his "cosmological law" of reciprocity or "justice." It is a deceptively simple idea with cosmological, ethical, and devotional implications. In addition to the elegant and straightforward statement "forgive and you'll be forgiven" and the prayer "forgive us to the extent that we forgive others," Jesus told two parables illustrating how this law might work in the context of practical economic affairs. In plotline, one parable is a tragedy, the other is a comedy.

I have been emphasizing Jesus' sense of humor because it is a little known dimension of his mind and because of the therapeutic value of humor. However Jesus was, as doctrine holds, "acquainted with grief"; he encountered people who were suffering and saw the negative consequences of certain human behaviors.

Jesus' use of classic dramatic structure in a few parables suggests the possibility that he had some familiarity with Greek theater. If Joseph and Jesus were "carpenters" (the traditional translation of the Greek "tekton" which means "artificer" or "craftsman"),⁴⁷ they would have traveled to Sepphoris to do construction work. His hometown of Nazareth was just four miles from the city of Sepphoris, which had a large theater in which Greek and Roman plays were frequently performed. According to the Gospels Jesus also traveled through other cities and districts (including Jericho, Samaria, the district of Sidon, and the region of Decapolis) which had thriving theaters.⁴⁸ Jesus used the word "hypocrites" which was the word for "actors," and another indication that he may have had some acquaintance with the theater.

While the influence of theater on Jesus is still controversial among scholars, it is clear that he used tragic and comic structures in his parables. In his travels, Jesus could easily have witnessed plays or heard descriptions of them. Common elements of Greek and Roman comedies included the stock character of a slave who outwits his master, women who outwit men, soldiers who brag in an exaggerated fashion about their exploits the reconciliation of fathers and children (including prodigal sons forgiven by their fathers).⁴⁹ Those themes are reflected in Jesus' parables of "The Unjust Steward" (Luke 16: 1-8), "The Widow and the Judge" (Luke 18: 2-4) "The Pharisee and the Tax Collector" (Luke 18: 10-14), and "The Prodigal Son" (Luke 15: 11-32), respectively. This is not to say that Jesus' parables were mere plot summaries of plays, but only that the structure of his parables could have been influenced by some acquaintance with Greek theater.

The "tragic" parable about forgiveness revolves around the central character's "tragic flaw" which results in his downfall, a typical device in Greek tragedies.

This is why Heaven's imperial rule should be compared to a secular ruler who decided to settle accounts with his slaves. When the process began, the debtor was brought to him who owed ten million dollars. Since he couldn't pay it back, the ruler ordered him sold, along with his wife and children and everything he had, so he could recover his money. At this prospect, the slave fell down and groveled before him: "Be patient with me, and I'll repay every cent." Because he was compassionate, the master of that slave let him go and canceled the debt.

As soon as he got out, that same fellow collared one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred dollars, grabbed him by the neck and demanded: "Pay back what you owe!" His fellow slave fell down and begged him: "Be patient with me and I'll pay you back." But he wasn't interested; instead, he went out and threw him in prison until he paid the debt.

When his fellow slaves realized what had happened, they were terribly distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had taken place. At that point, his master summoned him: “You wicked slave,” he says to him, “I canceled your entire debt because you begged me. Wasn’t it only fair for you to treat your fellow slave with the same consideration as I treated you?” And the master was so angry he handed him over to those in charge of punishment until he paid back everything he owed. (Mt. 18: 23-34)

The story revolves around the experience and actions of the first slave; he is the central character. The central character in classic tragedy starts out seeking something. Oedipus starts out seeking to avoid his predicted fate. Hamlet sought to find out if the “ghost” of his father revealed the truth about his uncle and mother. In the parable, the slave starts out seeking forgiveness.

Eventually the “hero” seems to discover what he was seeking. Oedipus leaves his homeland as a way to avoid his predicted “fate.” Hamlet discovers that his father’s “ghost” told him the truth. The slave receives forgiveness of his debt.

But the “heroes” of tragedy always have a fatal flaw which leads to their downfall. Oedipus is proud and believes that he can avoid a “fate” predicted by an oracle of the gods. This leads him to ignorantly fulfill the predictions *because* of his attempt to evade his fate. Hamlet “over-thinks” things, which results in his being both indecisive and clever. The consequences of his “over-thinking” are the deaths of all the main characters, including Hamlet. The slave cares more about his finances than about his fellow humans; his refusal to forgive a relatively small debt results in the revocation of his debt forgiveness and his imprisonment. The parable credibly illustrates how refusal to forgive others can lead to tragic consequences for oneself.

The story, though tragic, has a comic touch in the quantities of monies involved. The massive debt which is first forgiven (equivalent to about ten-million dollars in modern terms) immediately gives pause to wonder: how could a slave accumulate such an absurdly large debt? Despite his great fortune in having the debt forgiven, the slave is unwilling to forgive a relatively paltry debt of about one-hundred dollars. How could anyone who had received such great forgiveness be so petty in dealings with others? The slave's behavior seems ridiculously petty and so "laughable." At the same time his fate is tragic in the conventional sense.

Jesus' story of the "unforgiving slave" fits Aristotle's theory of tragedy except that for Aristotle a tragedy was a play rather than a narrative. Aristotle's theory of tragedy was widely accepted by the time of Jesus and even today is influential in aesthetic theory.

Plots, according to Aristotle, should have a change of intention or reversal of fortune; Jesus' parable has both. The plot must include "the incentive moment" which introduces a problem and starts a chain reaction of events. In the parable the "incentive moment" is the ruler collecting debts. The "climax" must be caused by earlier events and must itself cause the incidents that follow. In the parable the "climax" is the slave refusing to forgive after he himself was forgiven. The "resolution" is caused by preceding events but does not lead to events outside the compass of the play. The resolution resolves the problem set up in the incentive moment. The resolution of the parable is the resolution of the problem of debt collection; the slave who was originally forgiven ends up in prison.

Aristotle defined tragedy as having “incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.”⁵⁰ What emotions are aroused by Jesus’ parable? Pity is aroused for those in debt, including initially the slave who is at first forgiven then later for the second slave whose debt is not forgiven by the first slave. Most of Jesus’ listeners probably had their own debts which, if not paid, could lead to their imprisonment. The audience’s identification with debtors might well have aroused some fear or at least anxiety regarding their own debts. The imprisonment of debtors in the story could have heightened that anxiety. Having aroused the emotions, did hearing the story also produce a catharsis for the listeners? Was that Jesus’ intention?

If he intentionally designed the parable to produce a healing catharsis, Jesus was more sophisticated and knowledgeable about Greek philosophy than is usually assumed. I think it is unlikely that Jesus was familiar with Aristotle’s *Poetics*. If he intuitively created the parable, his intuition was a remarkably apt fit with Aristotle’s theory. Unfortunately these questions about intention and intuition must remain unresolved here. What can be said is only that some of Jesus’ stories may have produced emotional catharsis which may have been psychologically therapeutic.

What can be said is that the story was told to illustrate the principle “forgive and you will be forgiven” and suggests a corollary: if you don’t forgive, you won’t be forgiven. If the first slave had forgiven the second, the first slave would have remained in a state of forgiveness. Because he didn’t forgive, his action was reported to the master and the end result was revocation of debt forgiveness and imprisonment.

The second story has a similar dramatic structure and a reversal of fortune, but is comic rather than tragic because the resolution is a happy ending.

There was this rich man whose manager had been accused of squandering his master's property. He called him in and said, "What's this I hear about you? Let's have an audit of your management, because your job is being terminated."

Then the manager said to himself, "What am I going to do? My master is firing me. I'm not strong enough to dig ditches and I'm ashamed to beg. I've got it! I know what I'll do so doors will open for me when I'm removed from management." So he called in each of his master's debtors. He said to the first, "How much do you owe my master?"

He said, "Five hundred gallons of olive oil." And he said to him, "Here is your invoice; sit down right now and make it two hundred and fifty."

Then he said to another, "And how much do you owe?" He said, "A thousand bushels of wheat." He says to him, "Here is your invoice; make it eight hundred."

The master praised the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. (Lk. 16: 1-8)

The parable is classic comedy: the underdog kicked to the curb manages to cleverly reverse his situation and surprisingly comes out on top (see movies of Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, Jerry Lewis, Woody Allen, etc.).

As in other parables of Jesus, this one contains a shocking surprise. The manager is portrayed as "dishonest" yet is also praised for his shrewdness. The story does not promote the conventional morality of "honesty is the best policy." What it does indicate is the idea that forgiving debts can have a very practical worldly economic benefit: you will make friends who owe you favors. That was the "shrewdness" of the manager's actions, the assurance of employment after job termination. By forgiving part of his clients' debts, the manager assured himself of favors after he was released from his master's employ. Giving discounts to clients and customers is no doubt good business and is a lesson that can be drawn from the parable.

It is not entirely clear why the manager is labeled “dishonest” at the end of the parable. It may have been the case that business managers, then as now, were empowered to offer discounts to customers, in which case the manager in the story was did nothing wrong in discounting his customer’s payments. In that case, his “dishonesty” was not in his actions toward customers but in being guilty of the accusation of “squandering his master’s property.” The parable says he was “*accused*” but does not say he was *actually* guilty of squandering resources. In any case, it is interesting that Jesus chose to commend the behavior of a dishonest man.

Was Jesus advocating dishonesty as a means to improving one’s situation? That shallow interpretation of the story is troubling and may explain why this particular parable is not as familiar to Christians as some of the others. The shocking element of the manager getting away with dishonesty makes the story memorable and making the story memorable may have been Jesus’ primary motivation for framing the story as he did. However I believe there is more to the story.

Jesus famously associated with disreputable characters: tax collectors, harlots and other “sinners.” He sympathized with the oppressed, the poor, and the sick. It makes sense that if his sympathies were with people oppressed by the political and religious establishment he would also be sympathetic to those who subverted the oppressive system: outlaws and outcasts. His parables and sayings feature persons who are dishonest, dishonorable (“the prodigal son”), thieves (someone who wanted to rob a “strong man”), murderers (someone who wanted to kill a “powerful man”), religiously unorthodox (the “good Samaritan”), and vulnerable (a widow seeking justice).

Jesus did not condemn or judge people for their conditions or behaviors. It is probable that Jesus did not consider a person's conditions as being defining of the person. He believed in second chances; he may have believed in "seventy times seven" chances as indicated by the saying attributed to him "forgive seventy times seven." (Matthew 18: 22) He believed "we are all God's children" and thought our worth was defined by that relationship rather than earthly conditions, status and even behavior. His forgiving and non-judgmental consciousness made it possible for him to imagine a "disreputable" character to illustrate the practical business value of debt forgiveness. Perhaps a lesson to be drawn from the "dishonest manager" is that it is good to give people a second chance; perhaps even to give 490 second chances. If we set aside the difficulty of the literal sense of the story and look to the consciousness behind the story, we get a glimpse of a forgiving and non-judgmental mind transcending conventions and perceiving the divine in all things.

Another way Jesus attempted to promote a more forgiving society was by directing listeners' attention to their own attitudes and behaviors and away from the human tendency to criticize the perceived faults of others. This provocation to self-exploration and self-knowledge is implicit in the ambiguity, humor and counter-cultural tone and content of practically all Jesus' sayings. He uses stories and aphorisms which invite the listener to re-think (the original literal meaning of "repent") opinions and see the world through different eyes. This provocation is not merely implicit in his sayings but actually explicit in a particular saying:

"Why do you notice the sliver in your friend's eye, but overlook the timber in your own? How can you say to your friend, "Let me get the sliver out of your eye," when

there is a timber in your own? You phony, first take the timber out of your eye and then you'll see well enough to remove the sliver from your friend's eye.” (Mt. 7: 3-5)

The saying is a classic example of Jesus' use of humorous exaggeration. It suggests the ridiculous image of a person with a log in their eye attempting to remove a perceived sliver in another's eye. The word here translated as “phony” is the Greek “hypocrite” which literally meant “stage actor,” a person who pretends to be something other than what they really are. The term did not inherently carry a negative connotation; in fact theater was popular with the Greeks and Romans. Greeks generally held actors in high regard. Although in Roman culture actors generally had low status, some actors were celebrated as great artists. The fact that Emperor Augustus, King Herod the Great, and Herod Antipas all built lavish theaters and sponsored performances indicates that royals and aristocrats of the period held theater arts in high regard. Herod the Great held competitions in performing arts, awarding high honors and generous prizes to the winners.⁵¹ Just as today people are fascinated with actors and awards ceremonies for film, television, and live theater, many in Jesus' era admired and were somewhat fascinated with acting skill. The context indicates that Jesus used the word for “actor” to provoke self-examination rather than to condemn the listener.

Based upon his emphasis on imitating God, serving God, and finding the realm and rule of God, and Jesus clearly believed that finding God was the ultimate good. For Jesus practicing unconditional love and forgiveness is a crucial part of that quest but not the entirety of the absolute good.

Statements Related to Mosaic Law

An ethic based upon a few principles or upon an idea of “the highest good” does not need a list of rules. Rules in a principle based system are secondary to the principles and therefore can only serve as guidelines. For example, in situation ethics the principle is “do the loving thing.” One might say that most often the loving thing is to tell the truth but that in some situations it is better not to tell the truth. If Nazis were hunting for Jews and the Nazis come to your door and you know where the Jews are hiding, would it be loving to tell the truth? I believe a pretty good case could be made that in that situation the loving and right thing to do is to prevaricate as convincingly as you can. I believe that pragmatic and utilitarian ethicists could also make a case that lying is, in certain circumstances, the right and best thing to do.

Because Jesus held to an idea of the highest good, he could reasonably challenge the rule based ethic of Judaism. At the same time, a case could be made that Jesus’ ethic is consistent with a Jewish idea of the highest good, i.e. seek (or love) God.

One saying of Jesus clearly challenges the conventional interpretation of one of the “Ten Commandments.” Jesus said, “*The Sabbath day was created for Adam and Eve, not Adam and Eve for the Sabbath day. So the son of Adam is lord even over the Sabbath day.*” (Mk. 2: 27, 28) Jesus’ statement about the Sabbath *could* be extrapolated to encompass all the laws of Moses, i.e. the laws were made for humans and not humans for the laws so humans are “lord” over the laws. The “logic” appears to be that Adam, Eve, Abraham and other humans existed before the laws; so the laws were made for their sake, they were not made for the law’s sake. It is not clear that Jesus came to the same

conclusion about the other laws of Moses. However it is clear that at several points Jesus' teachings challenged conventional Jewish religious ideas and practices.

Beyond his casual attitude toward Sabbath laws, Jesus challenged purity and kosher laws. He was apparently as casual about "fasting" rules as about the Sabbath: *"The groom's friends can't fast while the groom is present, can they? So long as the groom is around, you can't expect them to fast."* (Mk. 12: 19) It is clear from this saying that Jesus was defending ignoring fasting rules. What is not entirely clear is what he means by "the groom is present." One can certainly understand why his disciples interpreted the saying as being an affirmation of Jesus' special status as "Messiah."

There is another possible interpretation of the "groom and fasting" saying. We have seen that Jesus thought of God's realm and rule as present. Some biblical prophets made use of the metaphor of God as "groom" and "husband" of Israel and Jerusalem:

"As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you." (Isaiah 62: 4-6)

"For your Maker is your husband—the LORD Almighty is his name—the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth." (Isaiah 54: 4-6)

"Return, faithless people," declares the LORD, 'for I am your husband.'"
(Jeremiah 3: 14)

Jesus may simply have been making reference to that prophetic metaphor. If by "the groom" Jesus meant to refer to God, then "the groom is present" simply refers to the Divine Presence: there is no need to "fast" in mourning or supplication when one is celebrating the Presence of God (the groom or husband).

"Why do you wash the outside of the cup? Don't you understand that the one who made the inside is also the one who made the outside?" (Thom. 89: 1)

The meaning of this saying is unclear. It may refer to purity rules or conventional practices; it may be about keeping up appearances of purity (the outside) while being “unclean” in thoughts (the inside). It *sounds* like a challenge to purity laws or at least conventional ideas about purity. Was Jesus suggesting that it is not necessary to wash the outside of the cup? Or was he implying that it is necessary to wash both the inside and the outside? Today it seems a trivial and irrelevant point; we are accustomed to washing both inside and outside. We can’t help but wonder why anyone would comment on cup washing and why anyone would remember the comment. If we reflect on the saying and view the cup as a metaphor for consciousness (inside) and expression (outside), it becomes suggestive of self-examination. That interpretation would certainly fit with Jesus’ philosophy, as will be seen in the section on “self-knowledge” (chapter 4, section 4).

More overtly challenging to conventional practices are sayings regarding eating:

“It’s not what goes into a person from the outside that can defile; rather it’s what comes out of the person that defiles.” (Mk. 7: 15)

“Stay at one house, eating and drinking whatever they provide. Whenever you enter a town and they welcome you, eat whatever is set before you.” (Lk. 10: 7, 8)

One important thing to notice about Jesus’ sayings is that many are in the indicative mood and only a few in the imperative mood. He more frequently makes observations in the indicative mood than commands in the imperative. One of the above sayings is an observation; the other is a command. The reason it is important to make the distinction is that followers of Jesus have tended to turn his indicative observations into imperative commands. That tendency is a misreading of Jesus’ philosophy, for it misses

the subtlety of his thought and his intention to induce the new way of seeing life that is “entering God’s realm” which is “within you” and “seeing God’s realm spread out on the earth.”

The two sayings about eating taken together broke down a fundamental social barrier that existed between Jewish and “Gentile” followers of Jesus. Eating is a primary form of socializing. When people are forbidden to eat together as a matter of food taboos, it sets up a barrier to social interaction and friendship. What Jesus said about food ultimately had far reaching consequences for the movement that emerged in his name. There were in Jesus’ time many Gentile sympathizers with Jewish religious ideas; these Gentiles were known as “God Fearers.” Undoubtedly those God Fearers and Jewish followers of Jesus were able to become better acquainted and form friendships as a result of eating together.

Other barriers, even circumcision, undoubtedly became non-issues as bonds of friendship and mutual respect formed. There is a saying about circumcision attributed to Jesus, though it probably did not originate with him. Whether or not Jesus said it, the saying provides an example of what could plausibly be attributed to him because of what he said about the Sabbath and about eating. The saying is found in Thomas 53: *“If it were beneficial, their father would beget them already circumcised from their mother. Rather, the true circumcision in spirit has become completely profitable.”* The saying “sounds like” Jesus in both its use of surprising logic and its content which undermined traditional Mosaic Law. Since Jesus’ original Jewish followers did not insist upon circumcision, they must have believed that Jesus would not have insisted upon it.

The sayings about food not defiling a person and eating “whatever is set before you” indicate that Jesus rejected the concept of “unclean” foods. These sayings are undoubtedly the basis of the early church controversy, referred to in *Acts* and Paul’s letters, about eating with Gentiles and eating non-kosher foods. The sayings imply a blanket rejection of the entire Mosaic code regarding “clean” and “unclean” foods.

The first saying, in addition to indicating that Jesus rejected concepts about clean and unclean foods, also contains a rather shocking suggestion that some might have regarded as humorous. By juxtaposing “what goes into a person” with “what comes out of a person” he brings to mind the fact food just passes through you. Another saying attributed to Jesus, while it may not have originated with him, makes the point explicitly: *“Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer?”* (Matt. 15: 17, NRSV)

The saying about “food not defiling a person” illustrates Jesus’ ingenious and elegant use of logic to undermine conventional beliefs and practices. If food just passes through, it does not stay in you. If it does not stay in you, it cannot make you “unclean.” Certainly “what comes out” can “defile,” but once it is buried in the earth, it cannot defile the one through whom it passed. Early Christians interpreted the “what comes out which can defile” as meaning “unclean” words and actions; probably Matthew added that bit of interpretation to his Gospel and attributed it to Jesus. I am not convinced that the traditional interpretation captures Jesus’ intended meaning, but it does not contradict the spirit of his teachings.

The second saying about “staying in one house” appears to be instructions for the road. The instruction would have allowed his disciples to be “good guests.” Rather than

making an issue about non-kosher dishes offered to them, they would have eaten whatever was set before them. The disciples would have been unhindered by food taboos in their social interactions and so able to form bonds with “Gentiles” in any city. And of course that is exactly what they did.

Jesus also countermanded the commandment “honor your father and your mother” by saying: “*If any come to me and do not hate their own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters - yes, even their own life - they cannot be my disciples.*” (Lk. 14: 26) The saying is puzzling in the context of an ethic centered in universal love. “Love your enemies,” but “hate” your family and even your own life? It seems *prima facie* preposterous.

The first thing to notice is that the statement is not in the imperative mood; it is not a command but rather an observation (this time in the subjunctive mood). He did not say “hate your family” but “*if you don’t hate your family and even your own life, you can’t be my disciples.*” The implication is that to “go” where Jesus went in consciousness entails, in some sense, “hating family and your own life.” The implication is that Jesus himself must have “hated” his own family and his own life in order to “enter God’s realm.”

The word “hate” in Hebrew can mean “oppose” and so does not necessarily convey the strong sense of “*feeling animosity.*” In English, “hate” is also sometimes used to mean “oppose” or “refuse” rather than to mean “animosity.” For example, I have said, “I hate beets,” by which I mean I don’t like the taste and prefer not to eat beets; it’s not personal. Or again, I have said, “I hate the Yankees,” by which I mean I am opposed to their winning yet another championship; it’s not personal. I hate political advertisements;

I hate their misleading words and insinuating tone. However my “hatred” of political advertisements does not hold any personal animosity, desire to harm, or intention to destroy. All my “hatred” of political advertisements entails is my intention to avoid seeing and hearing them whenever possible. The meaning and consequences of “hate” depend upon context.

There is in the Jewish rabbinical tradition a position that one’s rabbi should be more authoritative than one’s own parents; that may provide part of the explanation for Jesus’ saying about hating family. If a prospective disciple’s family opposed following Jesus as rabbi, the prospective disciple would have to choose between family and following Jesus. To follow Jesus, one would have to prefer his teaching to honoring the wishes of one’s family. One would *have* to choose between opposing one’s family and opposing Jesus. Since the Hebrew and Aramaic words for “oppose” are the same as the words for “hate,” a reasonable interpretation of Jesus’ saying is simply that one may have to be opposed to one’s family in order to follow Jesus’ teachings. Since Jesus’ teachings in a few cases opposed Mosaic traditions, it is likely that conservative Jewish families would have pressured their clan to oppose Jesus. To enter God’s realm one must prefer the “way” advocated by Jesus to the “way” advocated by family traditions. Nevertheless, accepting the rabbi’s authority as higher than that of one’s parents would not seem to entail “hating” one’s family in the sense of “having animosity” toward one’s family.

As for the call to hate one’s own life, surely Jesus was not advocating animosity towards oneself. Overall, his message gives no indication of being a call to self-loathing; he called people to see themselves as children of God, which is the most positive self-

image possible. I have heard people say, “I hate my life.” What they have clearly meant is that they wanted to *change* their lives, to go in new directions. People I’ve heard say “I hate my life” were not suicidal; they were just unhappy and wanting to pursue happiness in new directions. New directions were what Jesus offered. People who were content with their lives were not likely to follow him; only those who “hated” their lives would have followed him.

Christians have conventionally interpreted the statement about “hating one’s life” as a call to martyrdom for the cause of Christianity. However it is just as plausible to interpret the saying as meaning one must want to change one’s life in order to adopt Jesus’ philosophy. To truly change your life you must let go of old behaviors, situations and conditions. Following Jesus was clearly a life-changing decision for anyone who followed him. His disciples would have left behind their occupations as fishermen, tax collectors, etc. to become wandering advocates of a new philosophy. They would have let go of conventional family ties and religion to embrace a new way of living. They loved Jesus and what he represented to them more than they loved their old lives.

I believe Jesus spoke of “hating” relatives in order to shock his listeners into letting go of their identification of themselves with blood-ties and open their minds and hearts to a broader identification with the “family of God.” Identification with one’s genetic family can have detrimental effects on personal and spiritual development, especially in cases of emotional and physical abuse. Selective love, as for tribe or nation, often results in enmity towards “outsiders.” To expand consciousness toward universal love is to love all equally, which may entail loving tribe or nation less; in effect, to “hate” tribal and national divisions.

We know that conservative elements in his society resisted Jesus' message and mission. Anyone who joined Jesus might well encounter resistance from their own family members. Even today individuals, when adopting a new religion, can encounter considerable resistance from family members. Jesus was challenging his listeners to put new spiritual values ahead of family traditions, beliefs, and emotional ties.

In any case, Jesus also taught his disciples to love their enemies, hence any "hate" toward family ultimately would have to be transformed into love; but love from a different perspective on the relationships.

In *Jesus the Healer*, Steven Davies makes an interesting conjecture regarding a possible therapeutic effect of the "hate your family" idea. First Davies marshaled evidence for the theory that "demon possession" as depicted in the Gospels was probably an effect of family dysfunction. Citing modern psychology and cross-cultural anthropology, Davies showed that modern cases of dissociative identity disorders and "demon possession" in other cultures are frequently connected with childhood abuse of some kind. Davies concludes that:

*"The primary causal factor in cases of demon-possession is intrafamily conflict wherein subordinate family members . . . adopt a demon persona so as to respond and cope with their familial superiors. It can be said rather confidently that a person exorcised of such a demon persona who returns to his or her family situation with the situation unchanged will sooner or later . . . again respond to the unchanged stresses by the same coping mechanism he or she previously used. . . . we do have reports that Jesus offered a method by which the formerly demon-possessed might avoid further instances of demon possession. He advocated that individuals leave their families entirely and offered those who did so and became his associates a surrogate family headed by God the Father."*⁵²

Today we know more about the frequency and the tragic effects of child abuse. Some cases of dissociative identity disorder are caused by extreme child abuse. We know that often the abuse is perpetrated by parents. It may be that psychological symptoms caused by child abuse can be alleviated by the abused child being given permission to “hate” the parents. It is probably the case that people who were thought to be demonically possessed in Jesus’ time actually had severe psychological disorders such as dissociative identity disorder. If these admittedly speculative premises are true, the tentative conclusion we could draw is that Jesus may have helped alleviate symptoms of psychologically disturbed people by giving them permission to hate their parents. While this conclusion may not be scientifically provable, it is plausible and is suggestive of therapeutic experimentation and possibilities.

Therapeutic or not, by loosening obligation to biological family Jesus redefined the core unit of civilization for himself. *“My mother and my brothers - who are they? Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, that’s my brother and sister and mother.” (Matt 12: 48-50)* In Jesus’ philosophy, “family” was spiritual rather than biological. Those who act according to the ethic of God’s realm were the true family for Jesus. One who would “follow” him in consciousness would have to do likewise, but again the statement is an observation not a commandment.

It is not likely that Jesus *rejected* the Ten Commandments as moral and spiritual precepts. However his statements treat the commandments as subject to human reason. He *reasons* that the Sabbath was made for humanity’s sake, not humanity for the Sabbath’s sake; therefore exceptions to the rule can be made. He *reasons* that food

cannot defile a person, so food taboos in the Laws of Moses can safely be ignored. He *reasons* that to follow him his disciples might have to go against their family's wishes, which might entail "not honoring" parents and opposing the wishes of other family members. This pattern of using reason *against* religious rules is a pattern found in *philosophical* traditions. Religious traditions tend to use reason to *defend* religious rules. Jesus' attitude toward religious rules supports the hypothesis that he was more like a philosopher than like a preacher of conventional religious morality.

A few of Jesus' statements simply observe that humanly people *do* make exceptions to the prohibitions against killing and stealing. Opponents of abortion may cite the commandment "thou shalt not kill" to support their position, but may ignore that commandment when taking a position in favor of war or capital punishment. Likewise pacifists may cite the commandment to oppose war, but ignore it when advocating "death with dignity" arguments for euthanasia. Whether or not the commandment "Thou shalt not steal" is kept seems often a matter of interpretation. When local governments cite "eminent domain" to take property from those who do not wish to give up their property how is that "not stealing"? Historically Christians seemed to have no problem with taking land from indigenous populations in America, Africa, etc. When the natives of Palestine were displaced to make way for the new nation of Israel, how was that "not stealing"? Yet politicians, Christians and Jews look upon some of such actions as "God's will." I am not taking positions on these issues; my point is only that in practice even people who proclaim their belief in the 10 Commandments make rationalizations for killing and stealing. I suspect Jesus was perceptive enough in his day to recognize this fact too.

According to the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus shockingly compared the realm or rule of God to a successful murder:

“The Father’s rule is like a person who wanted to kill someone powerful. While still at home he drew his sword and thrust it into the wall to find out whether his hand would go in. Then he killed the powerful one.” (Thom. 98: 1-3)

According to The Gospel of Mark, Jesus made an observation about how to rob a powerful man:

“No one can enter a powerful man’s house to steal his belongings unless he first ties him up. Only then does he loot his house.” (Mk. 3: 27)

These two sayings do not exactly advocate murder and theft, but they do recognize that humans kill and steal, despite the commandments and laws against such actions. Considering the love ethic of Jesus, it is practically certain that he did not intend these sayings to give instruction for successful murder and burglary. We are compelled to do one of two things: ignore the sayings or reflect upon them and try to find interpretations and application in our lives consistent with Jesus’ love ethic.

First we should notice that the examples of killing and stealing given by Jesus in the sayings are *observations* of the *difficulty* of committing such acts. In that sense they can be seen as caveats for anyone contemplating such actions. The caveat would have been especially apropos for the Zealots in the audience.

If the strong and powerful men are seen as symbolic, they could be seen as representing strong and powerful individuals, nations or impulses. Certainly his audience might easily have thought of the Roman occupiers in connection with the strong and

powerful men; in which case, the sayings can be seen as cautions against thinking of successful armed rebellion as easy to accomplish.

Some of his disciples might have thought in terms of the difficulty of “casting out demons.” In modern terms we might think of “personal demons” – inner impulses – which are difficult to overcome. With that interpretation, “going into one’s house and practicing sword thrusts” could symbolize *mentally* practicing or visualizing the overcoming as a way to build up the *inner* strength to overcome. “Tying up the strong man” could symbolize use of will and thought to control of impulses. “Tying up the strong man” could also be interpreted in terms of non-lethal acts of resistance to the Roman Empire. In light of Jesus’ creative non-violent strategies, the “strong man” illustration could be seen as an enigmatic allusion to those practices.

What is certainly true about these sayings is that they provoke reflection. It may be that all Jesus was intending was to provoke people to look inward for answers. In fact practically every saying and parable of Jesus is enigmatic enough to provoke contemplation, which suggests that his intention was to help people get in touch with their own intuitions rather than blindly following conventions. Provoking people to contemplate ideas is traditionally a primary role of the philosopher.

Sometimes Jesus’ *observations* have come to be seen as *commandments*. The human tendency to seek rules to live by, rather than living by their own intuitions and reason, is probably the cause of such misreading. An example of such a misreading is a saying of Jesus regarding divorce. The saying appears to be a reinterpretation of the meaning of adultery. One challenge regarding the saying is that alternative versions are found in the different Gospels:

“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”
(Mark 10: 11-12, NIV)

“Anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, makes her a victim of adultery, and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” – (Matt 5: 32, NIV)

“Anyone who divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery.” – (Matt 19: 9, NIV)

“Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” – (Lu 16: 18, NIV)

The first thing to notice is that *none of these statements forbid* divorce and remarriage; they are stated as *observations* about what constitutes adultery. It is understandable that people take the observation to be a prohibition, but *technically* an observation is neither a prohibition nor a command.

Based upon the difference between Mark’s version and the versions found in Matthew and Luke, it appears that Matthew and Luke preferred a version in “Q” to Mark’s version. Three versions (one of Matthew’s, along with Mark and Luke) say that a man who divorces *and* re-marries commits adultery. This is likely an accurate version of the first part of the saying. Matthew and Luke both have the second part “anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” That is likely the second part of the original aphorism; hence Luke’s version is probably the only one that is accurate in its entirety. Only Matthew adds the “exception”: “except for sexual immorality,” which was part of Jewish law. Mark changes the second half to mention a wife who divorces her

husband, but women were not then allowed by *Jewish* law to initiate divorce. Mark's version probably was written for Romans and other Gentiles, who did allow women to initiate divorce.

The difference between Jesus' saying and Jewish law was that he expanded the meaning of adultery. He added two definitions not found in previous tradition: (1) divorcing one woman and marrying another and (2) marrying a divorced woman. This would seem to be a case of Jesus suggesting that Mosaic Law was not strict enough; the opposite of his perspective on other aspects of Mosaic Law. However, he did not literally forbid divorce, as some churches have supposed; he only said divorce *followed by re-marriage* is adultery.

If we look at the logical implications of the statement and the context of culture and of other New Testament sayings we can see that there is something more interesting than a new marriage rule behind the statement.

In Judaism of the time, marriage was a consecrated contract which involved the family of the bride along with the married couple. According to Mosaic Law a man could divorce his wife for "displeasing him" (Deut. 24: 1-4), but there was always the possibility of reconciliation. A man was *required* to divorce his wife if she committed adultery. Because only men could initiate divorces under Mosaic Law, no doubt Jesus meant his interpretation of divorce and adultery to protect women from being divorced cavalierly.

Adultery was considered a very serious offense; adulterers were supposed to be stoned according to Mosaic Law (Leviticus 20: 10). The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria was highly regarded within Judaism and a contemporary of Jesus. According

to Philo adultery was “the greatest of all violations of the law.”⁵³ Philo defined adultery as a man having intercourse with another’s man’s wife (not a married man having an affair with unmarried woman) and refers to it as a “violation of vows.”⁵⁴

Jesus’ statement about divorce and remarriage is logical *if* we take it that a *consecrated* marriage contract must be considered *sacred and inviolable*. A divorce followed by remarriage would in effect break the original marriage contract; hence those actions *taken together* would break the marriage covenant and so be adultery. Just divorcing a woman would not by itself constitute a breaking of the contract as long as the man did not make a new marriage contract with another woman. If a man married a divorced woman, he would be having intercourse with another man’s wife because the original contract was consecrated and so inviolable. In effect the Mosaic Law which allows divorce and remarriage contradicts the Law which makes marriage a contract in the “eyes of God.” Jesus must have interpreted the marriage contract as inviolable; that is the only interpretation by which we can make sense out of his expansion of the meaning of adultery. This is not a far-fetched notion; marriage vows even today do not generally include an escape clause.

Was Jesus actually opposed to divorce and remarriage or was there something else behind his observation? The question cannot be answered without looking at the broader context of Jesus’ life and the traditions found in the New Testament.

A wedding ceremony is essentially a vow or oath of fidelity. That was the understanding in Jesus’ time as well as in ours. Vows and oaths in Judaism were related to the commandment not to take God’s name in vain; the rabbinical traditions have over

the years discussed what kinds of oaths are acceptable. Philo made this comment on not taking God's name in vain as related to oaths:

*“Next to swearing not at all, the second best thing is to keep one's oath; for by the mere fact of swearing at all, the swearer shows that there is some suspicion of his not being trustworthy.”*⁵⁵

Philo took the position that one should avoid taking oaths whenever possible. For him, keeping one's oaths is good, but not taking oaths at all is better.

Jesus probably had a position on vows similar to that of Philo. There is an early tradition, recorded in the Gospels and the *Epistle of James*, that Jesus told his disciples not to make any oaths at all. After the passage on adultery in Matthew 5, Jesus reportedly said: “. . . *do not swear an oath at all . . . All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.*” (5: 34, 37) The juxtaposition of the adultery and oath sayings probably indicates that in Matthew's mind the two issues were related in Jesus' philosophy. That Jesus opposed taking *any* oaths is supported by the passage from *James*: “*Above all, my brothers and sisters, do not swear All you need to say is a simple ‘Yes’ or ‘No.’ Otherwise you will be condemned.*” (5: 12) The phrase “above all” indicates that this idea was very important to James; it may also have been to Jesus. Since not taking oaths at all is not a traditional rabbinical position, it is likely that the position was original to Jesus rather than to James, a later follower of Jesus who was Jesus' brother, according to the earliest traditions.

If Jesus did think it unwise to make vows, it is entirely plausible that he thought marriage covenants were unwise. That idea puts a different light on his saying about divorce and adultery. The statement about divorce, in light of the statement opposing

vows, might have been intended to make his disciples wary of marrying. According to Paul, Jesus' apostles and his brothers were married (1 Corinthians 9: 5). From the fact that apostles married we can conclude that Jesus did not *prohibit* marriage for his followers; he just wanted them to contemplate their options.

Paul advised unmarried Christians not to marry, but he probably did so for reasons different than those of Jesus. Jesus was wary of the vow involved in marriage, especially as related to his ideas about divorce and adultery. Paul was wary of marriage because he believed the resurrection and new world was coming soon and that Christians should focus upon preparing for that. Paul wrote:

“Now to the unmarried . . . I say: It is good for them to stay unmarried, as I do . . . the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not . . . For this world in its present form is passing away.” (1 Cor 7: 8, 29, 31)

Jesus, like the Cynic philosophers, was wary of traditional ideas about family obligations. Cynics generally did not marry. A notable exception was Crates who married Hipparchia. However Hipparchia adopted the Cynic philosophy and traveled with Crates; Hipparchia was not a traditional wife and theirs was not a traditional marriage. Like the Cynics, Pythagorians, Platonists and Epicureans, Jesus had women disciples. In the Greek and Roman traditions women could be philosophers; in the Jewish tradition women could not be rabbis. Jesus' attitude toward women was closer to that of philosophical schools than that of Jewish rabbis.

Recently there has been a great deal of interest in the question of whether or not Jesus was married. Several authors have speculated that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. Since Jesus appears to have been wary of family obligations and vows and

since there is no mention of his having a *wife* in any Gospel, it seems unlikely that he was married. Mary Magdalene was close to Jesus according to all traditions. So-called “Gnostic Gospels” including “*The Gospel of Thomas*” and “*The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*” identify her as an early church leader. “The Gospel of Philip” identifies her as the “companion” of Jesus. What seems most probable from all the information is that Jesus had a special relationship with Mary, but was not married to her. While the issue is of some importance for the biography of Jesus, it is of minor importance for understanding Jesus’ philosophy.

In his rejection of conventional moral and religious absolutes, Jesus’ approach to morality, like Fletcher’s, was situational. I would add here that “situationalism” is not identical with “relativism.” A relativist holds that there are no moral absolutes, that every moral idea is relative to culture or some other limited grouping; a situationalist (at least in the cases of Fletcher and Jesus) can hold to one or more “moral absolutes.”

One other important idea in Jesus’ ethics is that it is better to be generous and forgiving than to be fair. That idea has been discussed in connection with the parable of *the prodigal son* (Luke 15: 11-24, Chapter 4, section 1) and the *parable of the vineyard owner* (Matt 20: 1-15, Chapter 4, section 2, “On Love and Justice”).

(4) Jesus’ Personal and Social Transformation Philosophy

Transformational Metaphysics and Ethics

Jesus had a transforming impact on individuals and society; that is simply a historical fact. His disciples were transformed from fishermen, farmers and tax collectors into spiritual teachers and “community organizers.” His disciples started a new religion which eventually became the primary religion of the Western world and then spread to

have a significant impact in Asia. The fact that the “Jesus Movement” became a religion rather than a school of philosophy does not negate the concept of Jesus as “philosopher,” as will be seen in the later discussion of parallels between Jesus’ teachings and those of philosophers of his era.

The fact that Jesus had a transformational effect on individuals and cultures indicates that his philosophy had a personal and social transformation aspect. This is not to deny that his consciousness, personality and life were important elements of his impact on the world; it is only to affirm that his message expressed his consciousness and had effects on his followers. Jesus philosophy of personal and social transformation was coherent with his metaphysics and ethics. In fact his metaphysics and ethics were important aspects of his transformational impact.

First, the ontological and cosmological implications of Jesus’ teachings would fundamentally change a disciple’s “*ontological self-image*.” A shift in self-image is inherently transformational. By “*ontological self-image*” I mean what one believes about one’s ultimate being and possibilities, in contrast to *personal self-image* which is what one believes about one’s current human expression and conditions. Self-image determines to a great extent the individual’s feelings and behaviors. Successfully changing one’s self-image can have a truly transformational effect.⁵⁶ The self-image suggested by Jesus’ teachings is fundamentally positive and differs radically from the self-image suggested by the prevailing religion of his place and time.

The ontological self-image suggested by most of the religious and some philosophical systems of Jesus’ era is that of a very vulnerable self at the mercy of fate or the stern judgment and painful punishment of a demanding Creator. That type of

religious belief has to a great extent prevailed in Christianity up to this day due to the early Christians' inability to entirely release the older beliefs. The disciples of Peter's and Paul's generation clearly thought of themselves as having a powerful and benign "holy spirit." Later generations did not fully capture that sense of empowerment.

Jesus' teaching that God is our father suggests that we must be essentially divine and spiritual. If we are in some essential way offspring of the divine there must be a "divine core" present in our nature. As God unconditionally loves and accepts us, according to his teaching, we must also have the capacity to love as "the Father" loves. The self-image suggested by those ideas is a self embraced by divine love and imbued with divine power and limitless possibilities. The certainty of early Christians, reflected in Paul's letters, that they had spiritual power and were loved by God reflects the original teaching of Jesus. To the extent that Jesus' ideas of the Fatherhood of God and "the Kingdom within" took hold in his listeners, their ontological self-images would have been transformed in an empowering and comforting way.

The self-image suggested by Jesus' philosophy was different from the self-image suggested by the era's prevailing views of God. While the idea of God as Father did not originate with Jesus, it was also not the *primary* idea of God in the Judaism or philosophy of Jesus' time. Judaism was focused on God as *King* and *Judge* and humans as *subjects* of God's rule and judgment. Some philosophies of the era also emphasized God as judge of human souls, ready to inflict punishment. The concept of God as *unconditionally* loving found in Jesus' philosophy does not appear in other major belief systems of the era; the God concept of the era demanded obedience in order to receive the blessings of divine benevolence.

Jesus' disciples ultimately could not shake the idea of divine wrath and consequently portrayed Jesus in the Gospels as speaking of divine retribution. However, scholarly analysis of the Gospels indicates that Jesus himself did not speak of judgment day; such sayings are not well attested and contradict the logic of sayings that can reliably be attributed to Jesus.

Jesus' ethic was also transformational. The adoption of Jesus' ethical ideas would involve a transformation of a disciple's character, thinking, and acting. Jesus taught an ethic distinctly different from both the Jewish legalism and the various Greek philosophies of his era. The ethics of the era either involved following a set of rules or cultivating a set of virtues. His ethic did not reject rules but he did rationally critique them, indicating that the rules were not the absolutes of moral goodness. The only ethical virtue emphasized in Jesus' ethic was universal benevolence. The ethic was simple, clear, uncomplicated and probably psychologically liberating in a way that knowing and obeying a list of rules cannot be. His ethic set disciples free to be egalitarian, inclusive and democratic in their associations. The new ideal for relationships was put into practice by Jesus and his followers and had a transformative effect on society. Even though the transformative effect diminished with each passing generation, the ideals remained alive and have acted as catalysts for social reform over the centuries.

Jesus "converted" people to a different way of perceiving the world and being in the world. Conversion – whether to a religion or a philosophy – always results in character and moral transformation in some sense (for better or for worse). The effects of conversion on a person's character, state of mind and behavior is amply illustrated in the

numerous cases of different types of conversion collected by William James for his 1901 lectures on the varieties of religious experience.

Jesus philosophy also included practical suggestions for psychological and material well-being. He emphasized *faith* in God's benevolence, mercy, and generosity. The healing power of faith is verified by the placebo effect and is probably the reason that "relics" and pilgrimages sometimes seem to produce cures. I refer the reader to an anecdote cited earlier in this paper as an example of the therapeutic power of faith. A woman was diagnosed as terminal and given only a few days to live. Months later she returned to her doctor and was found to be in complete remission. Her only explanation was that she decided to leave her troubles to God and live to be 100. This case was reported by Bernie Siegel, a respected physician and Yale professor of medicine. After telling the story, Siegel commented that the case summarized the essence of his book.⁵⁷ I repeat the story not because it is the only documented case of cures only explainable in terms of faith, but because it is an extraordinary case attested to by a top medical expert. Jesus emphasized various aspects of love. The healing power of love has also been studied in recent years and popularized by authors such as Dr. Siegel. If Jesus had only effectively taught love and faith to people it would have been sufficient to have some therapeutic value for those who adopted his philosophy.

Beyond the therapeutic aspect of the Jesus philosophy for individuals, there was definitely a social transformation aspect. Historically the social aspect of Jesus' philosophy has been more widely discussed than the philosophy's therapeutic value for the individual. Christian charity, involvement in political causes, and various theories

about Jesus' "social gospel" all attest to the attention given to the social aspect of Jesus' philosophy.

The New Testament describes Jesus and his disciples as practicing a communal economy. They shared "all things in common" (see Acts 2: 44 and 4: 32). The first recorded such communal economy was the Pythagorean community (ca. 500 BCE). Later (ca. 150 BCE) the Essenes had a similar system. Unlike the communalism of the Pythagoreans and Essenes which required initiations and were merit based, Jesus promoted an egalitarian communalism which shared food and resources with all who chose to participate. Jesus is described as having meals with a variety of people on numerous occasions. He is described as consorting with people who were classed as inferior or "unclean": lepers, prostitutes, tax collectors, and "sinners" of all sorts.

Although Christian communal meals were eventually reduced to the sacrament of the Eucharist, in the first generation at least the movement was definitely practicing and modeling a democratic and egalitarian communalism. The communal model provided by early Christians was difficult to implement beyond a limited local level and ultimately survived only in the form of monasticism. The Greeks invented democracy as a form of government; the spirit of inclusive love and egalitarianism in Jesus' philosophy was compatible with democracy, even though the church has not always supported that spirit "in his name."

Five Psychological Keys to Transformation

In addition to thinking of oneself as God's offspring, practicing love and trusting God, Jesus' philosophy also indicated, at least five other keys to personal transformation. These keys are essentially psychological and involve spiritual practices. The keys are

psychological because they aim at self-knowledge and adoption of mental attitudes.

They involve spiritual practices because they are related to spiritual values and actions implied by self-knowledge and mental attitudes. The five keys are:

- (1) Focus on God first;
- (2) Use of catalytic aphorisms;
- (3) Pursuit of humble self-knowledge (e.g. “*get the log out of your own eye*”);
- (4) Cultivation of non-attachment (e.g. “*it is easier for a camel etc.*”); and
- (5). Use of one’s gifts (e.g. *the parable of the talents*)

Focus on God First

As a Jew, Jesus undoubtedly believed in the “two greatest commandment”: “*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*” (Deuteronomy 6: 4-5 and Mark 12: 29-30) and “*love your neighbor as yourself*” (Leviticus 19: 18 and Mark 12: 31).

The idea of loving God above all else and loving humankind was also a central idea in the Stoic philosophy. For example, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (c. 50-138 C.E.) described the path of the Cynic philosopher in part as follows:

*“Consider carefully, know yourself; consult the Divinity; attempt nothing without God; for if he counsels you, be assured that it is his will, whether you become eminent or suffer many a blow. For there is this fine circumstance connected with the character of the Cynic, that he must be beaten like an ass, and yet, when beaten, must love those who beat him as though he were the father, the brother of all.”*⁵⁸

From Epictetus’ admiring description of the Cynic philosophers we get a picture of a group of individuals living by ideals of obedience to God and love of humanity – even

of one's enemies. His description of the Cynic could have easily been a description of early Christians.

There is no inherent contradiction between loving God and humanity and being a philosopher; there is no inherent contradiction between being Jewish and being a philosopher. There is no reason to dismiss without consideration the possibility that Jesus was a Jewish philosopher.

Jesus expressed the idea of loving God in terms of serving God and humanity. He pointed out that one cannot be a servant to two masters:

“No one can be a slave to two masters. No doubt that slave will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and disdain the other. You can't be enslaved to both God and possessions.” (Matt 6: 24)

The word “possessions” in this passage is often translated as “mammon” which was an Aramaic word meaning wealth or possessions. To enter God's realm, one must serve God. If one slavishly pursues wealth, one is serving greed. From Jesus' perspective, one cannot serve both God and greed. He was not opposed to accumulation of wealth *per se*; he was opposed to *servicing* the “god” of wealth and possessions at the expense of the higher idea of serving God.

It is clear from Jesus' frequent use of the expression “God's realm” that the idea of entering “God's realm” and understanding “God's rule” was central to his philosophy. The passage about being a “slave” to God clearly indicates that devotion to God was his highest priority. He put serving God first, above all things. In that sense, Jesus was in agreement with both Judaism and Stoicism.

A common challenge for religion is that sometimes loyalty to nation or national laws seems to conflict with one's moral or spiritual principles or religious practices. In

Jesus' time the Jewish people felt a conflict between their loyalty to their national aspirations and the requirement to pay taxes to Rome. Jesus famously responded to that question by saying "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God what belongs to God," or as another translation expresses it:

"Pay the emperor what belongs to the emperor, and God what belongs to God!"

(Luke 20: 25)

His answer can actually be interpreted in two conflicting ways: pay your taxes (they belong to the Emperor) or *don't* pay your taxes (everything belongs to God). In the Gospel of Mark the saying was set in the context of a conversation, which probably reflects the original context. In Mark's story before giving his answer, Jesus asks for a coin and asks whose image is on it. When someone responds "Caesar's," Jesus says "Render to Caesar, etc." The story context seems to imply that Jesus was saying "pay your taxes, for Caesar made the coins and they are his." However if that context was invented by Mark, we are left with the ambiguity of the saying.

In fact, since Jesus' sayings and stories are often ambiguous, it is entirely possible that the saying originally stood alone, without the clarifying action of pointing to Caesar's image. If that is the case, Jesus' intention was not to answer the question but to provoke his listeners to find their own answer for the questions, "what belongs to the government and what belongs to God?" In any case, the author of Mark seems to have interpreted the saying as implying that taxes "belonged" to the Emperor. That interpretation may have been influenced by the facts that Mark was written in Rome and Paul and other early Christians sought to convert Romans to their faith.

Still the larger questions remain even today. If the government is using taxes in ways that oppose our spiritual values, is it still right to pay taxes? Since the government prints the money, isn't it appropriate to give back whatever the government requires? Do tithes belong to God as is taught in the Bible? If you believe in God but don't believe in any particular religion, how should you use money to express your love for God? (My own personal answers to the above questions are, respectively: yes, unless the government's actions are so egregious that you believe you must revolt; yes, under most circumstances; yes; and by giving to organizations which reflect your understanding of "God's will.")

In nations with freedom of religion, each individual must decide the appropriate spiritual use of personal wealth.

Use of Catalytic Aphorisms

"Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death."

(Thomas 1).

The Gospel of Thomas begins with a statement that interpreting the sayings of Jesus will result in not "tasting" death. Each of the canonical Gospels contains one saying using the phrase "will not taste death." The phrase is not found anywhere else in the Bible. None of the sayings are assessed by the Jesus Seminar as originating with Jesus. However the appearance of the phrase "will not taste death" in all four canonical Gospels as well as in Thomas strongly indicates that some such expression was remembered by disciples as originating with Jesus.

The sayings preserved in the synoptic Gospels may come from two different sources (*Mark* and *Q*):

And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power.” (Mark 9: 1)

“Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9: 27)

“Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.” (Matthew 16: 28)

The version in Mark affirms that people still alive will see that the kingdom *has* come. Luke affirms that people will see the kingdom of God before they taste death; it is ambiguous whether the kingdom is present or future. Both versions could be interpreted *either* as referring to a vision of an imminent apocalyptic event *or* to the idea that some of Jesus’ disciples would experience the *present* kingdom of God during their lifetime. Matthew’s modification is clearly about Jesus returning at the future imminent apocalyptic event. If Jesus taught a present kingdom, then either Mark or Luke’s version could be originally from Jesus, but Matthew’s version could not.

John’s reference to “not tasting death” is actually closer in meaning to *Thomas’* version than to the synoptic Gospels. Both versions affirm that Jesus’ word is the key to “not tasting death.” In John’s version Jesus speaks of not *seeing* death; his audience responds by using “*taste*” in place of “see”:

“‘Very truly, I tell you, whoever keeps my word will never see death.’ The Jews said to him, ‘Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, and so did the prophets; yet you say, ‘Whoever keeps my word will never taste death.’” (John 8: 51-52)

The Greek word translated as “keeps” means “attends to carefully.” While “keeping” and “understanding the interpretation” are not identical in meaning, both expressions indicate the importance of Jesus’ sayings to early Christian communities.

Both *John's* and *Thomas's* communities believed that Jesus' sayings were the keys to "not tasting death." Only the *Thomas* saying indicates that Jesus' words had to be *interpreted*, yet as we look at what Jesus said it is clear that interpretation is necessary if one is to discover meaning and application for his sayings.

The Greek word "taste" also can mean "to experience" or "to perceive." To "not taste death" is subtly different in meaning from "will not die." To not perceive or experience death means to not be *affected* by death. It could mean not being affected by the death of others as well as not being affected by one's own death. Anticipating death and losing loved ones can produce pain, anxiety and fear. To not taste death would be freedom from pain, anxiety and fear related to death.

Freedom from fear of death was an important theme in Greek philosophy. It could be that in some way Jesus' sayings freed his original disciples from fear of death and that freedom was, for them, "not tasting death."

The communities that used *Thomas* thought of "not tasting death" as the most important and ultimate outcome of studying and reflecting upon the sayings of Jesus. That attitude may have been more prevalent among the first generation of disciples than is commonly recognized. The *Gospel of Thomas* also shows that those who esteemed *Thomas's* Gospel recognized the sayings as having deeper meanings which had to be interpreted understood. The process of interpreting sayings would have acted as a *catalyst* for contemplation, insight, feeling and other inner experiences.

Language is used most often to convey or seek information. Descriptive sentences are usually intended to convey information and questions are usually intended to seek information. However, language is also sometimes used to provoke thought,

feeling, internal experience or insight. Such language is, in effect, “catalytic.” Some sentences are not intended to convey or seek information; rather, they are intended to act as *catalysts* for changing consciousness.

Some language can be “catalytic” as well as descriptive or questioning. For example stories, poetry, and philosophical treatises are primarily descriptive yet can be intellectually or emotionally provocative as well. Likewise, questions can be intended to provoke thought and feeling as well as to evoke information.

When a saying is not intended to describe or inquire but only to *provoke* inner experience that saying can be called a “catalytic aphorism.” Examples of catalytic aphorisms are Zen koans and the “Symbols of Pythagoras,” which will be discussed a bit later in this section, as will examples from Jesus’ sayings.

Catalytic aphorisms are in their literal sense usually obscure or paradoxical. The obscurity or paradoxical nature neither conveys nor seeks information; rather, it *confuses* and may even temporarily block conscious rational thinking. With the conscious mind partly “disabled” an opportunity occurs for deeper subconscious levels of feeling and insight to emerge into awareness. The temporary state of conscious confusion is similar to sleep, in that subconscious mentation “takes over” and can emerge into awareness through dreams. The experience and remembrance of a dream is awareness of subconscious mentation. Feeling and insight provoked by catalytic aphorisms are likewise awareness of subconscious mentation.

Milton Erickson, an influential psychiatrist and hypnotherapist developed methods for quickly inducing hypnotic and autohypnotic states. He believed that drawing forth guidance and solutions from the subconscious was a more effective use of hypnosis than

attempting to implant solutions by direct suggestion. The techniques he developed were usually intended to confuse the subject; the confusion of the conscious mind gave access to the subconscious. He said, "In all my techniques, almost all, there is a confusion."⁵⁹ He used non sequiturs, stories, and a variety of physical and linguistic techniques to subtly confuse his subjects and induce a hypnotic state. Catalytic aphorisms can have that same effect of confusing the listeners, thus perhaps inducing brief "hypnotic" or meditative states.

Erikson discovered some of his methods as ways to cope with the pain of his affliction with polio. Through autohypnosis he regained some control over his muscles so that he was able to become physically active. He took canoe trips and eventually was able to walk. He thus dramatically demonstrated in his life the physically therapeutic power latent in the mind.⁶⁰ It is probable that the philosophers who used catalytic aphorisms were, like Erikson, individuals who did self-exploration experimentally and who entered into states similar to those known today as meditative and hypnotic.

Considering the effectiveness of hypnosis to cure psychosomatic symptoms, it is possible that the use of catalytic aphorisms resulted in what appeared to be "miraculous" cures in ancient times.

Perhaps the most widely known examples of catalytic aphorisms are Zen koans. The koan is a riddle with no definitive answer. The Zen Master gives the student a koan as a focal point for meditation, which is intended to lead the student to a different state of consciousness called "satori." The koan "*what is the sound of one hand clapping?*" does not seek information nor rational analysis; it seeks to provoke a state of mind.

Zen Buddhism undoubtedly developed the koan technique as a result of interaction with Taoist philosophy in China. The Taoist seminal text, the *Tao-Te-Ching*, is filled with obscure and paradoxical sentences, for example: *“To yield is to be preserved whole. To be bent is to become straight. To be empty is to be full. To be worn out is to be renewed. To have little is to possess. To have plenty is to be perplexed.”*⁶¹

About the same time that Lao-Tzu was confusing Chinese followers with obscure sayings, in the West the philosophers Heraclitus and Pythagoras were also using catalytic aphorisms to sow the seeds of later Platonism and Stoicism.

Heraclitus of Ephesus (535-475 B.C.E.), who was known as “the Obscure One,” intentionally used obscure statements to direct his listeners’ minds through appearances to a deeper reality. One of his “mottos” was “Nature loves to conceal herself.”

Examples of Heraclitus’ obscure sayings are:

“You cannot step twice into the same river.”

“The dry soul is the wisest and best.”

“All things come out of the one, and the one out of all things.”

*“Mortals are immortals, and immortals are mortals, the one living the other’s death and dying the other’s life.”*⁶² .

The Pythagoreans had a widespread reputation as healers; it seems likely that they utilized to some extent the therapeutic power of induced “hypnotic” states. Pythagoras taught by means of enigmatic commands, which disciples contemplated for deeper meaning (they also contemplated “number” i.e. geometry and music theory). Iamblichus was one of the few ancient writers to record information about the Pythagoreans. He

asserted that “All Pythagoric discipline was symbolic, resembling riddles and puzzles, and consisting of maxims.”⁶³

Some of the “Golden Verses of Pythagoras” were straightforward commands such as: “Worship the Immortal Gods by making your sacrifice: keeping your faith, honoring great heroes, living in harmony in the world” and “Remember about the law of cause and effect in your life.”

Another set of sayings, “The Symbols of Pythagoras,” consists primarily of commands and prohibitions. Many of these are obscure in meaning and so fit the category of “catalytic aphorisms.” The “Symbols of Pythagoras” included:

“Eat not the heart.”

“Do not sit upon a bushel basket.”

“Do not walk in the public way.”

Pythagoras probably used such sayings to provide memorable images for contemplation, provoking his disciples to turn inward. They would have contemplated the sayings not merely to interpret them but also to explore the depths of their own consciousness. Pythagorean use of such “symbols” will be discussed more fully in the Conclusion of this section where Jesus’ philosophy is compared to the Pythagorean philosophy.⁶⁴

The greatest challenge to understanding verses of Pythagoras and other ancient sayings of the type is that the context of the sayings is lost. It is unlikely that the list of sayings was simply presented as a speech. The sayings more likely were responses to specific questions or situations. Without the context, we have to guess at meaning and purpose.

Take as a more modern example an aphorism of Benjamin Franklin: “Gentlemen, we must all hang together or assuredly we will hang separately.” Suppose we had practically no context for the saying; that it was just part of a list of Franklin’s aphorisms. Without context we can guess the saying is about the importance of humans working together. If we happened to know that “hanging” was a form of execution, we could guess the “hanging separately” part to be an allusion to death. We might suppose Franklin was exaggerating for effect in his reference to being hanged. If we had practically no knowledge of Franklin’s era, we might hypothesize that he was part of a gang of criminals who worried about being caught and executed. Knowing he was actually addressing conflict within the Continental Congress during the American Revolution, the wit and wisdom of the saying become more evident.

Ancient wisdom sayings, like Aesop’s Fables, originally were spoken in some unknown context. The sayings were remembered and eventually recorded. The conversational or conditional contexts might well have been forgotten. In the case of the New Testament Gospels, the authors probably had lists of remembered sayings without the contexts. Consequently the authors in writing their narratives had to imagine the contexts and provide settings for interpreting the sayings.

Like Pythagoras and Heraclitus, Jesus also used “paradoxical” and obscure sayings. It is possible that he had heard sayings of Pythagoras and/ or Heraclitus and was influenced by them. It is also possible that catalytic aphorisms found in Jesus,’ Pythagorean, Taoist, and Zen Buddhist philosophies were products of similar states of consciousness rather than of direct influence of one tradition on others.

Jesus probably spoke his aphorisms for the same purpose as the other philosophers of his era. The effectiveness of Jesus' aphorisms is indicated by the fact that his reputation as a healer became even more widely known than that of the Pythagoreans.

As with the parables, the sayings "stuck" in Jesus' disciples' minds. Undoubtedly at least some disciples would have contemplated the sayings in solitude, trying to understand and apply the meanings. In that way, the aphorisms could act as focal points to lead the disciples into meditative states. It is likely that Jesus practiced contemplation using biblical passages, ideas about God's nature, observations of nature and of human behavior. Some of his aphorisms indicate that Jesus contemplated his own body, states of mind, and memories. By contemplating his sayings one can enter into meditative states, just as contemplation of Zen koans can lead to meditative states.

Logical analysis of many of Jesus' aphorisms proves that they do not convey descriptive information and could only have acted as catalysts for thought and inner experiences. What follows is commentary on the catalytic aphorisms of Jesus.

"Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the realm of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the realm of God as a little child will never enter it." (Luke 18: 16-17, NIV)

This statement has no obvious meaning. The statement raises questions with no definitive answers: Why does God's realm belong to *children*? What does it mean to receive it as a little child? What qualities does a child have that are not prominent in adulthood? One could hazard any number of guesses about child qualities: innocence, playfulness, openness, etc.

Ultimately the “child mind” is as complex as the “adult mind” but with different qualities prominent. The saying invites one to go within oneself and try to remember one’s own childhood state of mind. The child mind is generally thought to be inferior to the adult, but here Jesus rejects that convention. There are two ways one can hope to discover the meaning of being like a child: by observing and trying to emulate the behavior of children or by looking within one’s memory. The memory is subconscious for adults and so the statement could act as a catalyst to put one in touch with subconscious mentation.

I believe the farther back one goes in memory the closer one comes to a state of consciousness in which the world is seen as a whole rather than in terms of separate pieces; a state in which the world as a whole is undifferentiated from “self.” Such a state would be akin to the mystical consciousness of divine unity.

“You must be sly as a snake and as simple as a dove.” (Mt. 10: 16)

In Jesus’ time the snake was associated with shrewdness, deception and harm (e.g. Genesis 3: 13); the dove with innocence and being easily deceived (e.g. Hosea 7: 11). The command to be both sly as a snake and simple as a dove is a paradox. Later Christians would associate the serpent with evil and the dove with the Holy Spirit, which makes the saying even more extremely paradoxical.

The aphorism calls upon the audience to look at two sides or potentialities of their consciousness. Interpretations of “snake” and “dove” may vary from person to person.

The “snake” may symbolize that in human consciousness which can discern and even employ deception. The ability to see through deception is obviously a very helpful ability. In some situations the ability to employ deception could be harmful, yet in other

situations might be beneficial. Government intelligence agencies employ deception to protect national interests. Such deception could be beneficial, in the right circumstances. Jewish sympathizers employed deception to save Jews from the Nazis during World War 2. Certainly the deceptions of Jewish sympathizers were on the right side of history and morality. People routinely tell “little white lies” to avoid hurting the feelings of others. It could be argued that such “white lies” are better in some circumstances than frank expression of opinion. Surprise parties can bring great joy, but deception is required to keep the surprise a secret. Deception to pull off a surprise party is harmless at worst and at best can contribute to a positive memorable experience.

The “dove” may symbolize that in human consciousness which is trusting, innocent and harmless. Such qualities can put a person at risk in interactions with untrustworthy people; yet trust and harmlessness are necessary for developing positive relationships. Some synthesis and balance of the “snake” and “dove” in character and consciousness could make one both effective and harmless in worldly interactions.

The aphorism calls upon the audience to reconcile the paradox, which cannot be done entirely through reason; only an intuitive or mystical insight can reconcile opposites in consciousness. That mystical insight transcends dualistic consciousness is affirmed in practically all mystical traditions. Mysticism is usually defined as seeking conscious oneness with God and is often described as an experience of pure unity in which all apparent separation is dissolved. The ultimate goal of all yogic systems is the conscious oneness with God. Christian mystics seek the same experience. The Renaissance polymath and mystic Nicholas of Cusa spoke of God as the “coincidence of opposites.”

Whether or not Zen Buddhism should be classified as a mystical tradition is controversial; it does not use the language of “conscious oneness with God,” which is found in most mystical traditions. However satori is sometimes described as a “non-dual” consciousness. Even if satori is not identical with mystical experience, satori in its transcendence of dualistic consciousness is at least akin to mystical consciousness.

If we accept the premise that Jesus was a mystic, it follows that he intended to convey mystical insight. If he intended to help others attain the mystical perspective, it would follow that his paradoxical sayings were intended as devices to provoke a consciousness transcending dualistic thinking, i.e. to provoke what is commonly called a “mystical experience.”

If Jesus did not intend to help his disciples transcend dualistic thinking, then his paradoxical sayings can only be seen as self-contradictory nonsense. Considering his impact on his own time and through the ages, it seems far more likely that Jesus had mystical insight than that he was just speaking nonsense.

Another example of Jesus’ use of an obscure statement has been turned into an idiom meaning “give anonymously to charity” or “do good works without concern for praise.” That idiomatic meaning is a result of a phrase that was probably added to the original saying. The phrase added by Matthew was “when you give to charity,” which was followed by the instruction: “*don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.*” (*Mt. 6: 3*)

However the *Gospel of Thomas* records the same saying without the connection to giving to charity: “*Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.*” (*Thom. 62: 2*) If Jesus was *not* simply attempting to coin a new idiom and especially if

the *Gospel of Thomas* has the original saying, then the saying is another example of an obscure and paradoxical sounding aphorism. Even if the saying is connected to the practice of giving to charity the meaning is not obvious; it is an odd way to say “give anonymously” if that was the intention.

Is there any significance in the “left hand” and “right hand” dichotomy of the saying? There does not appear to be any uniform association of “good and bad” or “clean and unclean” with handedness in the Hebrew biblical tradition. In Proverbs, Wisdom is characterized as having “Length of days is in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honor.” (Proverbs 3: 16) The proverb indicates blessings in both hands. On the “other hand,” Ecclesiastes contains a saying about the heart related to the hands: “A wise man’s heart is at his right hand; but a fool’s heart at his left.” (Ecclesiastes 10: 2). However there are not other passages associating the right with wisdom and the left with foolishness. Most reference to right and left hands in the Hebrew Scriptures do not carry any connotative difference between right and left.

The New Testament only has a few passages making reference to the right and left hands. The mother of James and John asks Jesus “Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.” (Matt 20: 21) Clearly she does not associate one hand with good and the other with evil. On the other hand Matt. 25: 33 reports that on judgment day the King will separate the sheep from the goats (this is apparently figurative) with “sheep on his right hand and goats on the left.” He then says to those on the left “Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” (Matt 25: 41) The Jesus Seminar concluded that the “sheep and goat” passage did not originate with Jesus; it is found only in Matthew, so

we should be wary of inferring that it represents the normative metaphorical understanding of right and left.

Overall, it appears that the left hand was generally thought of as *weaker* than the right, but the left hand was not necessarily usually associated with foolishness or evil. In our culture, the predominance of right-handed people and the prejudice of some right-handed people against left-handed people has resulted in a conventional interpretation of Jesus' saying in terms of "right hand, good; left hand, bad." Personally as a "southpaw," I resent and reject such interpretations.

Regardless of the symbolic meanings of "right hand" and "left hand" there is the additional issue of the meaning of one hand "not knowing" what the other is doing. How would one go about preventing the left hand from "knowing" what the right hand is doing? In what sense do hands "know"? If one focused all one's attention only on the activity of the right hand, one might be able to have "consciousness" in the right hand while becoming unconscious of the left hand, at least temporarily. Likewise if one were to concentrate entirely on the left hand, one could become unconscious of the right hand.

Autogenic training uses the technique of concentrating only upon one hand in order to learn to produce a state of relaxed concentration. Autogenic training is "one of the most comprehensive and successful Western deep-relaxation techniques . . . which was developed by the German psychiatrist Johannes H. Schultz in 1932."⁶⁵ The first exercise in autogenic training is to repeat the phrase "My right [left] arm is heavy" (the subject uses "right" or "left" depending upon which hand is dominant).⁶⁶ The relaxed concentration can lead to an altered state of consciousness, which may be described as "autohypnotic" or "meditative."

While autogenic training is progressive and involves instruction on posture and attitude and Jesus' saying is only a paradoxical sounding command, the mental effect of both would be similar in one respect: both call for the listener to concentrate attention on one hand.

There is a possibility that Jesus' statement was intended to help disciples get in touch with their power of concentration and help them open to the greater resources of the subconscious mind. That is not to say that Jesus would have had in mind the modern concepts of "concentration" and "subconscious resources." The saying suggests the possibility that Jesus practiced a form of meditation in which he learned to focus his attention upon parts of his body. Jesus' saying that the kingdom of God is within you and his predilection for thought provoking sayings strongly suggest that he was a man who practiced exploration of "inner space." He probably was expressing thoughts based upon his own contemplations and thought of the "trance state" as an experience of the realm of God. Regardless of how Jesus came up with his sayings and his intention in sharing them, the effect of thinking about the "right hand/ left hand" saying can be mental concentration on one's hand until one achieves an altered state of consciousness.

In any case there is no one interpretation of the saying that can be considered definitive. With no definitive interpretation the saying becomes a catalyst for thought, inner experience and many possible interpretations.

One frequently used phrase in Hebrew Scriptures uses "right" and "left" in a way that has relevance for another of Jesus' catalytic aphorisms:

"So be careful to do what the LORD your God has commanded you; do not turn aside to the right or to the left." (Deuteronomy 5:32)

The idea of following God's commandments without turning to the right or left would have been familiar to Jesus' Jewish audience. A modern idiom reflects the same idea: "follow the straight and narrow." That phrase was probably derived from a saying attributed to Jesus: "*But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*" (Matthew 7:13-15) This saying probably did not originate with Jesus, according to the scholars of the Jesus Seminar. The saying was probably added as an interpretation or extrapolation of another saying, which is about a *door*:

"Struggle to get in through the narrow door; I'm telling you, many will try to get in, but won't be able." (Lk. 13: 24)

Jesus' Jewish audience might well have associated the "narrow door" with the idea of a "narrow road" from which they were not to turn right or left. Jesus' aphorism about the narrow door contains both an admonition and an observation. The two parts stand in a kind of tension with each other. First Jesus tells his disciples to do something; then he tells them that many won't be able to follow the instruction. The tension is another example of using conflicting "suggestions" which, as in Ericksonian hypnotherapy, could induce an altered state of consciousness.

"Many won't be able" *could* mean that Jesus expected only a few of his disciples to be able to obey Mosaic Law. It also *could* mean that many of his disciples would be able to obey that Law but that *many* would not be able.

However the "door" could represent something other than obedience to Mosaic Law. Considering the challenges Jesus made to conventional acceptance of Mosaic Law, there is no compelling reason to suppose that the "door" refers to strict adherence to Mosaic Law. The "narrow door" could mean living by Jesus' teachings, which as we've

seen did not exactly advocate adherence to tradition. The narrow door could also mean “entering God’s realm” which according to Jesus is “within.” Since entering God’s realm was the central idea in Jesus’ mission, that “entry” is the most probable meaning of “getting through the narrow door.”

The statement does not condemn the “many”; it only notes that many will fail – which could be true of practically *any* difficult enterprise. For example, many football teams will try to win the Super Bowl next year, but only one team will; many won’t be able. Whatever the door is supposed to refer to, the aphorism is suggestive of maintaining focus and concentrating on a difficult task. The statement does not suggest that the listener (or reader) will fail – only that many will. The possibility of failure gives all the more reason to “struggle.” The saying, in a way, is applicable to any difficult task; any difficult task requires concentration and an awareness of the possibility of failure can act as a goad to keep a person “on task.” The aphorism can be seen as a goad to what Buddhists call “right effort.”

Traditionally Jesus is thought to have established a “new covenant” in contrast to the “old covenant” of Mosaic Law. One catalytic aphorism contrasts old and new in a way that does *not* imply preference for the new.

“Nobody drinks aged wine and immediately wants to drink young wine. Young wine is not poured into old wineskins, or they might break, and aged wine is not poured into a new wineskin, or it might spoil.” (Thom. 47: 3, 4)

The passage on young and old wine in *Thomas* differs from this version in *Mark*:

“And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins.” (Mark 12: 22)

Mark’s version clearly emphasizes “new wine” and “new wineskins,” probably because he wanted to suggest the “new covenant” of Christianity. *Thomas’* version is probably closer to the original saying. In *Thomas* the saying acknowledges the aged wine as preferable to young wine and *then* points out the necessity of putting young wine in new skins and old wine in old skins. Hence the saying in *Thomas* is not about a “new covenant” superior to the “old” but rather is about a contrast between new and old in a general or abstract way.

What relevant meaning and application can be drawn from observation about the young and old wine? There are many references to wine in the Hebrew Scriptures. Wine was sometimes used to represent the negative consequences of drunkenness and sometimes to represent joy and merriment. “New wine” was generally used as a reference to abundant provision, while “old wine” was more likely to be associated with refined pleasure. The aphorism suggests that acceptance of new “abundance” requires the inner flexibility which characterizes new wineskins, while the old can be pleasant but pleasure from old ways cannot be sustained if one seeks new abundance with new flexible ways of thinking.

The saying seems to be pointing toward reflection on appropriateness: new skins appropriate for new wine, old skins appropriate for old wine. The wineskins probably represent states of mind: attachment to old traditions vs. openness to new ideas. In that analogy, the wine would represent ideas or “spirits” (new vs. old). The point then could

be something like “people who like old ideas won’t be able to assimilate new ones; people who like new ideas won’t be able to appreciate old ones.”

In the Thomas version, the new is not recommended as superior, which probably means that it was *not* Jesus’ primary intention to indicate the superiority of a “new covenant.” To get the point of the saying is to understand something about the nature of the old and the new. The applications of such understanding would vary from case to case. Again, the aphorism serves as a catalyst for reflection rather than for specific advice or doctrine.

The wine and wineskin aphorism seems to imply “getting” something: new ideas or flexibility or understanding of the value of both old and new. Another aphorism says something about “having” and “getting”:

In fact, to those who have, more will be given, and from those who don’t have, even what they do have will be taken away. (Mk. 4: 25)

That aphorism about “having” was taken by singer-songwriter Billie Holiday to be about money. Her song “God Bless the Child” was inspired by the “having” aphorism and reflects a popular interpretation of the aphorism. The lyrics say in part: “empty pockets don’t ever make the grade,” “money you’ve got lots of friends . . . when you’re gone and spending ends, they don’t come no more,” and “them that’s got shall get, them that’s not shall lose, so the Bible says and it still is news.”

In *Mark*, the aphorism on “having” follows passages about not hiding light under a bushel and affirming that what is hidden will be revealed. *Mark* evidently took the aphorism as being about “letting your light shine.” In contrast, *Matthew* uses the aphorism as an interpretation of the “parable of the talents,” which on the surface is a

parable about economics and “using your talents” rather than hiding them. Despite the different contextual settings, Matthew and Mark both indicate the saying is about *using* what you have – light or talents – not about merely having or not having per se.

Jesus clearly wanted people to “get” the importance of loving, trusting in God, and focusing on God’s realm. He also clearly did not place much value on getting worldly wealth. In the context of what one should seek to get, Jesus’ aphorism about “having” was probably not intended to be about having worldly wealth.

In the context of what Jesus taught, his disciples *could* have interpreted the passage as being a cynical statement about the economics of the world. Disciples could also have seen the aphorism as being about “entering God’s realm,” i.e. having “consciousness” of God, love, faith, and wisdom; in which case the saying would be about the importance of having that *consciousness*. In fact, the saying could be understood either way, both ways and other ways. The aphorism’s ambiguity makes it another catalyst for reflection and insight.

Jesus’ teaching on “asking and receiving” shows the “having” is not the only way of “getting” in his philosophy. A third way of “getting” in his philosophy is found in his emphasis on *producing*, which is seen in his seed parables. Related to his use of seed analogies is the simple observation that what is produced depends upon what is planted:

“Since when do people pick grapes from thorns or figs from thistles?” (Mt. 7: 16)

Figs and grapes were staples of the Mediterranean diet of that time; those fruits were valued for their pleasant flavor and of course grapes were also valued for wine. Why did Jesus relate the picking of figs and grapes to the unrelated idea of plants which

produce thorns and thistles? That unusual conjunction is not at all an obvious idea, though the fact explicit in the question is obvious.

In *Matthew* and *Luke* the aphorism about figs and grapes is proximate to a saying about good trees bearing good fruit and bad trees bearing bad fruit. Relating the saying to “good and bad” trees is certainly a reasonable moral to draw from the saying. At the same time, one is left wondering about the figurative meaning of “good and bad” trees. What qualities of figs and grapes are supposed to be “good”? What qualities of thorns and thistles are “bad”? Are the trees supposed to refer to different kinds of *people* or to different kinds of *behaviors*? The answers to all such questions are left open to interpretation by the listener. Perhaps Jesus was saying that “prickly” people are not likely to bear “good fruit.” Perhaps he was saying that “prickly” people are avoided by others. The aphorism is ambiguous; it can serve as a catalyst for reflection and insight.

Of course, Jesus’ philosophy is not devoid of instruction regarding the nature of good. His advocacy of love and trust and his association of joy with entering God’s realm make clear what his ideas of good are. Even so, it is up to the interpreter of his aphorisms to determine how Jesus’ ideas of good are related to grapes and thorns and figs and thistles.

The ambiguity of Jesus’ aphorisms is suggestive rather than didactic or specific regarding application. The specific applications of his catalytic aphorisms could in theory be as many as the individuals who seek to apply them. His sayings are relevant to common human desires, such as desire for friends, wealth, power, safety and fame. One aphorism in particular is relevant to the desires for fame, power and safety:

A city built on a high hill and fortified cannot fall, nor can it be hidden. (Thom. 32)

Matthew and *Luke* report only part of the saying found in *Thomas*; the two “synoptic” Gospels report Jesus saying, “a town on a hill cannot be *hidden*” (Matthew 5: 14), but say nothing about the town’s invulnerability to *falling*. *Matthew* and *Luke* were both written after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Jerusalem was a fortified city on a hill which fell, so perhaps *Matthew* and *Luke* recognized that Jesus was mistaken in the part of the saying they omitted: a fortified city on a hill *can* and *did* fall. In any case both supposed qualities of a city on a hill are important for the effect of the saying.

Surely Jesus knew that Jerusalem had fallen several times in the past. In fact Rome ruled Jerusalem during Jesus’ lifetime. So why did he say a city on a hill cannot fall? Perhaps he was being ironic. Most of Jesus’ sayings are intended figuratively rather than literally, so the saying about a city on a hill is probably not intended to be literally about building invulnerable cities.

Just to give one possible interpretation, suppose the saying to be about people of a certain type rather than literally about cities. If one supposes that the saying is about people, then a city on a hill could be about conspicuous and protected people. It may sometimes seem to us that very wealthy people and high officials in government and religion “cannot fall” (but of course, like cities on hills, they sometimes do) and they also cannot hide from the public. One of the biggest complaints of celebrities seems to be that it is difficult for them to go out in public. Celebrities have stalkers. There are disadvantages to being in the limelight. And while conspicuous power, fame and wealth usually offer some security in life, even the mighty *can* fall.

If one can accept the possibility that privacy and even anonymity can have advantages and prominence can have disadvantages, the saying suggests contemplation of that possibility. Such contemplation could lead to the realization that everything has its price; there are advantages and disadvantages to every position in life. Such a realization can help one accept with equanimity one's current conditions while at the same time remaining alert to risks and opportunities.

While there can be disadvantages to fame, glory, wealth and power, such attainments are often simply the result of people actualizing their potential. Some of Jesus' sayings promote actualizing one's potential. One example is this aphorism:

“Since when is the lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket or under the bed? It's put on the lampstand isn't it?” (Mk. 4: 21)

This saying as found in Mark's Gospel is linked to the saying about “whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed.” However in Matthew the same saying is linked to the sayings “You are the light of the world,” “a town on a hill cannot be hidden” and “let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” The different contexts which Mark and Matthew use as settings for the “lamp” saying illustrate how freely Jesus' sayings were used and interpreted by early followers. Mark interprets the saying as being about revelation of what is hidden; Matthew sees the saying as an admonition to do good works to glorify God.

The saying is certainly about purpose: lamps are for the purpose of lighting a room so putting a lamp under a bushel defeats the lamp's purpose. The saying invites contemplation of one's purpose in life. The aphorism also raises a question with the

uninterpreted symbol of the lamp and its light. What are the “lamp” and “lampstand” supposed to represent? What is the “light” which is meant to be shared?

Light is that by which things are seen. In terms of human experience, consciousness is analogous to light; consciousness is that by which things are seen. Lifting up one’s consciousness to share what one sees is analogous to lifting a lamp up on a lampstand to share that by which things are seen.

Matthew’s idea that the light represents “good works” is a reasonable interpretation; doing good works is a way of sharing one’s consciousness. Mark’s idea that the light is “revelation of the hidden” suggests the more common idiom of light as knowledge; sharing knowledge is a way of sharing one’s consciousness. There is no good reason to reject one interpretation in favor of the other. There is also no good reason to prohibit any other interpretations. The quest for self-knowledge can be seen as a search for one’s own “hidden light” which can be manifested in the world. That “light” can be shared in many ways.

Jesus and his disciples revealed their light by traveling from place to place, proclaiming the philosophy of God’s realm. They were on a “road trip” to transform the world, just as Gautama and his disciples traveled to reveal the light of the Buddha. These dedicated spiritual travelers did not attempt to persuade everyone to adopt the life of the road. Householders could and did adopt the philosophies of Jesus and Gautama.

Some parts of Jesus’ message were probably specifically meant for those who adopted the life of the road and may have had no relevance for householder disciples. For example, the following saying may have been meant as a description of the life of the spiritual traveler for those who considered adopting that life:

Foxes have their dens and birds have their nests, but human beings have no place to lie down and rest. (Thom. 86: 1, 2)

The saying may simply have been intended as information: if you adopt this way of being, you won't have a place to lie down; you won't have a home. There is an intriguing parallel to the saying in Plutarch's "*Life of Tiberius Gracchus*" describing the life of the homeless soldiers of Italy: "The wild animals that roam over Italy have every one a cave or lair to lurk in; but the men who fight and die for Italy enjoy the common air and light, indeed, but nothing else; houseless and homeless they wander about with their wives and children."⁶⁷

Even though Jesus' saying *could* simply be a description of an adopted life-style, there are other possible ways of interpreting the saying. The saying is apparently counterintuitive: most human beings *do* have houses, usually more comfortable and well-appointed than the dens of foxes and nests of birds. On the other hand, human beings began as nomadic hunter gatherers and throughout history have exhibited a kind of restlessness. Tribes migrated. Armies of nations traveled to build empires. Today people frequently move to new locations. Even people who are the most settled, staying in the same house for decades, usually take time to vacate their homes for vacations. Many people stay at one job for most of their lives, hoping to eventually retire and *travel*.

From a spiritual perspective, human restlessness is a quest to "go home" to God. The idea of going home to God may mean for some their destination in the "after life." For the mystically inclined "going home to God" means going within to find one's connection to the divine and to "live from" that center. From the mystical perspective, one is never truly alive until one finds one's center in God.

"Follow me, and leave it to the dead to bury their own dead." (Mt. 8: 22)

How can the dead bury the dead? The paradox is obvious in this saying, unless Jesus was talking about zombies. The only way to make sense of the saying is to interpret the “dead” figuratively. The “dead” could mean those who are not in touch with God’s realm, those who are not alive to spiritual reality. Are the dead who are to be buried also those who are not spiritually alive or are they the literally dead? If both groups of the dead are understood to be not literally dead but figuratively spiritually dead, then what does it mean that the first group is to bury the second?

This catalytic aphorism calls for reflection upon what it means to be “truly” alive as well as upon what it means to be dead. It is also related to the quest for happiness. Happiness is not easy to define, but certainly happiness includes satisfaction with life. When people feel fully alive and live life to the fullest they are happier than when they are simply resigned to tedium or are just going through the motions. A person obsessed with death is already dead in the figurative sense of “not fully alive.” And so we come full circle, back to the saying which began this section:

"Whoever discovers the interpretation of these sayings will not taste death."

(Thomas 1).

Pursuit of Humble Self-Knowledge

"When you know yourselves, then you will be known, and you will understand that you are children of the living Father. But if you do not know yourselves, then you live in poverty, and you are the poverty." (Thomas 3: 2)

The above saying, recorded in *Thomas*, was not chosen by the Jesus Seminar as being an authentic saying of Jesus. I quote it here because it reflects one of the primary concerns of philosophy after Socrates: pursuit of self-knowledge. Even if Jesus did not make this reference to the importance of self-knowledge, I believe the

nature of his catalytic aphorisms demonstrates that facilitating self-knowledge was one of his aims. If Jesus had simply intended to convey information or rules for living, his style would have been didactic. Instead his style was elusive and allusive; his sayings provoke questions and reflection. His sayings generally direct his disciples' attention inward to their own minds. I suspect that there are many more authentic sayings of Jesus in the *Gospel of Thomas* than scholars have admitted; but even if one rules out *Thomas* as a source of authentic sayings, the canonical Gospels contain most of the catalytic aphorisms.

At least one saying of Jesus' is clearly a call to his disciples to know themselves:

"Why do you notice the sliver in your friend's eye, but overlook the timber in your own? How can you say to your friend, "Let me get the sliver out of your eye," when there is a timber in your own? You phony, first take the timber out of your eye and then you'll see well enough to remove the sliver from your friend's eye." (Mt. 7: 3-5)

This passage calls upon people to stop trying to "fix" others and instead focus upon "fixing" themselves. "Taking the timber out of your eye" may be taken to mean "clear out of your mind what is obstructing your perception of God's realm."

The passage is also an example of Jesus' sense of humor. Exaggeration is a classic way humans express their sense of humor. Exaggerated imagery surprises and often provokes laughter. The image of having a timber in one's eye while trying to remove a sliver from another's eye is a classic example of humorous exaggeration.

The word translated as "phony" is the Greek word for actor from which the English word "hypocrite" is derived. The use of that word indicates that Jesus had some familiarity with Greek theater (as was discussed also in the above section on "Forgiveness"). It is likely that he used the word for humorous effect rather than as an

insult. He was inviting people to look at the “acting” they were doing to hide their true nature.

Jesus recognized that people play roles in public life. He recognized that just because a person had a particular station or office in life did not necessarily indicate that the person was trustworthy. His awareness of the deceptiveness of position is expressed in a saying about “scholars”:

Look out for the scholars who like to parade around in long robes, and insist on being addressed properly in the marketplaces, and prefer important seats in the synagogues and the best couches at banquets. (Mk. 12: 38, 39)

The scholars or scribes were the educated class who sustained the industry of preserving literature and letters. They performed a crucial function for government, religion and business. In his warning Jesus did not condemn people for being scholars. He did not even criticize scholars in general. The warning is specific: watch out for *ostentatious* scholars who expect special treatment. Why should we be wary of ostentatious people who expect special treatment? Perhaps we should be wary because their behavior indicates self-seeking rather than seeking the public good.

The saying can also be taken as a warning to notice one’s own behavior. In that sense it can be taken as a guide to self knowledge. The saying suggests questions to ask oneself: am I self-seeking? Do I “parade around” to show off? Do I expect people to address me properly? Am I a pompous blowhard?

The quest for self-knowledge is psychologically and often physically therapeutic. The whole endeavor of psychoanalysis is a quest for self-knowledge; the hope of psychoanalysis is that the patient will be helped or cured by becoming conscious of

unconscious material. Psychosomatic symptoms are sometimes cured by the psychoanalytic process. Likewise hypnotherapy can be a tool for self-knowledge for psychological and psychosomatic therapeutic purposes. Jesus' catalytic aphorisms may well have been therapeutic in the same way that psychoanalysis and hypnotherapy can be therapeutic.

The warning to watch out for status conscious people also reflects the social purposes and inclusive spirit of Jesus' philosophy. The antithesis of an inclusive spirit is elitism. Elitism is inherently exclusive; when there are elite people there are classes. Once hierarchical classes are established, "lower" classes are often excluded from access to wealth and power. Status conscious people thrive in elitist systems. Consequently, communities seeking to have an inclusive spirit need to be cautious about the motives of people who relish and seek status.

Cultivation of Non-Attachment

Like status, wealth and poverty are relative to each other and to culture. A person considered wealthy in one culture might be considered impoverished in another. A "poor" American might well be considered "rich" by people in impoverished lands. The wealth required to acquire a 2,000 square foot home in Manhattan is far beyond what is needed for 2,000 square feet in Missouri; the cost of the Manhattan home would be at least ten times the cost of the Missouri home. The struggling American "middle class" could be considered "poor" relative to America's upper 5%. Whether one considers oneself "rich" or "poor" might well be at least partly a matter of personal perspective. And that perspective *can* be that "money isn't everything; I am rich in other ways."

In Jesus' time there was practically no "middle class"; there were a few very wealthy people while the vast majority lived at a subsistence level or worse. First century Palestine was an "under-developed, agrarian economy based primarily on the production of food through subsistence-level farming by the peasantry." Peasants made up 90% of population. City dwelling absentee landlords were common.⁶⁸ It is well to keep this in mind when considering Jesus' sayings about the "rich" and the "poor." At least 90% of his audience would have been "poor" in economic terms.

"How difficult it is for those who have money to enter God's realm! It's easier for a camel to squeeze through a needle's eye than for a wealthy person to get into God's realm." (Mk. 10: 25)

In Christian circles a couple of explanations have circulated regarding the expression "camel to squeeze through a needle's eye." One explanation that circulates is that the "needle's eye" was a name for a low gate into Jerusalem. That interpretation is baseless; there was no "needle's eye" gate in Jerusalem's walls. Another less well known explanation is that "camel" is a copyist error; the original word was "rope" which in Aramaic is very similar in spelling and pronunciation to "camel." That explanation is more plausible than the "Jerusalem gate" theory. Both explanations fail to note that Jesus was simply using humorous exaggeration to make a point. Even if he said "rope" he was using a humorous image (personally I find "camel" is funnier than "rope").

The saying's main point remains, regardless of which explanation one accepts: it is very difficult, nearly impossible, for wealthy people to "enter God's realm." Perhaps human desire for wealth is behind attempts to divert attention from the main point of the saying by focusing on the camel and needle's eye.

Why should it be so difficult for wealthy people to enter God's realm? We have seen that entering God's realm is a matter of focusing on love, generosity, trusting in God instead of in wealth, and putting God before greed; focusing on acquiring and protecting wealth could distract one from such spiritual efforts. We have seen that in Jesus' philosophy God's realm is not an afterlife place but an inner state. God's realm is a state of mind rather than a state of money.

In the history of philosophy and religion there have been many movements which emphasized rejection of the worldly value of wealth. The Pythagoreans, Essenes and early Christians had the economic equality of communal property. In a society in which wealth is shared there are no rich or poor in the relative quantitative sense. Another way to characterize members of commune is that all are "poor" in the sense that none own personal property. All could also be characterized as "rich" since each owns the property of all; the cumulative economic resources of 100 "poor" people could add up to a "tidy sum." A saying (which probably did not originate with Jesus) summarizes the nature of a communal situation in terms of wealth:

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much . . ."
(Matthew 19: 29)

Cynic philosophers and early Christian hermits practiced independent self-reliant voluntary poverty as a means to spiritual freedom. Hindu yogis (some of them), Buddhist monks and Christian monastics all reject worldly wealth in favor of spiritual advancement. Jesus' comments about wealth are in alignment with the attitudes of all these philosophical and religious perspectives.

On the other hand, neither Judaism nor Christianity espouses voluntary poverty as necessary for spiritual well-being. In fact many modern Jews and Christians interpret acquisition of wealth as a sign of God's favor. Somehow Christians have justified worldly success as desirable and communal living as undesirable despite sayings of the founder that appear to encourage detachment from and sharing of wealth.

To add to the confusion, some of Jesus' sayings appear to provide keys to worldly success. His saying about "asking and receiving" does not place limits upon "how much" one can request from others or from God. His "parable of the talents" (discussed in the next section) seems to advocate using what one has as a way to increase one's wealth. Furthermore a few of his parables hold up the generosity of rich men as being admirable: the father of the prodigal son; the generous vineyard owner; the master who (initially) forgives the equivalent of a ten million dollar debt; and the man who invites people off the street to a feast. How could one emulate the behavior of those wealthy men without first becoming wealthy? How can one "give to one who begs" if one has nothing to give?

Although he adopted a Cynic-like lifestyle, Jesus does not appear to have insisted upon that lifestyle except for the disciples who went out to proclaim the "good news" of God's realm. The voluntary poverty of Jesus and some of his disciples was relevant to their wandering preaching mission; they relied upon the resources and generosity of householders in the towns to which they traveled. They may also have had a community treasury, whether or not Judas Iscariot was, historically, the treasurer for the group.

According to Acts Jesus' disciples held all things in common. The early followers of Jesus probably adopted a communal approach to property, similar to the systems of the Pythagoreans and Essenes. Those who traveled with the message

probably organized such groups in the towns they visited. Those who had no personal property because they were part of a communal property arrangement would also be “poor.” Hence a dedicated rich person could give his or her property to the community and thereby become one of the “poor” while increasing the wealth of the community as a whole.

Jesus’ attitude toward wealth was probably ultimately more like the Stoic than the Cynic attitude. The Cynics avoided wealth; the Stoics attempted to practice non-attachment to wealth, even if they happened to be wealthy. The Stoics did not value accumulation of riches; on the other hand they affirmed that one’s life work could result in wealth. By Stoic standards the point was to be *detached* from worldly wealth, even if you could not help becoming rich. They believed one could use wealth and power for good as long as one was not attached to wealth and power.

The vast majority of Jesus’ audience would have been, relatively, the “poor.” He may have had a few wealthy followers. The “poor” who might have felt stigmatized by their relative poverty might well have felt some relief in hearing that they were “blessed” while the rich would have difficulty entering God’s realm. There may have been some “therapeutic value” in whatever relief, uplift or encouragement the “poor” might have felt from Jesus’ sayings about the rich and poor. If the early movement shared wealth, that also might have had an anxiety and stress relieving effect on the relatively poor.

In order to persuade people to non-attachment, Jesus had to point out the “downside” of attachment to wealth and the “upside” to non-attachment to wealth.

In one short parable Jesus points out the futility of placing too much confidence in one’s wealth:

“There was a rich person who had a great deal of money. He said, ‘I shall invest my money so that I may sow, reap, plant, and fill my storehouses with produce, that I may lack nothing.’ These were the things he was thinking in his heart, but that very night he died.” (Thom. 63: 1-3)

The saying “you can’t take it with you” is an appropriate moral for the parable of the rich man who died. The abrupt ending of the parable is shocking and the abrupt surprise could be considered an ending both tragic and funny. Ordinarily it is not funny when a person dies, but when the person is fictional and not particularly a sympathetic character, the fictional death *could* provoke laughter. Effective humor is as much a matter of timing of delivery as of content. A slight pause before saying, “he died” could be enough to surprise the audience and provoke (perhaps uncomfortable) laughter.

Regardless of how one responds to the story emotionally, the point seems to be that accumulated wealth has no lasting value. The story raises the question of ultimate value: is there *any* pursuit in life that has lasting value? One answer given by Jesus or his early followers is to “store up treasures in heaven” through acts of love and generosity:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Matthew 6: 19-21)

Luke’s version of the saying emphasizes specifically giving to the “poor” as a way to store up heavenly treasures:

“Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and

no moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” (Luke 12: 33-34)

Since accumulation of wealth was a low priority or “non-priority” in the philosophy of Jesus, one might expect parables in which characters pursue wealth to end badly for those characters. Sometimes that expectation is fulfilled; sometimes not. The following parable ends badly for a character seeking wealth:

“A person owned a vineyard and rented it to some farmers, so they could work it and he could collect its crop from them. He sent his slave so the farmers would give him the vineyard’s crop. They grabbed him, beat him, and almost killed him, and the slave returned and told his master. His master said, ‘Perhaps he didn’t know them.’ He sent another slave, and the farmers beat that one as well. Then the master sent his son and said, ‘Perhaps they’ll show my son some respect.’ Because the farmers knew that he was the heir to the vineyard, they grabbed him and killed him.” (Thom. 65: 1-7)

The parable as found in *Thomas* is the simplest version and so probably closest to the original. *Mark’s* expanded version of the same parable concludes with Jesus saying, *“What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others.”* (Mark 12: 9)

In both *Matthew’s* and *Luke’s* versions, Jesus asks the same question, but it is the audience that gives the reply: *“He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.”* (Matt. 21: 40-41) *Matthew* and *Luke* probably used a version recorded in *Q*, since their versions are practically identical but differ slightly from *Mark’s* version. The obvious conclusion to be drawn from the Synoptic versions is that Jesus is the son who will be killed and those who kill him will be punished.

However it should be noted that the parable does not support the theology developed by the church about Jesus' death. First of all, the father is not like Jesus' or the later church's concept of God: the father is not compassionate, all-knowing or all powerful. He is short-sighted, cannot impose his will, and doesn't seem to care about the suffering of others. Secondly, the theology of the church is that Jesus' death was redemptive; his death was a payment for sins so that people could be forgiven. The parable does not have a redemptive conclusion. The son is not resurrected and no one is forgiven. In the synoptic versions, the story ends with death and then in a conversational epilogue the *punishment* of those responsible for the son's death. However, the ending of Thomas' version is stark and shocking: the "wicked farmers" apparently get to keep the land.

All versions of the parable agree in basic outline: a landowner sends out servants to collect crops; the servants are beaten; the landowner sends his son to collect, thinking the farmers will respect his son; but the farmers kill the son.

In the parable's literal content, the landowner cares more about collecting his crops than he does about the safety of his own son. The parable is a tragedy for both son and father, partly caused by the cruelty of the farmers, but also partly caused by the father's obsession with collecting his profits. The parable is structured like a classic tragedy: the main character has a fatal flaw, in this case an obsession with collecting profits regardless of possible costs; the fatal flaw results in tragic consequences. The parable as told was not a theological allegory but a tragedy, probably intended to make a point about consequences of heedless profit seeking. The man's persistence does not gain him what he wants; instead he suffers loss of something precious. This is a parable about

misplaced priorities. It demonstrates that making wealth as one's top priority can result in tragic consequences.

According to Jesus' teaching, non-attachment to wealth helps one avoid tragic consequences. His teaching on non-attachment aims at shifting people's perspectives from the view that wealth is a blessing to the view that having a consciousness of owning nothing is the ultimate blessing. By thinking of oneself as owning nothing, one gains everything: the entire realm of God, the universe itself. This, at any rate, is a plausible interpretation of the beatitude of poverty: "*Fortunate are you poor! God's realm belongs to you.*"

Luke follows this beatitude with two more surprising blessings: "*Fortunate are you hungry! You will have a feast. Fortunate are you who weep now! You will laugh.*" (*Luke 6: 20-21*) The blessing on the hungry is perfectly logical from one point of view: only someone who is hungry *can* have a feast; those who are *full cannot* have a feast. Jesus' audience may have understood the blessing as a future promise, but that does not mean he intended it that way. He may have intended it as a simple observation: only the hungry can have a feast and in that sense the hungry are fortunate. Jesus may also have had spiritual meanings in mind for these sayings. Matthew's version of the "Beatitudes" speaks of hungering and thirsting for righteousness or justice. Matthew may have modified the original simpler versions of the Beatitudes to help readers understand the spiritual meanings. Instead of the stark "those who weep shall laugh," Matthew gives a possible spiritual interpretation: "those who mourn shall be comforted."

The blessing on those who weep could also have been a simple observation: those who weep now will also laugh – at some point. A study of the relationship between

crying and laughing would be interesting and possibly revealing about human nature. A link between laughing and weeping is suggested by the fact that it is difficult to tell from sound alone whether someone is laughing or sobbing. Both crying and laughing may be cathartic if they involve physiological release of pent up emotions. Since the psychological and physiological effects of crying and laughing are similar, there could be a deeper emotional link between the ability to laugh and the ability to cry. Mark Twain believed that the secret source of humor is sorrow, so he certainly saw a psychological link between laughing and crying. Perhaps Jesus intuitively grasped such a link too and meant to suggest the link in his blessing for those who weep.

The sayings can be understood as reflecting the fleeting nature of temporary conditions: sometimes we are hungry and sometimes we feast; sometimes we weep and sometimes we laugh. Since conditions, including wealth, are temporary it is not wise to be emotionally attached to conditions. This is the essence of non-attachment in spiritual and philosophical teachings: there is something more important than temporary earthly conditions and possessions. That “something more important” varies from one religion and philosophy to another. Estimates of the something of greater value have included happiness, virtue, enlightenment, and knowledge of God. In Jesus’ philosophy “entering God’s realm” is the “something more important” than temporal conditions; and entering God’s realm brings joy.

The practice of “non-attachment” includes the idea of “letting go” or “emptying oneself” of worldly thoughts. A parable found only in the Gospel of Thomas expresses that perspective of “emptying oneself”:

The Father’s rule is like a woman who was carrying a jar full of meal. While she was walking along a distant road, the handle of the jar broke and the meal spilled behind

her along the road. She didn't know it; she hadn't noticed a problem. When she reached her house, she put the jar down and discovered that it was empty. (Thom. 97:1-4)

The Jesus Seminar concluded that the parable of the woman with the jar was an authentic saying of Jesus, even though it is only found in *Thomas*. The parable fits the style of Jesus, illustrated for example in the “mustard seed” parable: a giant tree as the common metaphor for divine power was reversed by representing divine power with a common shrub. In the woman and jar parable images in biblical stories are reversed. The parable reverses the imagery of the popular stories about poor widows’ jars miraculously filling up because of the words of Elijah and Elisha. Instead of jars filling up, Jesus compares God’s realm to a woman’s jar emptying.

A parable about “emptying” from the Cynic tradition provides insight into the meaning of Jesus’ parable about the woman with the jar:

“It’s like this. Some merchants ran their ship aground on a reef. Since they could not budge it in any way, they went away lamenting. So, when robbers, without understanding the problem of these men, sailed up with an empty ship, they freely loaded cargo, and at once transferred the cargo from the strange ship, unaware of the calamity as they made the transfer. For as the one ship emptied, it started to float and become seaworthy. But the ship taking on the other’s cargo quickly sank to the bottom because of the robbery of foreign goods. This can always happen to the person who has possessions. But the Cynics have stood apart from all of these things. All of us possess the whole earth.”⁶⁹

Emptying one’s life of possessions was seen by the Cynics as a way to freedom and to being “godlike.” For the Cynics, since God needs nothing, to free oneself from needs and anxieties about possessions is to become godlike. For the Cynics, only by owning nothing can one possess everything. The parable of the woman with the jar fits

perfectly with the Cynic philosophy regarding possessions, which suggests that Jesus wanted to convey a similar philosophical idea.

Jesus' philosophy of non-attachment to biological family, old traditions, and wealth extends even to non-attachment to ideas of self: *"Whoever tries to save his soul will lose it, but whoever loses his soul will save it."* (Lk. 17: 33)

Jesus spoke of losing one's *soul* (*pseuche*); traditionally the word "pseuche" in the saying has been translated as "life." In all New Testament passages translated as "soul" the Greek word is "pseuche." A different Greek word ("zoe") is usually translated as "life."

The conventional translation of the saying misleads the reader into thinking Jesus was talking about martyrdom. The conventional translation encourages a radical shift in consciousness; willingness to give up one's life would involve a radical shift from the instinctive desire to preserve one's life. The self-preservation instinct is very strong and not easily "overridden" by willing self-sacrifice. The saying is about a radical shift in consciousness, but not necessarily the shift from pursuit of self-preservation to pursuit of martyrdom.

In historical retrospect, because early Christians went through periods when many Christians were martyred, it is understandable that the church interpreted the saying as being about martyrdom. However the overall philosophy of Jesus is optimistic and non-violent; his original audience would have little reason to believe that following Jesus would result in martyrdom. Nor is there a call for martyrdom as a way to "enter God's realm" in other authentic sayings of Jesus.

The concept of martyrdom was not foreign to Jesus' original audience, but neither was it a primary theme of any of the major religious sects of the time. Neither the authentic message nor historical context of Jesus' sayings suggests that he was calling his disciples to martyrdom. It is therefore reasonable to consider alternative ways of seeing the saying about "losing and saving one's soul."

Even translating "pseuche" as "soul" probably does not convey the original meaning to the modern mind since the meaning of the word "soul" has changed over the years. The word "soul" implies much more than self-preservation instinct and willingness to sacrifice oneself; soul implies *all* aspects of perception and feelings. Originally the concept of soul referred to individual awareness or what we today usually call "consciousness." In Hebrew and Greek the "soul" is that in humans which could feel sorrow, fear or joy; in soul resided the powers to see, hear, love, "sin" or do good works. One could "say" something to the soul, indicating the "self" as distinct from "consciousness," even though in some contexts "soul" means roughly the same as "person."

What could it mean then to try to save the soul and lose it or lose the soul to save it? The word "save" means "preserve" or "hold on to." To try to preserve one's consciousness would be to hold on to one's usual ways of perceiving, feeling and acting. To "lose" one's consciousness would be to let go of habitual ways of perceiving, feeling and acting. In other words, hanging onto one's soul is resistance to changing one's consciousness; letting go of one's soul is willingness to change one's consciousness. "Letting go of consciousness" can be understood as ceasing to rely exclusively on conscious will to cope with life and opening to a "Higher Mind." Most forms of mystical

meditation seek such a “letting go,” as does the use of hypnosis to unlock “unconscious resources.” Interpreted this way, the saying encourages an attitude of openness to radical internal change. The way to “save” one’s “soul” or consciousness is to remain open to change.

Using One’s “Talents”

The English word “talent” has an etymology linking it to one of Jesus’ parables and before that to a specific measure of weight. Jesus did not use the word “talent” to mean “ability” or “special gift” but the parable of the talents is nevertheless about the use of abilities. Influenced by the parable, the modern use of the English word “talent” originated sometime in the late Middle Ages.⁷⁰

The value of a “talent” has significance for understanding the parable and there are a couple of ways to get a sense of the monetary value of the talent. In Jesus’ time the Roman talent was equal to about 71 pounds; in Palestine it was equal to about 130 pounds. In Jesus’ parable of the talents, a talent would have been about 130 pounds of silver. In the parable three servants are given talents; one receives five talents, another gets two and the last gets one. To get a sense of the value of silver today, I looked up the value of a pound of silver on the internet on July 18, 2012. The estimate given was about \$435. Hence a Palestinian talent of silver today could be worth around \$56,550; two talents could be worth \$113,100 and five talents could be worth \$282,750.

A better measure of the value of the talents in Jesus’ parables would be to estimate its value to the people who lived in that time. In Jesus’ time a silver coin was equivalent to a day’s working wage and a talent was the equivalent of about 6,000 silver coins. The silver coin was basically the minimum wage of its time. The current Federal

minimum wage is \$7.25/ hour. Hence minimum wage for 8 hours is \$58. A talent of silver in Jesus' time would mean as much to the workers of his time as \$348,000 ($58 \times 6,000 = 348,000$) would to a worker today. Two talents would be worth \$696,000 and five talents would be the equivalent of \$1,740,000.

The point is that the parable involves large amounts of money. The servant who buried his talent in effect buried somewhere between \$56,000 and \$350,000, depending upon the method you use to assess its worth. The large amount he buried in the ground helps us understand why his master gave the coins to a more competent servant. The translation of the parable which follows simply uses the amount of silver coins involved rather than attempting to estimate the values in dollars.

“You know, it’s like a man going on a trip who called his slaves and turned his valuables over to them. To the first he gave 30,000 silver coins, to the second 12,000, and to the third 6,000, to each in relation to his ability, and he left.

Immediately the one who received 30,000 silver coins went out and put the money to work; he doubled his investment. The second also doubled his money. But the third, who had received the smallest amount, went out, dug a hole, and hid his master’s silver.

After a long absence, the slaves’ master returned to settle accounts with them. The first, who had received 30,000 silver coins, came and produced an additional 30,000, with this report: ‘Master, you handed me 30,000 silver coins; as you can see, I have made you another 30,000.’ His master commended him: ‘Well done, you competent and reliable slave! You have been trustworthy in small amounts; I’ll put you in charge of large amounts.’

The one with 12,000 silver coins also came and reported: ‘Master, you handed me 12,000 silver coins; as you can see, I have made you another 12,000.’ His master commended him: ‘Well done, you competent and reliable slave! You have been trustworthy in small amounts; I’ll put you in charge of large amounts.’

The one who had received 6,000 silver coins also came and reported: ‘Master, I know that you drive a hard bargain, reaping where you didn’t sow and gathering where

you didn't scatter. Since I was afraid, I went out and buried your money in the ground. Look, here it is.' But his master replied to him: 'You incompetent and timid slave! So you knew that I reap where I didn't sow and gather where I didn't scatter, did you? Then you should have taken my money to the bankers. Then when I returned I would have received my capital with interest. So take the money away from this fellow and give it to the one who has the greatest sum.'" (Mt. 25: 14-28; cf. Lk 19: 12-24)

The moral of this parable is seemingly obvious: use your abilities to make the most of what you have or you might lose even what you have. It is reminiscent of Jesus' saying, ". . . to those who have, more will be given, and from those who don't have, even what they do have will be taken away. (Mk. 4: 25) A shorter expression of the moral of the story could be "use it or lose it."

The style of the parable reflects Jesus' style. The large amounts of money involved reflect his penchant for hyperbole, as seen for example in the large amount of debt forgiven in the parable of the "unforgiving slave" (Matthew 18: 23-34). Jesus liked to surprise his audience and there are a couple of surprising turns in the parable. The comical foolishness of a slave burying a large sum of money in the ground is surprising. The master taking the money from the "incompetent slave" is a bit of a surprise; it makes "business sense" but seems harsh. The master in the parable is not forgiving or generous as are other characters in Jesus' other parables. Jesus' listeners might have expected more compassion at the end of the parable.

It would be a mistake to think that all fathers, rich men, and masters in Jesus' parables represent God the Father. Jesus portrayed the Father as forgiving and generous (see above Chapter 4, section 1). When a character reflects the "heavenly" nature of God the Father, it is reasonable to interpret the character as illustrating the heavenly character.

When a character does not reflect Jesus' descriptions of the Father, the character must represent something else.

Jesus' parables can be thought of as sometimes being illustrations of the way the world is and sometimes as being illustrations of the realm of God. The master in the talent parable probably represents something like the way of the world. The distinction is important and not that difficult to discern. The judge who is reluctant to give a widow justice is far different from the father who embraces his prodigal son. The judge is worldly; the father is "heavenly." Or again, the master who is willing to forgive a million dollar debt is markedly different from the master who takes money from an incompetent slave. The forgiving master is like the forgiving father, heavenly; the master who takes money away is worldly.

There is a theme of "fruitfulness" or "usefulness" in Jesus' philosophy. The parable of seed sown on different kinds of soil (Mark 4: 3-8) focuses upon the relative fruitfulness of the different soils. The parable of the talents fits this theme in a different way. The theme of fruitfulness seems to be aimed at encouraging the audience to be productive, to make use of their abilities. This aspect of Jesus' philosophy could be called "motivational."

There are two other sayings which are related to the theme of "usefulness":

"Since when is the lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket or under the bed? It's put on the lampstand isn't it?" (Mk. 4: 21)

"Salt is good. But if salt loses its zing, how will it be renewed? It's no good for either earth or manure. It just gets thrown away." (Lk. 14: 34-35)

It is unlikely that Jesus intended the saying about lamps to be *just* about lamps. Light is universally understood as a symbol for knowledge and enlightenment. The

saying suggests that hiding your knowledge, abilities and resources is useless to you and everyone else, while sharing that “light” makes it useful to you and everyone else. The saying fits with Jesus’ admonition to not be timid as well as with his parable about using your “talents.”

The symbolic meaning of salt is not as universally recognized as the symbolism of light. Salt was seen as adding enjoyment to life from its use as a seasoning. Ritual food for holy feasts often included salt and food offered to divinities was enhanced with salt to make the offering pleasing to the deities. Salt was used ritually in Egyptian, Greek and Roman religions as part of offerings to deities; Judaism, Hinduism, Jainism and Shintoism also have some rituals which use salt.

Regardless of what symbolic meaning we might ascribe to salt, the saying equates goodness with usefulness. In that way, like the lamp illustration, the saying stands as another example of the idea that what makes something relatively “good” or “bad” is its *usefulness*. Taking into account the talent parable, the lamp example and the salt example, Jesus’ philosophy is salted with a definite Utilitarian flavor.

5) Jesus on Human Potential

The idea of humans being offspring of God implies a divine potential in humanity. Jesus’ ideas about the nature of that potential were implied rather than explicit. He taught that we have the potential to love universally and unconditionally, like “our Father.” His parables suggested potential for enlightened usefulness (as seen in the preceding section). Sayings attributed to Jesus suggest that through faith *anything* is possible.

There are many sayings attributed to Jesus which indicate that there is “light” within the children of God (human beings in general). The Jesus Seminar scholars do not consider the “light” sayings as original to Jesus, for a variety of reasons. The only saying involving light that the scholars agreed was authentic is the saying about putting a lamp on a lampstand.

However there is good reason to believe that Jesus made some other references to “inner light” even if we cannot be certain about the form of the sayings. In addition to the saying about the lamp discussed in the previous section, there are at least 12 other sayings about inner light ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, John and Thomas:

“You are the light of the world.” (Matt. 5: 14)

“Let your light shine before others.” (Matt. 5: 16)

“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light.” (Matt 6: 22 and Luke 11: 34)

“He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.” (Jesus referring to John the Baptist, John 5: 35)

“I am the light of the world.” (Jesus referring to himself, John 8: 12 and John 9: 5)

“While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” (John 12: 36)

“I have come as light into the world.” (John 12: 46)

“When you are in the light, what will you do?” (Thomas 11: 3)

“There is light within a person of light, and it shines on the whole world.”

(Thomas 24: 3)

“If they say to you, ‘Where have you come from?’ say to them, ‘We have come from the light, from the place where the light came into being by itself, established itself, and appeared in their image.’” (Thomas 50: 1)

“If one is whole, one will be filled with light, but if one is divided, one will be filled with darkness.” (Thomas 61: 5)

“I am the light that is over all things.” (Thomas 77: 1)

“Images are visible to people, but the light within them is hidden in the image of the Father’s light.” (Thomas 83: 1, 2)

Of the above sayings, the saying *“The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; but if it is not healthy, your body is full of darkness”* (Luke 11: 34) is the most likely to be an authentic saying of Jesus. The saying in *Matthew* and *Luke* is from “*Q*.” *Thomas* has a similar saying (61:5), the only differences being *Thomas*’ version does not include “the eye is the lamp of the body” and speaks in terms of being “whole” or “divided” rather than in terms of “healthy/ not healthy eye.” The double attestation of “*Q*” and *Thomas* indicates that some version of the saying was very early and could have originated with Jesus.

The saying about the eye has some markers of Jesus’ style. Jesus typically used concrete imagery and the passage refers to the eye, which is a concrete image; the “whole” and “divided” of *Thomas* is abstract and probably is a modification for the purpose of interpretation. Modification for interpretation is typical of Gospel authors, as for example when *Matthew* added the phrase “in spirit” to the beatitude “blessed are the

poor,” which was retained in the original form by Luke. Also Jesus generally spoke figuratively rather than literally. The saying about a “healthy eye” could easily be seen as figurative, since a “body full of light” is not easily understood literally. “Eye” could represent the way you “see” and “look at” things *mentally*. In that case, the saying is about mentally “seeing” things in “healthy” or “unhealthy” ways.

The question is: what could be the meanings of “a body full of light” and “a body full of darkness”?

Perhaps some of the sayings in *Thomas* shed light on the meaning of the “healthy/unhealthy eye” saying. Either Jesus or some of his early followers believed that “*we have come from the light, from the place where the light came into being by itself.*” In other words, our true being is self-existent divine “light.” The notion that we are really “beings of light” has an interesting parallel in the modern scientific understanding. From a scientific viewpoint there is a sense in which we are literally made of light. Our bodies are potentially light for if our bodies were accelerated to the speed of light, they would become pure energy and light, according to the formula $E = mc^2$.

Jesus or early followers believed that there is “light” behind visible images; that inner light is “hidden” in “the image of the Father’s light.” The image of the Father’s light can be understood as humanity itself, since the creation story in Genesis established the belief that humanity is made in the image and likeness of God. These statements from *Thomas* are ontological affirmations: we come from the light of God, we are the image of that light, and the light that illuminates the visible world is within us. “Light” in these passages seems to mean something like “divine conscious being.”

The light sayings can be understood as being about divine potential in humanity.

They can be interpreted as meaning:

God is the Source of Light: knowledge, enlightenment, talents, consciousness and being itself.

Humanity is the “image and likeness” of that light.

How we mentally look at things (represented by the “eye”) determines our health (the light or darkness in our bodies).

“You are the light. Let your light shine.” Use your talents and they will increase. Share your wisdom and knowledge. Then what you have within you will be useful to you and useful to others. Then you will prosper and be healthy – full of light.

Jesus may very well have, on one or more occasions, told people that he was “light” and told them that they were light. There are other possible interpretations of the light sayings, but this interpretation is, I think, at least as useful as salt.

Jesus’ sayings also affirm the human potential to experience a divine joy. In fact, joy seems to be the primary potential he explicitly associates with his primary objective of entering God’s realm. There are five authentic sayings which speak of finding the joy of God’s realm. These sayings have typically been interpreted as being about “saving souls” because Christianity has placed so much emphasis on proselytizing. However, we have seen that Jesus had a philosophy which emphasized attaining a consciousness of love, wisdom, and God’s presence. Since Jesus’ concept of entering God’s realm was about consciousness, the sayings about finding joy are better interpreted as being about finding that consciousness than as being about “saving souls.”

“What do you think of this? If someone has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders off, won’t that person leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go look for the one

that wandered off? And if he should find it, you can bet he'll rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn't wander off.” (Mt. 18: 12-13)

“Is there any woman with ten silver coins, who if she loses one, wouldn't light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? When she finds it, she invites her friends and neighbors over and says, ‘Celebrate with me, because I have found the silver coin I had lost.’” (Lk. 15: 8-9)

One can understand how, with their emphasis on evangelism, early Christians saw the above to parables as being about saving lost souls. On the other hand coins and sheep can be interpreted in ways other than as signifying “lost souls.” The people in the story were searching for possessions they had lost. There is no reasonable sense in which a “lost soul” can be seen as the rightful *possession* that previously *belonged* to an evangelist or a church. If one says the shepherd and the woman represent “God” and God rejoices over lost souls who are found, there is the problem of the implication that the omniscient God can somehow lose track of “His” possessions.

Viewed without the evangelical spectacles of the later church, a simpler and more obvious interpretation of the man and woman in the parables is that they represent human beings in general. Human beings lose things, search for what they have lost, and rejoice when they find what they've lost. This interpretation also fits well with Jesus' admonition to seek and his affirmation that those who seek will find.

Then the question becomes: what is it that we lose, search for, find and rejoice in finding? It is not unreasonable to suppose that Jesus meant the lost sheep and coin to represent something that we once had and can have again, something that will bring great joy to us when we recover it. That supposition opens the sayings to a wide variety of

interpretations, which as we have seen is typical of his sayings. The something lost could be innocence, the “child mind,” “buried talents,” faith, self-control, happiness or a host of other elements of consciousness or even “God’s realm” itself. The value in the ambiguity is that individuals can interpret the saying in terms of reflection upon their own experience and conditions. Such reflection can lead to therapeutic insight. Finding what we have “lost” can infuse renewed joy into our lives.

The connection of joy to finding God’s realm within us and “spread out on the earth” is explicit in the following parable:

“Heaven’s realm is like treasure hidden in a field: when someone finds it, that person covers it up again, and out of sheer joy goes and sells every last possession and buys that field.” (Matt 13: 44)

In this analogy, “heaven’s realm” is hidden and can be “accidentally” found when one goes “digging.” Digging how and where? In the context of philosophical thinking of Jesus’ time, one should “dig” into one’s own mind for self-knowledge. As a result of self-exploration one could “accidentally” discover hidden potential or attain a mystical experience. Discovery of self-knowledge was equated with enlightenment not only in Greek philosophy but also in Chinese and Indian philosophy. As we have seen, Jesus indicated the importance of self-knowledge (Chapter 4, section 4). If the realm of God is within you, you could discover it by searching within yourself.

Thomas’ Gospel contains a variation on the “hidden treasure” parable:

“The Father’s realm is like a person who had a treasure hidden in his field but did not know it. And when he died he left it to his son. The son did not know about it either. He took over the field and sold it. The buyer went plowing, discovered the treasure, and began to lend money at interest to whomever he wished.” (Thomas 109: 1-3)

This extended account of the parable seems to imply that previous generations had the “treasure” within them but did not know it. That notion of “unknowing” generations is another idea that Jesus might have expressed. The ending of Thomas’ version might be an extension of the original parable to emphasize the “profit” of finding the Father’s realm. It does not include the response of joy that is found in Matthew’s version. The versions found in Matthew and Thomas have in common that God’s realm is a hidden treasure to be found by digging.

Another theme of the buried treasure parable in *Matthew* is that the treasure is worth more than all of the finder’s worldly possessions; he sells all he owns to get the treasure. The ideas of the great value of “heaven’s realm” and of finding the realm are also found in the parable of “the pearl of great price”:

“Again, Heaven’s realm is like some trader looking for beautiful pearls. When that merchant finds one priceless pearl, he sells everything he owns and buys it.” (Matt 13: 45-46)

The potential to heal by spiritual means was a prominent feature in the New Testament tradition about Jesus and his disciples. Assuming that his reputation as a healer has a historical basis, the potential to be healed by spiritual means and to be a spiritual healer may be considered other aspects of human potential. Jesus did not teach directly about healing, but his philosophy contains therapeutic elements. It was not a philosophy about healing but a philosophy that had healing effects. It may be that his personality and “presence” inspired people with belief, affecting a kind of “placebo”

effect. To the extent that a person's beliefs and attitudes generate personality and presence, Jesus' philosophy is the key to understanding his healing effects.

(6) What Jesus Said about Himself

According to the synoptic Gospels, the Q Gospel and the Gospel of Thomas, Jesus rarely made self-referential statements. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus spoke incessantly about himself and referred to himself as mediator between God and humanity. The most probable reason for the startling difference between John and the rest of the Gospels is that John had a different agenda than the other Gospels. John, the last of the Gospels to be written, is a Gospel expressing what the church came to believe about Jesus. The other Gospels, at least in part, were attempts to express what people remembered of Jesus' sayings. The synoptic Gospels had the additional agendas of creating a narrative of Jesus' life and expressing what disciples believed was the meaning of his death.

Because the Gospel of John is now regarded by most scholars as being a development of church "Christology," the unique sayings attributed to Jesus found in John are regarded as having little or no value for discerning what the historical Jesus actually said. Consequently, John probably doesn't tell us much, if anything, about what Jesus said about himself.

There are a few sayings in the other Gospels which are probably authentic and which are self-referential. From these sayings we may be able to gain some insight regarding how Jesus saw himself.

"I have cast fire upon the world, and look, I'm guarding it until it blazes."
(Thom. 10: 1)

Jesus saw himself as an agent of change. “Setting the world on fire” is today a common idiom meaning “having a great transformational impact on the world.” As fire has long been an archetypal representation of change and was used by the “process” philosopher Heraclitus as a symbol of the changing nature of the world, it is likely that Jesus was using “fire” in the saying with the same figurative meaning. Jesus’ philosophy was unconventional and countercultural, no doubt intentionally so and aimed at “setting the world on fire.”

“I was watching Satan fall like lightning from heaven.” (Lk. 10: 18)

This saying is found only in Luke, but the Jesus Seminar scholars believed it was an authentic saying of Jesus. Since Jesus habitually spoke in figurative and non-literal ways, we should be cautious about taking this saying as proving that Jesus “believed in Satan” in a literal and ontological way. That is especially true since this is the only authentic saying that refers to “Satan” and the saying is found only in one Gospel. The saying sounds like a comment about something Jesus was doing: “I was watching.” The language suggests that Jesus was having a vision and then afterward told some disciples what the vision was. The saying suggests that Jesus occasionally had vivid subjective visions, possible while in a trance state. In early church writings there are several references to another saying which sounds like a description of a subjective vision. Even though that saying is not included in the canonical Gospels or in the Jesus Seminar “canon,” it is relevant to the discussion of Jesus having subjective visions. The saying was quoted by Origen and Jerome:

“Just now my mother, the holy spirit, took me by one of my hairs and carried me to Tabor, the great mountain.”⁷¹

Origen and Jerome claimed that this saying of Jesus was recorded in a lost book titled “The Gospel according to the Hebrews.” Some early Christians thought of the “holy spirit” as “mother,” a feminine aspect of God. This saying indicates that Jesus may have likewise. On the other hand, there are no other authentic sayings that make reference to “the holy spirit” so we do not know if Jesus used that terminology. The two sayings, taken together, offer a tantalizing glimpse of a possibility that Jesus occasionally had visions. Unfortunately, it is only a glimpse of a possibility rather than compelling proof.

Jesus may have quoted the proverb “*Those in good health don’t need a doctor.*” (Mk. 2: 17). If so, it indicates that he saw himself as a “doctor,” a healer.

Jesus may have believed that his disciples represented him and that he was “sent by God” in some sense. While the Jesus Seminar did not accept the following quote as authentic, it is one of several from different sources which suggest Jesus’ view of having a divine mission:

“The one who accepts you accepts me; and the one who accepts me accepts the one who sent me.” (Mt. 10: 40)

Mark contains a similar saying: “*Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.*” (Mark 9: 37)

Luke sounds the same theme, but again in different wording: “*Whoever listens to you listens to me; whoever rejects you rejects me; but whoever rejects me rejects him who sent me.*” (Luke 10: 16)

A saying in *John* is fairly close in wording to Matthew's version: "*Whoever accepts anyone I send accepts me; and whoever accepts me accepts the one who sent me.*" (*John 13: 20*)

The presence of the same basic idea attributed to Jesus in all four canonical Gospels suggests a very early and widespread tradition. The tradition may have originated with Jesus, but just exactly what he said is obscured by the different wordings in the Gospels. Based not only upon these sayings but also upon the fact that Jesus traveled around delivering a message and had a following of enthusiastic disciples, I think it is highly probable that Jesus saw himself as having a divine mission and encouraged his disciples to participate in that mission.

Christianity has emphasized that Jesus came to sacrifice his life to pay for our sins and to give eternal life to those who believed in him. Yet the historical Jesus does not appear to have said anything about those ideas; they seem to be later interpretations of his mission. As has been shown in this paper, Jesus' sayings can be understood as expressing a philosophy including ontological, cosmological and ethical concepts as well as strategies for provoking reflection and self-knowledge. I'll have more to say in a later section about Jesus as a philosopher in the context of the philosophies of his era.

Even though "eternal life" does not appear to have been a major theme of Jesus' philosophy, he may have made reference to the possibility of "not tasting death." This idea was discussed in the beginning of the section on "Catalytic Aphorisms." Jesus may have seen himself as one who had transcended fear of death and as having the ability to convey that transcendence to others through his sayings. The idea of "not tasting death" also implies the belief that death is an illusion; that life and consciousness continue

beyond the appearance of dying. After all, if a person does not experience death, wouldn't that mean that the person only *seems to others* to be "dead" and that the person continues in a consciousness of being alive?

Jesus may have seen himself as "possessing" all things in some way:

"My Father has turned everything over to me." (Mt. 11: 27 - also see Lk. 10: 21; John 3: 35; Thom. 61: 3)

The best way to understand his perspective is to think of his saying that God's realm (the whole universe) belongs to the poor (*"blessed are you poor, for yours is God's realm"*). Jesus may well have had the same mentality as the Cynics, who eschewed possessions and at the same time thought of themselves as possessing all things. The logic of the Cynics is compatible with Jesus' philosophy: we are children of God; all things in the universe belong to God; as children of God we are heirs to all that God has; therefore, we possess all things. The Cynics and Jesus thought of personal possessions as burdensome and yet also thought of all things belonging to them as children of God. This seems to be a paradoxical position; it requires a mystical perspective to make sense.

Finally, Jesus may have seen himself as someone who had the intention of helping to unify humanity and of helping people realize their unity with God. His emphasis on inclusive love and entering God's realm attest to that self-image. Luke and Thomas both tell a story of someone asking Jesus to settle a dispute. In *Luke* Jesus responds by asking, "Who made me a judge?" (*Lk. 12: 14*) In *Thomas*, Jesus responds to the request with an ironically haunting question: "*Mister, who made me a divider?*" (*Thom. 72:2*) The irony of course is that Jesus' followers eventually became divided over him into many factions,

sometimes bitterly and with tragic consequences. Since Luke and Thomas independently tell the same story, it may reflect a very early memory of Jesus.

It is my hope that the day will come when, instead of using the religion *about* Jesus as an instrument of division, humanity will use the philosophy *of* Jesus as an instrument for unity. It is my hope that through the philosophy of Jesus people will discover their own innate God-like capacity for compassion, forgiveness, understanding, and healing. It is my hope that the day will come when people will stop waiting and looking to the sky for “Judgment Day,” and instead see that God’s realm is within us and all around us.

CONCLUSION: JESUS – THERAPIST AND PHILOSOPHER

Jesus the Therapist

The only clues we have to what lies in any individual’s consciousness are that individual’s words and behavior. If we would understand the impact Jesus had on world culture, we must understand his consciousness. The primary practical reason to focus on his philosophy is to understand his consciousness.

By understanding Jesus’ consciousness we may learn something about fuller expression of human potential and new ways to maintain physical health and heal illness. Since behind all words and actions there is causation in consciousness, it must be the case that behind his touch and words Jesus had *a state of consciousness* from which healing flowed in some way.

Consciousness is understood to be primary in the modern “metaphysical movements” such as Unity, Religious Science and Christian Science; touch and even the spoken word are thought to be supplementary and perhaps even unnecessary. There is

ample anecdotal evidence of healing through prayer in those metaphysical movements to support their theory. William James provided such anecdotes in his classic work *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. There are also modern scientific studies indicating that silent prayer has some therapeutic effect.⁷² The metaphysical movements may provide important clues for understanding the healing consciousness of the historical Jesus.

Examination of the words of the historical Jesus reveals therapeutic elements in his philosophy. He used illustrations from nature to urge his listeners to let go of worry; letting go of worry relieves stress, which is one of the leading causes of illness. His sense of humor may also have helped his listeners release stress. His parables and aphorisms may have induced altered states of consciousness which, like the hypnotherapy of Milton Erickson, may have helped his followers access healing. Jesus' radical optimism may have been adopted by his followers to some therapeutic effect. He inspired faith in his followers which most likely affected psychosomatic healing, as placebos do today. Whatever the accurate explanations may be, it is a historical fact that Jesus' *consciousness* affected his contemporaries in such a way as to create his *reputation* as a great spiritual healer.

Beyond understanding his healing and transformational impact on his contemporaries, it may be that reflection upon the philosophy of Jesus can lead us to a better self-understanding, ways to harmonize society, and even insight into the way of universe works.

Jesus the Philosopher

Throughout its history, philosophy has interacted with religion because some philosophers were religious while other philosophers sought to prove that religion is irrational. Jesus of Nazareth was religious in the sense that he believed in God and morality, but what has not been widely recognized is that he was also philosophical. His philosophy is similar at certain points to some philosophies of his era and also can be differentiated from those philosophies. In this section the philosophy of Jesus will be compared to the Western philosophies of the Cynics, Stoics and Pythagoreans, all of which were contemporary with Jesus, and with the Chinese philosophies of Taoism and Moism.

Classifying Jesus as a philosopher does not imply a complete characterization of him, but his historical place as a philosopher has been almost entirely neglected. He can also be accurately categorized as a “mystic” and “healer.” The categories of “philosopher,” “mystic” and “healer” are not mutually exclusive. Both philosophers and mystics devote themselves to quests for truth and insight through contemplation of ideas. Many philosophers have also been mystics, e.g. Pythagoras (probably), Plotinus (undoubtedly), St. Augustine of Hippo and Ralph Waldo Emerson. The earliest philosophers of India were all mystics. Pythagoras and Empedocles are two philosopher-mystics who also had reputations as healers.

Within the Judaism contemporary with Jesus, some Jews saw their religion as philosophical.

“The Jews had for a great while three sects of philosophy peculiar to themselves; the sect of the Essenes, and the sect of the Sadducees, and the third sort of opinions was that of those called Pharisees.” – Flavius Josephus⁷³

Flavius Josephus was a first century C.E. Galilean Jew who wrote extensively on the history of the Judaism. He referred to the different sects of Judaism as “philosophies” which indicates that religion and philosophy were not as strictly differentiated in the first century as they are today.

Another first century Jew, Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (20 BCE – 50 CE), considered himself a philosopher and also thought of the different sects of Judaism as being “philosophies.” In fact, he thought of Moses as being a philosopher: “Moses, who had early reached the very summits of philosophy.”⁷⁴ Philo had some familiarity with Pythagorean and other Greek philosophies as well as with Jewish “philosophies.” Philo’s approach to interpreting scriptures was Pythagorean and Platonic. When commenting on the 10 Commandments, Philo wrote an extended explanation of why there were *ten* commandments using Pythagorean numerology:

“. . . one must at once admire the number, inasmuch as they are completed in the perfect number of the decade, which contains every variety of number, both those which are even, and those which are odd, and those which are even-odd. . . . it comprehends likewise all the proportions It also contains the harmonic proportion . . . the visible peculiar properties of the triangles, and squares, and other polygonal figures.”⁷⁵

Philo even had some acquaintance with Persian Magi and Indian philosophers, whom he referred to as “gymnosophists.”

That fact that first century Jewish intellectuals thought of Judaism as one of the philosophies of their time indicates that the term “philosopher” would have been applied in that time to any person advocating beliefs about God, nature, and how people ought to

live. According to the *Gospel of Thomas* when Jesus asked his disciples to tell him what he was like one disciple replied: “You are like a wise philosopher.”⁷⁶

The Cynic Jesus

At some point Antisthenes (ca. 445-365 BCE), a disciple of Socrates, concluded that human culture was unnatural: a contrivance, relative to societies and without absolute truth or value. He came to believe that nature provides an ethical norm that is in most respects superior to human values. In particular he considered social restraints on individual freedom and the human pursuit of wealth to be “unnatural” and a major cause of human unhappiness. Discussing Antisthenes perspective on wealth, a modern philosopher wrote: “Antisthenes defends the claim that, although he is penniless, he prides himself on his wealth. True wealth and poverty, he argues, are possessed in people’s souls.”⁷⁷

Antisthenes is considered the first Cynic by some and by others a forerunner of the Cynics. Diogenes of Sinope lived in the same era and location as Antisthenes and is generally regarded as either the iconic model for the Cynic philosophy or the first true Cynic. Here I shall not be concerned with the controversy about who was the first Cynic, but shall consider both philosophers to be representative of the Cynic philosophy. I shall also refer at a couple of points to later Cynics. The Cynic philosophy began in the era of Antisthenes and Diogenes and continued to be adopted and practiced for nearly a thousand years.

Some modern New Testament scholars have speculated that Jesus of Nazareth was strongly influenced by the Cynics and may even be considered a Jewish Cynic.⁷⁸

There are in fact significant indications that Jesus was similar to the Cynics in “life-style”

and thought. I do not consider calling Jesus a “Jewish Cynic” to be quite accurate for two reasons: (1) Cynics are not generally characterized by their religion but by their place of birth or action; under that convention it would be more consistent to call Jesus a “Galilean Cynic”; (2) while Jesus’ philosophy may have more in common with the Cynic philosophy than with others, there are important distinctions between his philosophy and that of the Cynics. Even “Galilean Cynic” would not be an entirely accurate label for Jesus as philosopher.

One expert on the Cynic philosophy characterized Diogenes’ main ideas as follows:

“The central ideas of Diogenes’ Cynicism are: (1) nature provides an ethical norm observable in animals and inferable by cross-cultural comparisons; (2) since contemporary Greek society (and by implication any existing society) is at odds with nature, its most fundamental values (e.g. religion, politics, ethics, etc.) are not only false but counterproductive; (3) human beings can realize their nature and, hence, their happiness only by engaging in a rigorous discipline (*askēsis*) of corporeal training and exemplary acts meant to prepare them for the actual conditions of human life – all the ills that mortal flesh is heir to; (4) the goal of Cynic ‘discipline’ (*askēsis*) is to promote the central attributes of a happy life, freedom and self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*); (5) while Cynic freedom is ‘negative’ . . . – ‘freedom from’ rather than ‘freedom to’ – it is also active, as expressed in the metaphor of ‘defacing’ tradition (by parody and satire) and in provocative acts of free speech meant to subvert existing authorities (e.g. Plato, Alexander the Great, et al.).”⁷⁹

With regard to the list of Diogenes’ central ideas there are points of similarity with Jesus. On point (1), Jesus pointed to nature as a model for human behavior, specifically regarding human means of food and clothing production.⁸⁰ On point (2),

Jesus felt free to critique some the practices of the Jewish religion, for example he was indifferent to kosher rules and Sabbath practices.⁸¹ On the other hand it would not be accurate to characterize Jesus as being opposed to all fundamental religious values. On point (3), Jesus clearly considered “entering” or “finding” “God’s Kingdom” to be an occasion of great happiness, as indicated in the parables of found treasure, found pearl of great price, found lost coin, et al. The role of self-discipline is primarily indicated in his instructions to his disciples for their travels, which will be discussed below. On (4), Jesus’ freedom to travel wherever he chose, violate customs and speak his views regardless of conventions is similar to the freedom advocated by the Cynics. His emphasis on joy has already been noted in connection with point (3). His self-sufficiency is indicated by the counter-cultural nature of his message and behavior as well as his independence from religious, familial and political entanglements. On point (5), Jesus also used parody and provocation in his speech.⁸²

Jesus’ “lifestyle” and ways of self-expression are also comparable to the Cynic lifestyle and ways of self-expression. The Cynics were easily recognizable in the context of their culture by what they possessed as well as by their behavior. Their possessions consisted of a rough cloak, a knapsack (also sometimes called a “bag,” “wallet” or “purse”), and a staff. Cynics were “homeless beggars” and evangelizing preachers. The minimalism of their possessions and their beggar/preacher lifestyle were important elements of their “*askēsis*”; intentionally using hardship to develop state of happiness independent of external social and natural conditions.

The homelessness lifestyle of the Cynics and of Jesus is reflected in the following quotations:

“Diogenes liked to proclaim himself, ‘Without a city, without a home, bereft of fatherland,

A beggar and a vagabond, living from day to day.’”⁸³

Jesus said, *“Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the son of man has no place to lay his head.”⁸⁴*

According to the Gospels, Jesus sent out disciples with instructions even more minimalist in terms of “luggage” than the customary Cynic possessions. The tradition reflected in Mark’s Gospel has Jesus instructing his disciples: *“Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt.”⁸⁵* This description reflects familiarity with the Cynic “uniform,” referring specifically to the staff, knapsack (bag), sandals, and clothing. The Cynics carried a bag; Jesus instructs his disciples to be even less burdened on that point. He has them carry the Cynic staff and not carry an extra shirt (Cynics carried no extra clothing); on these points his disciples would resemble the Cynics. The only point on which Jesus allows his disciples to be more “burdened” than the Cynics is by allowing them to wear sandals. The upshot of the instructions may be stated as “be *like* the Cynics, but not *exactly* like them.”

There were other similar traditions regarding what Jesus told his disciples which is reported in Matthew and Luke’s Gospels. The instructions in Matthew and Luke make reference to the well known elements of the Cynic uniform but again with differences. In Matthew, Jesus instructs the disciples to take “no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep.”⁸⁶ In Luke, Jesus says, “Take nothing for the journey – no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt.”⁸⁷ Both these

traditions emphasize the difference from the Cynics. The emphasis on difference suggests that at some point early on Jesus and his followers were similar enough to the Cynics that they needed to emphasize their difference by means of an even more rigorous rejection of possessions than was practiced by the Cynics.

The movement started by Jesus became a mass movement cutting across lines of nationality, gender, and ethnicity. The same was true of the Cynic philosophy which began hundreds of years before Christianity. “Cynicism was unique among classical intellectual traditions in becoming something like a ‘mass movement.’”⁸⁸

*“But the appeal of the Cynic ideology was too contagious to contain and control, as we see if we consider how disparate were the positions, both social and intellectual of those who took a serious interest in it: Philo Judaeus, the early Christians, Roman aristocrats . . . satirists, Greek sophists, imperial educators and moralists, the Church Fathers . . . a pious emperor . . . and the urban poor, both free and slaves.”*⁸⁹

Notice that the list of those interested in the Cynic philosophy includes early Christians and Church Fathers; the interest was partly a result of the similarities between the original activities of the Cynics and of Jesus and his disciples.

The similarity of ideas and expression can be clearly seen by comparing a parable of Jesus found in the Gospel of Thomas⁹⁰ with a parable found in Cynic epistles. I’ve already referred to these parables in the section on “non-attachment,” but I repeat them here for emphasis and as a reminder to the reader.

The Jesus parable:

*“The Father’s kingdom is like a woman who was carrying a jar full of meal. While she was walking along a distant road, the handle of the jar broke and the meal spilled behind her along the road. She didn’t know it; she hadn’t noticed a problem. When she reached her house, she put the jar down and discovered that it was empty.”*⁹¹

The Cynic parable:

“It’s like this. Some merchants ran their ship aground on a reef. Since they could not budge it in any way, they went away lamenting. So, when robbers, without understanding the problem of these men, sailed up with an empty ship, they freely loaded cargo, and at once transferred the cargo from the strange ship, unaware of the calamity as they made the transfer. For as the one ship emptied, it started to float and become seaworthy. But the ship taking on the other’s cargo quickly sank to the bottom because of the robbery of foreign goods. This can always happen to the person who has possessions. But the Cynics have stood apart from all of these things. All of us possess the whole earth.”⁹²

In both cases a surprising parable is used to express the philosophy; both parables emphasize the process of “emptying” as key to the respective philosophies. Recall that Jesus said the kingdom of God belongs to the poor (the Greek word essentially means “beggars”) and we find a paradox similar to the claim at the end of the Cynic parable: “the Cynics have stood apart from all of these things (possessions). All of us possess the whole earth.”

A man named Crates was a wealthy landowner who became a Cynic. He sold all his land and distributed the proceeds to fellow citizens.⁹³ Crates said: “I don’t have one country as my refuge, nor a single roof, but every land has a city and house ready to entertain me.”⁹⁴ Note the striking parallel to a saying attributed to Jesus: “No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields . . .”⁹⁵

By referring to God as “your Father” and “the Father” Jesus implied a divinity in humanity. That idea of a divine humanity was found among the Cynics long before Jesus.

The Cynic self-image as found in ancient texts can be summarized in these terms: “The gods, who are man’s benefactors, provide a paradigm for Cynic self-sufficiency; the Cynic himself is godlike, friend of the gods, their messenger, their agent, and, in being *agathos daimōn* (‘tutelary god,’ ‘guardian angel’), he is himself virtually divine.”⁹⁶

There is here a similarity and a difference. Jesus’ way of speaking of the Father implied that we are already divine in some sense; the Cynic way implied that one could *become* divine by adopting the Cynic philosophy. Christians fairly quickly shifted from the inherent divinity implied by Jesus to a divinity attained by “adoption” through joining the Christian movement.

Jesus’ idea of his followers as God’s children, sharing all things in common and in some mystical sense “owning” God’s kingdom finds a parallel in a syllogism of Diogenes: “Everything belongs to the gods. Wise men are the friends of the gods. The goods of friends are held in common. Therefore everything belongs to the wise.”⁹⁷ Jesus spoke of God’s kingdom as already present, inside and outside, spread out on the earth; in other words the *cosmos* is governed by God. Diogenes said: “The only good government is that in the cosmos.”⁹⁸

There are two important differences between Jesus’ philosophy and the Cynic philosophy: (1) Jesus’ philosophy adds emphasis on community to the rugged self-sufficiency of the Cynic philosophy and (2) Jesus’ philosophy includes a theological-metaphysical-ethical dimension which is for the most part absent from the Cynic

philosophy. The community ideas present in Jesus' teachings are directly related to the theological-metaphysical-ethical dimension. I hyphenate "theological-metaphysical-ethical" because the three categories are intimately interwoven in Jesus' philosophy. With respect to the theological-metaphysical-ethical dimension, Jesus' philosophy is more like the Stoicism of his era. The community ideas in Jesus' philosophy have some similarity to the Pythagorean philosophy. In addition, Pythagoras used a strategy similar to one used by Jesus to provoke contemplation in his disciples and Pythagoras had a reputation as healer and wonder-worker very much like that of Jesus.

The Stoic Jesus

The founder of Stoicism was Zeno, a Phoenician philosopher. Zeno and later Stoics were strongly influenced by the Cynics. Bertrand Russell noted regarding Zeno that "the views of the Cynics were more congenial to him than those of any other school, but he was something of an eclectic."⁹⁹

The similarities between Jesus' philosophy and Stoicism are immediately apparent in Russell's description of views of Epictetus, a Stoic philosopher nearly contemporary with Jesus. According to Russell, Epictetus (ca. 60-100 CE) held that "God is the father of men, and we are all brothers,"¹⁰⁰ and that we should love our enemies.¹⁰¹ Because Christianity is commonplace today, those ideas seem commonplace to us. However when Jesus and the Stoics were pronouncing the Fatherhood of God and the related ethical idea loving one's enemies, those ideas did not reflect the prevailing consciousness.

Jesus' metaphysics consisted primarily of these ideas: (1) God's love and power are universal, (2) God's rule of nature operates by a principle and process of expansion,

(3) God's rule is also characterized by bountiful benevolence, (4) there is a law of reciprocity operative in human affairs, and (5) as children of God we freely determine our experience by our use of the law of reciprocity. The ethical values he advocated are directly related to the consequences of the law of reciprocity: forgive and you will be forgiven, love your enemies, be "good Samaritans" (as we now generally think of the moral of the parable), etc.

While Jesus apparently did not generally speak of justice, which was the primary value in Judaism and Greek philosophies, his sayings and parables express a concept of justice. The parables sometimes juxtapose the value of justice/ fairness with the value of forms of benevolence (another primary value of the ancient world). For example, he told a story about a vineyard owner who paid a day's wage to all the workers, no matter if they worked all day or only an hour. The "fair" response of the owner would have been to pay those who worked shorter hours less than those who worked the full day. Those who worked the full day objected to the owner's generosity, leaving the listener with the question: which is better, fairness or generosity? The Prodigal Son parable raises basically the same question.

The Stoic philosophy expressed ideas very similar to those in Jesus' philosophy. Bertrand Russell's description of Stoic ideas reveals some of those similarities:

"The course of nature . . . was ordained by a Lawgiver who was also a beneficent Providence."¹⁰²

"God is not separate from the world; He is the soul of the world, and each of us contains a part of the Divine Fire."¹⁰³

"As a principle, the Stoics preached universal love."¹⁰⁴

As is typical in Greek philosophy, the Stoics believed the world was ruled by Law or Reason. They added that Law, Right Reason, Zeus, Mind, Destiny, and God are one and the same thing.¹⁰⁵ A universe ruled by general laws is a metaphysical concept. Identifying the ruling law or reason with God is a theological concept. The ethical ideas of both Jesus and the Stoics are directly related to the theological concept of imitating the nature of God and the metaphysical concept of a universe ruled by law.

Even a famous Stoic prayer is similar to the way of prayer taught by Jesus. The Stoic philosopher Cleanthes devised this prayer: “Lead me, O Zeus, and thou, O Destiny, lead thou me on. To whatsoever task thou sendest me, lead thou me on.”¹⁰⁶ The spirit of the prayer is practically the same as the prayer of Jesus: “Father . . . your kingdom come, your will be done.” These prayers do not ask for favors for self, family, or nation; they affirm a willingness to “flow with” the will of God, whatever that might be.

One significant difference between Jesus and the Stoics is that the Stoics were more intellectually oriented; they tried to solve classic philosophical problems such as: is the universe deterministic or do we have freedom? If God is good and all-powerful, from whence is evil? What is the substance of things? Jesus did not formulate rigorous rational answers to such questions; he was more concerned with how best to live and proclaiming the “hidden treasure” of the presence of God within humanity and nature.

Philosophically, Jesus seems a hybrid of Cynicism and Stoicism. He lived and frequently talked like a Cynic. His theology, metaphysics and ethics are similar to the Stoic philosophy. He was more “community oriented” than the Cynics; he had less to say about metaphysics than the Stoics.

Before moving on to comparison of Jesus' philosophy with the Pythagorean philosophy, I should mention that there are hints in Jesus' philosophy for thinking about the type of philosophical questions with which the Stoics were concerned.

Greek philosophers' speculation about the substance of the universe produced a wide range of proposals: water, air, earth, mind, number, fire, etc. As far as is known, Jesus never proposed a theory of substance. On the other hand, one of his favorite metaphors for the universe (God's kingdom) was seed and earth: the mustard seed; seed sown in different kinds of soil; the seed that unfolds first the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. The metaphors involve potential "packed" into a point (the seed), a process which forms something larger and very different from the original seed, and a field in which the seeds are buried. These metaphors are apt for "process metaphysics" as advocated by Heraclitus (fl. 500 BCE) and Alfred North Whitehead and the process philosophers who followed him.

Regarding the question of "whence evil?" one would think this would be an important issue for Jesus considering his idea of a universe ruled by a benevolent Father, but he did not directly address it. His sayings indicate that he was aware that people can be greedy, unforgiving, dishonest and violent; but he offered no explanation for such behavior. His sayings seem to assume that people can choose their own thoughts and behaviors, so perhaps he simply assumed humans have free will and their choices are the cause of good or ill. He may have been a dualist, with belief in an "evil power," but there is no compelling evidence for ascribing that view to him. Another possibility is that he believed, as one saying attributed to him states, that God alone (presumably including "God's government" of the universe) is good. If that is the case, then perhaps he also

thought of “good and evil” in the human context as merely relative concepts and consequently not posing a problem of evil in any absolute sense. That he gave no definitive answer is clear from the history of Christian thought, in which a wide range of theories have been proposed regarding “the problem of evil.”

The philosophy of Jesus was clearly more concerned with helping people flourish and find joy than with answering deep philosophical questions. His reputation as a healer reflects his convictions regarding divinity in humanity, the prodigious benevolence of God, and his conviction that as children of God we can have whatever we ask for. Some of his practices and methods are reminiscent of a philosopher who also had a reputation as a healer: Pythagoras (*fl.* 570 BCE).

The Pythagorean Jesus

The Pythagorean philosophy has been summarized in the following terms:

“Man realizes the divine by knowing the universal and divine principles which constitute the cosmos To know the cosmos is to seek and know the divine element within, and one must become divine and harmonized since only like can know like.”¹⁰⁷

I may as well note at the outset that the Pythagorean philosophy in its best known features appears completely unrelated to the message of Jesus. The Pythagoreans focused upon the idea that “all is number” and were mathematicians, musicians, and developers of music theory. Jesus had no apparent interest in mathematics or music.

On the other hand there are at least five significant ways in which Jesus and Pythagoras were very much alike: (1) as mentioned, both were probably healers; (2) both founded communities in which the members shared all property in common and which were open to both men and women; (3) both believed in a divinity in humanity; (4) both believed in friendship extended to all; and (5) both used concrete aphorisms with obscure

meaning as a teaching device, what I have previously labeled “catalytic aphorisms.”

Here I will concentrate on the fifth similarity as the most significant and striking.

Aphorisms ascribed to Jesus tend to use concrete imagery which has no obvious application. His disciples had to interpret the meanings for themselves. Here are just a few examples:

“You must be sly as a snake and as simple as a dove.” (Mt. 10: 16, SV)

“Since when do people pick grapes from thorns or figs from thistles?” (Mt. 7: 16, SV)

“Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.” (Thom. 62: 2, SV)

“Struggle to get in through the narrow door; I’m telling you, many will try to get in, but won’t be able.” (Lk. 13: 24, SV)

Pythagoras taught by means of enigmatic commands, which disciples contemplated for deeper meaning (they also contemplated “number” i.e. geometry & music theory). Iamblichus was one of the few ancient writers to record information about the Pythagoreans. He asserted that “All Pythagoric discipline was symbolic, resembling riddles and puzzles, and consisting of maxims.”¹⁰⁸

Pythagoras’ sayings included:

“Eat not the heart.”

“Do not sit upon a bushel basket.”

“Do not walk in the public way.”

What do these sayings mean? I ask the reader to reflect for a moment to interpret the above sayings before reading any further.

The meanings of the sayings according to Porphyry were:

“*Eat not the heart* signified not to afflict ourselves with sorrows.”

“*Do not sit upon a bushel basket* meant not to live ignobly.”

“*Do not walk in the public way* meant to avoid the opinions of the multitude, adopting those of the learned and the few.”¹⁰⁹

The meanings ascribed to the sayings are not obvious nor the only possible interpretations. Porphyry’s explanations may have been his own conclusions or what he heard from previous teachers. In all probability, Pythagoras used such sayings to provide memorable images and to provoke his disciples to turn inward not merely to interpret the sayings but to explore the depths of their own consciousness. Jesus probably spoke his aphorisms for the same purpose.

We know that Zen Masters use obscure riddles (koans) for the purpose of helping disciples reach a higher consciousness; it is not improbable that the sayings of Pythagoras and Jesus had a similar purpose and effect. With the possible parallel between methods of Western philosophers and Eastern philosophers in mind, I turn now to briefly describe two Chinese philosophies with similarities to the philosophy of Jesus.

The Taoist Jesus

Taoism began with the *Tao-Te-Ching*, traditionally attributed to a philosopher named Lao-Tzu. I will use the book title “*Tao-Te-Ching*” and “*Lao-Tzu*” interchangeably, as is customary. In China Taoism developed in two directions: a religion and a philosophy. The religion interpreted the texts in terms of magic-thinking and folk beliefs. The philosophy interpreted the texts in terms of ethics and metaphysics and was also somewhat mystical. I’ve long thought that the mentality of the author of the

Tao-Te-Ching is very similar to the mentality of Jesus. It is beyond the scope of my purpose to provide a full description of Taoism. Instead, I simply want to point out a few passages with affinity to Jesus' philosophy.

Jesus suggested that his students rediscover the "child mind": *"Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."* (Mark 10: 15, NIV)

The *Tao-Te-Ching* also points to children as models of the Way (Tao):

*"Can you concentrate your vital forces and achieve the highest degree of weakness like an infant?"*¹¹⁰

*"He who possesses virtue in abundance may be compared to an infant."*¹¹¹

As discussed above, Jesus modeled a "Cynic" simplicity of life. He saw abundance of possessions as obstructive to "entering the Kingdom":

"How difficult it is for those who have money to enter God's government! It's easier for a camel to squeeze through a needle's eye than for a wealthy person to get into God's government. (Mk. 23, 25, SV)

Similarly the *Tao-Te-Ching* advocates simplicity:

*"Let people hold on to these: manifest plainness, embrace simplicity, reduce selfishness, have few desires."*¹¹²

*"I alone am inert, showing no sign (of desires), like an infant that has not yet smiled. Wearied, indeed, I seem to be without a home."*¹¹³

*"Elegant clothes are worn, sharp weapons are carried, food and drinks are enjoyed beyond limit, and wealth and treasures are accumulated in excess. This is robbery and extravagance. This is indeed not Tao."*¹¹⁴

Like Jesus, the Tao-Te-Ching makes use of paradoxical sounding aphorisms:

*“To yield is to be preserved whole. To be bent is to become straight. To be empty is to be full. To be worn out is to be renewed. To have little is to possess. To have plenty is to be perplexed.”*¹¹⁵

Like Jesus, the Tao-Te-Ching affirms the omnipresence and benevolence of the Source of the universe: *“The Great Tao flows everywhere. . . . It clothes and feeds all things but does not claim to be master over them.”*¹¹⁶

Like Jesus, Lao-Tzu advocated universal benevolence:

*“I treat those who are good with goodness, and I also treat those who are not good with goodness. Thus goodness is attained.”*¹¹⁷

*“The sage does not accumulate for himself. The more he uses for others, the more he has himself. The more he gives to others, the more he possesses of his own. The Way of Heaven is to benefit others and not to injure. The Way of the sage is to act but not to compete.”*¹¹⁸

One primary difference between Jesus and Lao-Tzu is that Lao-Tzu was much concerned with political science: how to be a good ruler and how to govern society. Jesus' philosophy is concerned with personal ethics and God's rule of the universe (roughly equivalent to one meaning of “Tao” as the “Way” of the universe), but does not directly offer advice for temporal human rulers.

The Moist Jesus

Moism, founded by Mo-Tzu, for a time rivaled Confucianism and Taoism in China. Though Moism faded from popularity, the philosophy has been preserved as part of the history of Chinese thought. The central message of Moism was love and its

teachings on love are consistent with that aspect of Jesus' philosophy. A few quotations should suffice to make the point:

*"But how do we know that Heaven loves all the people in the world? Because it enlightens them all. How do we know that it enlightens them all? Because it possesses them all. How do we know that it possesses them all? Because it feeds them all."*¹¹⁹

*"When all the people in the world love one another, the strong will not overcome the weak, the many will not oppress the few, the rich will not insult the poor, the honored will not despise the humble, and the cunning will not deceive the ignorant. Because of universal love, all the calamities, usurpations, hatred, and animosity in the world may be prevented from arising."*¹²⁰

*"If the rulers of the world today really want the empire to be wealthy and hate to have it poor, want it to be orderly and hate to have it chaotic, they should practice universal love and mutual benefit. This is the way of the sage-kings and the principle of governing the empire, and it should not be neglected."*¹²¹

Moism, while not containing other elements found in the philosophy of Jesus, is perfectly compatible with Jesus' philosophy insofar as love is a central, if not *the* central idea.

The Original Philosophy of Jesus

Was Jesus a teacher of religion or was he a philosopher?

Many definitions have been offered for "philosophy" and "religion." Neither word is easy to define in a way that will encompass all philosophies and all religions. However, regardless of how one defines the words it is clear that there are both philosophical and religious *traditions*. We can distinguish between philosophy and religion by participation of individuals in the respective traditions: when one is participating in a religious tradition, one is being religious; when one is participating in a philosophical tradition, one is being a philosopher.

Jesus' thought and practice was very similar to the thought and practice of Cynic philosophers. Some of his ideas were like those of the Stoic philosophers. Some of his practices were like those of the Pythagoreans. He gave reasons for not abiding by Jewish practices. His thought is comparable to ideas in Chinese philosophies. His methods of teaching were the same as some methods used in the philosophy of his era. He clearly participated in the philosophical tradition and so *was* a philosopher.

The fact that a religion developed on the basis of his life shows that his *followers* were religious, not that *he* was. The fact that he spoke of God does not place him outside philosophical tradition, nor does it necessarily make him a preacher of religion. Yet Jesus did participate in the Jewish traditions, even though he challenged some of those traditions. He was religious within the Jewish tradition, even if somewhat on the fringe of it.

Jesus' philosophy had distinct original elements and cannot be precisely classified as "Cynic," "Stoic," "Pythagorean," or by any other name. Perhaps a name is needed. "Jesuit" and "Nazarene" are taken. "Christian" is too strongly connected with the religion *about* Jesus. Perhaps calling Jesus a "Holistic philosopher" comes closest to describing the Spirit and methodology of his philosophy, incorporating as it does elements found in many philosophies, mysticism, logic, and empirical observation of nature and human behavior. Whether or not we give it a name, his philosophy is part of the stream of ancient philosophical thought. One need not accept the dogma or creed of any Christian religion to be a "Holistic philosopher."

Again, was Jesus a teacher of religion or a philosopher? He was Jewish and he was a philosopher, so can be classified as a "Jewish philosopher," like his contemporary

Philo Judaeus of Alexandria and later Jewish philosophers such as Spinoza. To have an accurate idea of Jesus, it is important to recognize that as a “Jewish philosopher,” Jesus was as unique as any founder of any philosophical school. More importantly, Jesus’ ideas and practices had therapeutic elements from which we can still learn today.

CHAPTER 5: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Various elements found in the content and style of Jesus' teachings are associated with health and healing. An examination of Jesus' philosophy shows that he advocated: optimism, faith, letting go of worry, prayer, universal love and forgiveness. Jesus' presentation style is similar to methods that have been used to induce meditative and hypnotic states, which states have been shown to have therapeutic value as well. There is good reason to believe that Jesus infused many of his stories and sayings with an element of humor; his sense of humor probably provoked laughter from some who heard him. Medical research indicates that the above mentioned elements of Jesus' philosophy and style of expression have therapeutic value either for sustaining health or producing cures.

It is customary to "explain" the healings attributed to Jesus as caused either by faith or supernatural power. Assuming Jesus' reputation as a healer was based on actual events, it is probable that faith - his and that of those who came to him - was a major factor in whatever healings occurred. The well-known "placebo effect" is sufficient evidence for the claim that at least *some* people can be cured of *some* illnesses by the simple faith that they are receiving effective treatment - even when they are not. The assertion that Jesus healed by "supernatural" power cannot be proved or disproved by "natural" experiments, because the "supernatural" is, by definition, "beyond nature."

Grant that the "power of faith" was indeed at work in the healing ministry of Jesus, it is also clear that "faith" was not the *only* thing at work. Even if faith were the only factor in some psychosomatic healings, the question would remain: *why* did people have faith in Jesus to heal them? Jesus' words and *consciousness*, i.e. his mentality and personality, must provide the answer to that question. From Jesus' words we have

enough evidence to draw some conclusions about his consciousness. When considering the possible effects Jesus had on his contemporaries it is important to consider his philosophy and style as a *whole* and not merely in terms of separate elements.

Besides Jesus' consciousness, it is important to recognize that the consciousness those who came to him would have had some effect on the outcome. Not everyone who receives a placebo is cured by it. Not every person with a terminal illness prognosis succumbs to their illness. There are what have been labeled "exceptional patients"; those who defy medical expectations and probabilities by recovering from illnesses when, according to medical theory, they "shouldn't." One physician who researched "exceptional patients" was Dr. Bernie Siegel, who reported what he discovered in the popular books "*Love, Medicine and Miracles*," "*Peace, Love and Healing*," and others. Jesus' philosophy is consistent with what Dr. Siegel discovered in "exceptional patients," those who overcame medical odds and experienced "miraculous" healings: "*Acceptance, faith, forgiveness, peace, and love are the traits that define spirituality for me. These characteristics always appear in those who achieve unexpected healing of serious illness.*"¹²²

A combination of mental and emotional elements can factor into a "spontaneous remission" from illness. The phenomena of spontaneous remission are not well understood, but there is some evidence indicating that it may be possible to "induce" spontaneous remission. A clinic in Europe has been exploring the possibility of inducing spontaneous remission and has had some encouraging results. An article on that subject by physicians at that clinic described a case in which a spontaneous remission began to occur during a conversation between patient and physician. They were discussing

questions about what the patient's wanted to do with her life, forgiveness, and "surrendering to God." The discussion of "surrendering" involved Jesus' saying about how the Father supports the lives of the birds of the air and lilies of the field. The physician was examining the patient during the discussion and discovered that the cancer lump in the woman's breast began to dissolve as they were talking.

The physicians at the clinic considered their conversations to be philosophical rather than religious. Their notion that working with forgiveness and surrendering to God are *philosophical* suggests that our ideas of what is "philosophical" today can be associated with the philosophy of Jesus. Central features of the philosophical discussions at the holistic clinic were "meaning" and "purpose" in life. While I have not focused upon questions of the "meaning and purpose of life" in discussion of Jesus' philosophy, it is fairly obvious his philosophy indicated meaning and purpose throughout. The main thrust of Jesus' philosophy was clearly that what gives meaning and purpose to life is seeking to enter God's realm. The way into that realm is proposed in terms of love, faith, and changing one's consciousness.

Like Dr. Siegel, the authors of the article affirmed that spirituality is an important key to spontaneous remission:

"We know that spontaneous remission of cancer is seen with almost all kinds of cancer and we know that it often happens after a spiritual breakthrough."

"In letting go of negative attitudes and beliefs, the person returns to a more responsible existential position and an improved quality of life. The philosophical change of the person healing is often a change towards preferring difficult problems and challenges, instead of avoiding difficulties in life."

“The person who becomes happier and more resourceful often also becomes more healthy, more talented, and more able to function.”¹²³

Even though I believe that Jesus’ therapeutic effect was the result of the organic *whole* of his philosophy and consciousness, in terms of scientific research it is necessary to examine *parts* of that whole separately. What follows then is an exploration of what medical research can tell us about the therapeutic value of *parts* of the philosophy of Jesus.

Optimism and Health

In 2012 an analysis of 200 studies by Harvard researchers found that “traits like optimism and hope, and higher levels of happiness and satisfaction with one’s life were linked with reductions in the risk of heart disease and stroke.”¹²⁴ The study showed that of various attitudes studied, optimism was “most robustly associated with reduced risk of cardiovascular events.”¹²⁵ The study found that even when risk behaviors like smoking and poor diet were factored out, optimism still proved to be linked with the reduced risks.

The Harvard study indicates that optimism can, in effect, be a preventative factor for sustaining health. Can optimism also be therapeutic for recovery from illnesses? Research published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* indicated a connection between optimism and recovery rates from coronary artery bypass surgery. The results of the study indicated that optimism was “associated with a faster rate of physical recovery during the period of hospitalization and with a faster rate of return to normal life activities subsequent to discharge” and “there was a strong positive association between level of optimism and postsurgical quality of life at 6 months.”¹²⁶

The study does not indicate that people are cured by optimism, but it does indicate that optimism has therapeutic value for recovering from illness.

In addition to preventive and therapeutic value, optimism appears to be positively and significantly associated with longevity. Another study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* examined self-perceptions of aging and discovered a correlation between “positive self-perceptions” and longevity. The self-perceptions labeled as “positive” were derived from responses to statements such as “things keep getting worse as I get older,” “I have as much pep as I did last year,” “as you get older, you are less useful,” “I am as happy now as I was when I was younger,” and “as I get older, things are (better, worse, or the same) as I thought they would be.” Those who did not feel less useful, who affirmed “pep” and happiness, and who felt things in general got better had “positive self-perceptions” and could certainly be considered optimistic.

“This research found that older individuals with more positive self-perceptions of aging, measured up to 23 years earlier, lived *7.5 years longer* than those with less positive self-perceptions of aging.”¹²⁷ The authors of the article noted that

“the effect of more positive self-perceptions of aging on survival is greater than the physiological measures of low systolic blood pressure and cholesterol, each of which is associated with a longer life span of 4 years or less. . . . also greater than the independent contribution of lower body mass index, no history of smoking, and a tendency to exercise; each of these factors has been found to contribute between 1 and 3 years of added life.”

If the optimistic positive self-perception on aging has a greater impact on longevity than blood pressure, cholesterol, smoking and exercise, it must have *some* benefit for health or recovery from illness.

Self-perception may have a more significant impact on health and healing than we currently know. Optimistic self-perception appears to have a significant impact on longevity. The Benson-Friedman concept of the placebo effect as “remembered wellness” suggests a shift in a person’s self-perception from “I am not well” to “I remember being well.” That shift, however characterized, is a shift in how one thinks of oneself.

Another indicator of the therapeutic possibilities of shifts in self-perception is the profound effects changing one’s self-image can have. Plastic surgeon Dr. Maxwell Maltz discovered in his practice that changing how a person looked did not always change how the person felt about herself or how she functioned. Wanting to help his patients, Dr. Maltz began to research self-image psychology and share methods for change with his patients. He claimed to have found many methods to help patients adopt a new self-image consistent with their new physical image.¹²⁸

Dr. Maltz’s claims regarding his patients were not documented in his book, possibly because of doctor-patient confidentiality. However, he did cite anecdotal and research evidence strongly indicating that how we think of ourselves has significant impact on how well we function. For example, Maltz cited studies of performance of various tasks at different times, comparing effects of physical practice, no practice and visualization on performance.¹²⁹ Unfortunately, Maltz did not cite his sources.

One of the studies described by Maltz was published in 1943 in *Journal of General Psychology*.¹³⁰ Three groups were tested on throwing darts. They were then dismissed for 18 days. During that period, one group was not to practice throwing darts, another physically practiced, and the third group practiced mentally, i.e. visualized themselves throwing darts effectively. The outcome of the experiment was that those who merely visualized throwing darts improved almost as much as those who physically practiced; those who did not practice did not improve.

A study with basically the same design was done 17 years later, using basketball free-throw shooting as the tested skill. The latter study also indicated that those who did not practice did not improve; those who physically practiced improved the most; and those who visualized improved nearly as much as those who physically practiced.¹³¹

What do the studies on dart-throwing and basketball tell us about “self-perception” and “self-image”? The studies suggest that if we develop images of ourselves doing some tasks well, the subsequent self-image can help us improve at those tasks. The studies suggest that mental imagery, including image of self, has physiological effects. The studies suggest a field of experimentation that could have significant consequences for physical health. If use of imagination can affect motor skills, then at the very least it can affect brain, nervous system, and muscles. If imagination can affect brain, nervous system and muscles, then it can affect health.

How are the effects of imagination on the body and health relevant to optimism and the philosophy of Jesus? The subjects in the “mental practice and motor skills” studies mentioned above were visualizing optimistically. They were visualizing doing well, succeeding. *Optimistic* visualization may be therapeutic. In Jesus’ philosophy, the

self-image suggested by his teaching was image of self as offspring of God and has having the realm of God within them. What more optimistic self-image could one have? I suspect that some of those who followed Jesus shifted their self-perception from “victim” to “offspring of God with God’s realm within” which shift may have contributed to psychological or even physical healing.

Faith: Placebo Effects and Exceptional Patients

The phenomena in medical research commonly known as “the placebo effect” are probably too complex to be understood by laypeople; and probably too complex to be well understood by medical professionals. The “placebo effect” is commonly assumed to involve a change in belief. The complexity of the effect results from the complexity of the nature of belief. That complexity is three-fold: (1) beliefs are formed in a variety of ways and involve a variety of factors, including but not limited to genetics, environment, emotional responses, and internal reasoning processes; (2) the word “belief” is not precisely defined in common usage, since it is used to mean “expectation,” “opinion,” “trust,” et al.; and (3) the neurophysiology of belief involves interactions of brain structure, the nervous system, and physiological chemistry.

There are many factors that may be part of what causes “the placebo effect” but study after study has shown that an inert treatment can be followed by cures of all kinds of illnesses. In a report to the National Institutes of Health, the authors noted that “The placebo response is almost ubiquitous. Studies show that in virtually any disease, roughly one-third of all symptoms improve when patients are given a placebo treatment without drugs (Goleman and Gurin, 1993).”¹³²

In the same report the authors note that “The placebo response relies heavily on the interrelationship between doctor and patient. . . . Doctors who believe in the efficacy of their treatment communicate that enthusiasm to their patients; those who have strong expectations of specific effects and are self-confident and attentive are the most successful at eliciting a positive placebo response.”¹³³ This is significant because it indicates that not only does a patient’s beliefs affect outcome, but also that the beliefs and behavior of therapists can have an impact on the results.

Doctors Herbert Benson and Richard Friedman, experts in the field of mind-body research, described the placebo effect in the following terms:

“The placebo effect yields beneficial clinical results in 60-90% of diseases that include angina pectoris, bronchial asthma, herpes simplex, and duodenal ulcer. Three components bring forth the placebo effect: (a) positive beliefs and expectations on the part of the patient; (b) positive beliefs and expectations on the part of the physician or health care professional; and (c) a good relationship between the two parties. Because of the heavily negative connotations of the very words ‘placebo effect,’ the term should be replaced by ‘remembered wellness.’ Remembered wellness has been one of medicine’s most potent assets and it should not be belittled or ridiculed. Unlike most other treatments, it is safe and inexpensive and has withstood the test of time.”¹³⁴

The Benson-Friedman explanation of the placebo effect is illuminating. They explain the effect in terms of beliefs, expectations, and relationships. In addition to the role of positive beliefs, they acknowledge the role of optimism in their phrase “positive expectations.” Their acknowledgment of the role of the good relationship between professional and patient indicates the social dimension of belief. However the social dimension of belief is probably much broader than supposed by the authors. Our beliefs

are influenced by family and social affiliations including religious, educational, vocational and socioeconomic class. The strength of social support systems plays a role in relative optimism and belief.

Since a social group with shared beliefs formed around Jesus, it is appropriate at this point to address the role relationship systems play in belief, optimism and general well-being. An exploratory study of speed of recovery from athletic injuries indicated that a number of factors were associated with relative speed of recovery. Researchers found that quicker recovery from injuries was associated with positive attitude, stress control, goal setting, positive self-talk, mental imagery, and *social support*. Athletes with strong support from their social network recovered more quickly than those who lacked such support.

While the studies about recovery from injuries do not directly address the placebo effect, we do see elements associated with that effect. Positive self-talk and use of mental imagery are commonly advocated by teachers of “positive thinking” to establish positive *belief*. Positive attitude (optimism) is also part of the “positive thinking” approach to well-being and success.¹³⁵

The phrase “positive thinking” was popularized by the minister Norman Vincent Peale with his book “*The Power of Positive Thinking*” published in 1952. Peale’s work was a simplification of the metaphysically based therapeutic religious philosophies variously known as “Mind Cure,” “New Thought,” “Christian Science,” “Religious Science,” and “Unity.” For all such spiritual philosophies establishing belief in health is the primary mechanism for healing and sustaining health. Each system has its own idealist metaphysical theory and way of interpreting the Bible, but the theories are similar

enough to be considered together under one category. For simplicity I will refer to all such groups and methods as “metaphysical.”

Metaphysical systems are not “faith healing” in the traditional sense. Traditional faith healing involves belief in leaders with special gifts (the faith healer) who have a supernatural connection to God, or belief in sacred objects or places with special sacred connection to God. The metaphysical systems claim that anyone can change their consciousness in ways that will establish physical and emotional health. The metaphysical systems speak of divine laws rather than divine gifts and divine intervention. While sometimes using the word “miracle” in reference to their work, the metaphysical systems explain “miracles” as the effects of working with divine law. Faith healing emphasizes that God is a Person (or three persons, according to traditional Christian doctrine) who hears and responds to our prayers and faith in the mysterious ways or whimsy of a Divine Super Person. Metaphysical healing emphasizes God as Infinite Mind and Principle which responds to our thoughts in accord with divine law. Faith healing emphasizes belief in the healing or sacred object; metaphysical healing emphasizes changing our thoughts with faith in divine law and God as Unchanging Principle rather than as mysterious Person.

In the final analysis, the faith healers and metaphysicians are working with belief for healing; they are just doing the work in somewhat different ways with somewhat different explanations.

There is an abundance of anecdotal evidence for healing through faith in religious publications, as one would expect. Yet even respected physicians have given credence to

faith healing, in books extending back at least to the great American philosopher and psychologist William James and continuing up to recent books.¹³⁶

James was one of the first academics to have a serious interest in metaphysical healing. William James' lecture on "The Religion of Healthy-Mindedness"¹³⁷ cites testimonies to metaphysical healing by individuals known to him. James stated in the lecture that the metaphysical healing philosophy (a.k.a. "mind-cure" and "New Thought") produced significant results: "The blind have been made to see, the halt to walk; life-long invalids have had their health restored. The moral fruits have been no less remarkable."¹³⁸ James was not engaging in hyperbolic flourish; he was taking at face value various testimonies by people known to him. One of his fellow faculty members in the Harvard philosophy department was Horatio Dresser, a metaphysical healer and author of some renown in his time.¹³⁹ This is not to claim that James himself was a "New Thoughter"; in fact James had significant philosophical differences with the metaphysical movements. However, as a pragmatist William James saw in the metaphysical movements results that commanded his respect and curiosity.

Love, Forgiveness, Health & Healing

It is indisputable that Jesus' philosophy and behavior promoted the value of compassion and the Christianity adopted that value. Christianity has generally believed in faith healing, but has not generally thought in terms of compassion healing. Medical research now indicates that the cultivation of compassion may have genuine therapeutic value for healing and for preventing illness.

Research published in *Journal of Advancement in Medicine* indicates that the systematic cultivation of compassion strengthens the immune system. The study cites

research in which subjects watching a video of Mother Teresa working with the sick and poor in India experienced an increase in salivary immunoglobulin A (S-IgA).

S-IgA“(1), provides the first line of defense against pathogens in the upper respiratory tract, the gastrointestinal system and the urinary tract (2), and is frequently used as a measure of secretory immunity. Higher levels of S-IgA are associated with decreased incidence of disease and susceptibility to upper respiratory infections.”¹⁴⁰

The research by the authors of the article involved testing the induction of “positive emotions” (care and compassion) using and comparing both an external method (watching videos, such as the one with Mother Teresa already mentioned) and a self-induction method which involved having subjects direct their attention to the area around the heart and focus on feelings of care or compassion toward someone or something.¹⁴¹ Their research found that: “Positive emotions . . . produced significant increase in S-IgA levels” and “that self-induction of positive emotional states is more effective at stimulating S-IgA levels than previously used external methods. Self-induction techniques may therefore be useful in minimizing the immunosuppressive effects of negative emotions.”¹⁴²

If, as indicated by the above research, cultivation of compassion strengthens the immune system, it is possible that the strengthened immune system could also cure illness as well as prevent it. In any case, cultivation of compassion, as advocated and demonstrated by Jesus, evidently has value for health. Compassion may be seen as a therapeutic element of Jesus’ philosophy.

Jesus’ emphasis on forgiving also appears to be sound psychological therapy, as illustrated by a recently developed and researched “forgiveness therapy.” “Forgiveness

therapy” is a process developed by psychologists to help clients work through issues of anger and resentment. The process has 17 steps which can be summarized as follows: awareness of psychological defenses, feelings and habitual ways of thinking (steps 1-5); insights attained regarding counter-productive ways of thinking (steps 6-8); rethinking and changing feelings and strategies in relation to offender (steps 7-13); and various realizations building up to “awareness of internal, emotional release” (steps 14-17).¹⁴³ Forgiveness therapy defines forgiveness as “an unjustly hurt person’s act of deliberately giving up resentment toward an offender while fostering the undeserved qualities of beneficence and compassion toward that offender.”¹⁴⁴

The forgiveness therapy process has been used with clients who have serious emotional issues, including people with substance abuse issues and incest survivors. A study of forgiveness therapy used in drug abuse treatment indicated that participants who went through forgiveness therapy “had significantly more improvement in total and trait anger, depression, total and trait anxiety, self-esteem, forgiveness, and vulnerability to drug use than did the alternative treatment group.”¹⁴⁵ In a study of incest survivors, forgiveness therapy also proved effective. Those who were treated with a process model of forgiveness gained more than the control group in forgiveness and hope and decreased significantly more in anxiety and depression. “In forgiving, the injured party may give up the qualities of resentment or even hatred but not necessarily enter into relation with an untrusted offender.”¹⁴⁶

Jesus did not offer a 17 step psychological process for forgiveness. However, what he did offer was a logical and elegant solution to a primary religious concern for the people of his time and motivation to apply that solution. In Jesus’ era, people believed

that God might forgive their sins if they made sacrificial offerings and if the priests were ritually pure and performed the sacrifices correctly. There were several uncertainties involved in that view: was the offering sufficient? Were the priests pure? Were the sacrifices offered correctly? Would God accept the offerings?

Jesus offered an alternative based upon the common view that God was just: forgive and you will be forgiven. To illustrate how it was just to receive forgiveness as compensation for forgiving others, Jesus also told parables to show how forgiveness worked practically in human affairs. Jesus' followers were probably motivated to work on forgiving others by a combination of factors: the strong desire to have sins forgiven; the logical elegance of the principle "forgive and be forgiven"; and the practical illustrations in Jesus' parables. The effect of the motivation may well have been sufficient to produce results similar to modern "forgiveness therapy." What is clear is that forgiving others has psychological benefits and Jesus' philosophy emphasized forgiving others.

Although the studies of forgiveness therapy did not include data on physiological effects of forgiveness, the diminishment or release of emotions such as anxiety, anger and resentment indicates release of stress. Release of stress is known to have a positive impact on physical health, consequently the effectively releasing negative emotions by practicing forgiveness likely could be physiologically as well as psychologically therapeutic.

Anxiety Reduction and Health

Stress is a contributing factor to a wide range of human illnesses. Discovering ways to regulate and defuse excessive stress is an important area of health research.

Professor Emeritus of Medicine with the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons Dr. Theodore VanItallie wrote that “despite all the problems involved in this area of investigation, evidence continues to accumulate that stress – particularly chronic stress – may give rise to, or worsen, a number of illnesses.”¹⁴⁷ The same article lists some of the illnesses to which extreme or chronic stress can be a contributing factor: Dysregulation of the stress system is known to be a contributive causative factor in a variety of illnesses, including: depression, post traumatic stress disorder, diabetes, Grave’s disease, fibromyalgia, rheumatoid arthritis, peptic ulcer, hypertension, atherosclerosis, osteoporosis, and immune dysfunction.¹⁴⁸ Clearly, it is important for effective health care to find ways of coping with and reducing stress.

A study with the intriguing title “Don’t Worry, Be happy” reported that “increased positive affect was protective against” coronary heart disease. The study was a large population (1739 participants) 10 year survey of coronary heart disease incidents as related to positive and negative affect. Positive affect was defined as “the experience of pleasurable emotions such as joy, happiness, excitement, enthusiasm, and contentment.”¹⁴⁹ “Negative affect” was defined as emotions such as depression, anxiety, and anger.

The authors wanted to know if worry and depression were related to incidence of heart disease and if being able to experience positive affect helped prevent such incidents. The authors believed their results suggested “that preventive strategies may be enhanced not only by reducing depressive symptoms” (“don’t worry”) “but also by increasing positive affect” (“be happy”).¹⁵⁰

Stress, worry and anxiety, are interrelated; it is just not yet clear *how* they are interrelated. Are “worry” and “anxiety” two words for the same psychological state? Precise clinical definitions can probably *technically* discriminate between the words “worry” and “anxiety” as referring to different psychological states or habits. However insofar as “worry” and “anxiety” involve thoughts and feelings of negative expectancy associated with physical tension, they are similar enough to be considered interrelated factors contributing to what are generally regarded as stress related illness. Do worry and anxiety cause stress or are they effects of stress? This is one of those “which came first, the chicken or the egg” kind of questions. Even if worry and anxiety were always *effects* of stressful *conditions*, it is would probably still be the case that worry and anxiety exacerbate stress. There is not enough evidence to conclude that worry and anxiety are always effects of conditions; worry, anxiety and stress are best thought of as interrelated in a “feedback loop.”

In regard to health concerns, the important points are that the worry-anxiety-stress “feedback loop” is counterproductive to health and that methods are needed to diminish or break the “loop” to improve health and probably in some cases to cure illness. A logical place to begin countering “negative” feelings would be finding methods to establish or increase the opposite “positive” feelings. Perhaps drugs provide a partial solution, but drugs usually have negative side effects; a more natural approach would be preferable.

A number of different types of therapies for stress have been shown to be effective. The technology of biofeedback, the spiritual practice of meditation, physical

exercise, dietary changes and even laughter have all shown promise for coping with stress.

For purposes of this study I will only be interested in effects of meditation, prayer and laughter. Jesus did not teach a “meditation method” in the conventional sense; yet there is reason to believe that his way of expressing his philosophy induced “meditative states” in his followers, as indicated in the discussion of his philosophy in the previous section of this paper. I would also point out here that Jesus’ philosophy counseled “non-worry” and promised supreme joy as a result of adopting his whole philosophy to enter the realm of God. His was a philosophy likely to induce “positive affect.”

Meditation and Therapeutic Suggestion

Research on meditation practices indicates that they have significant effect on reduction of stress and anxiety. Research on hypnosis and autohypnosis indicates similar results. Meditation and hypnosis have similar effects on brainwaves and physiology. Meditation generally aims also at promoting spiritual values. Hypnosis generally has specific psychological aims, but also has proven therapeutically effective for some somatic and psychosomatic symptoms. Research indicates that there is no significant difference in physiological or subjective states between meditation and hypnosis.¹⁵¹

Jesus did not use hypnosis or teach a meditation method in the modern conventional senses of those terms. Yet the style and content of Jesus’ sayings indicate similarities with some methods of hypnosis, and reflection on his sayings might have induced states similar to those produced by meditation methods.

In his discussion of Jesus’ parables, New Testament scholar Stevan Davies concluded, in agreement with many scholars before him, that the parables would have

produced an altered state of consciousness in some of his audience.¹⁵² Davies found a modern parallel in the work of Milton Erickson, the innovative and influential hypnotherapist. Erickson wrote that hypnotherapists have found that the use of shocking, surprising, and confusing stories and statements can be used to induce trance states which allow patients to activate and access unconscious creative and therapeutic potentials to solve their own problems.¹⁵³

Davies summarized Erickson's work in the following terms:

“A therapist should enable the client to gain access to his or her own unconscious functioning so that the client can thereby work to resolve his or her own difficulties. As the conscious ego structure has limited access to the unconscious (practically by definition) the therapist should enable the client to put aside his or her conscious ego structure so that access to the unconscious is made possible. The way to do this is to place the client into trance and to make nondirective suggestions to the client to facilitate him or her in making use of already present unconscious potentials. Thus trance facilitates resolution of the client's problems with the assistance, but not the direct advice of the therapist.”¹⁵⁴

The Ericksonian method for inducing trance “used confusion to break up clients' ordinary reality orientation.”¹⁵⁵ The method involved “confusion due to [verbal] shock, stress, uncertainty, etc. [leads to] unstructuring of usual frames of reference [leads to] restructuring needed [leads to] receptivity to therapeutic suggestions.”¹⁵⁶ After briefly describing Erickson's method, Davies notes, “If we take seriously what specialists in the study of Jesus' parables tell us over and over again, we see that they conclude, with lines of reasoning wholly unrelated to considerations of Ericksonian therapy, that Jesus used parables to produce confusion, unstructuring, restructuring, receptivity.”¹⁵⁷

In his work, Davies was contending for a view that Jesus was attempting to induce the state he called “the kingdom of God,” which Davies described as a dissociative state in which Jesus was “possessed” by an alternate persona. Davies further surmised that Jesus’ sayings caused his listeners to enter a dissociative or “spirit possessed” state. Although I do not personally find Davies’ arguments for possession by an alternate possession compelling, assessing his arguments is beyond the intended scope of this paper and is not relevant to my hypotheses. I will only say that *Erickson’s* work did not result in dissociative alternate persona in his clients comparable to “spirit possession,” therefore the analogy to Erickson’s work does not support the “spirit possessed Jesus” of Davies’ theory. Erickson characterized his work in terms of accessing resources in the unconscious and not in terms of inducing possession by an alternate personality (Davies’ theory of “spirit possession”).

However, the parallel between Erickson’s methods and Jesus’ sayings noted by Davies is illuminating. The exploration of Jesus’ philosophy in the preceding section noted time and again the elements of shock and surprise in Jesus’ sayings as well as the countercultural content of those sayings (the “unstructuring-restructuring” aspect). There are parallels between Erickson’s methods and Jesus’ style of expression. For example:

Erickson: “apposition of opposites” – Jesus used such appositions, e.g. “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing.”

Erickson: “Surprise” – Jesus’ parables had elements of surprise within and at the end, e.g. the “justified” tax collector and the “not justified” Pharisee.

Erickson: “Confusion”- Jesus’ sayings were often confusing [see above section on “Catalytic Aphorisms,” chapter 4, section (4)].

Erickson: “Shifts in frames of reference” – practically all of Jesus’ sayings and parables represented shifting one’s frame of reference, seeing the world in a different way.¹⁵⁸

Just as Jesus primarily used analogies to direct the attention of his listeners to “God’s realm,” Erickson employed “a rich repertory of analogies drawn from everyday life” to induce trance and help his clients access the potential of their unconscious. Many of Erickson’s analogies were “about the perceptions and experiences of childhood; the child’s way of functioning are closer to unconscious, which Erickson is trying to facilitate in trance work.”¹⁵⁹ Jesus told his disciples that they had to become like little children to receive “God’s realm.”

Based upon the parallels between Erickson’s approach to hypnotherapy and Jesus’ approach to entering God’s realm, I believe Davies is correct in his argument and position that Jesus’ sayings induced trancelike states similar to if not identical with hypnotic states. I believe those states helped Jesus’ audience access “unconscious resources” and made Jesus’ audience “receptive to therapeutic suggestion.” Jesus did not use the language of “accessing unconscious resources”; in his terminology a person could “enter God’s realm” which was “within them.”

What were the “therapeutic suggestions” in Jesus’ sayings? The suggestions were contained in the content of Jesus’ philosophy; his sayings *indirectly* suggested optimism, faith, love, forgiveness and joy. In Jesus’ sayings, the “suggestions” were part of the content; the style, how he shaped the content, was what likely “induced” trance states or hypersuggestibility. Jesus language did not suggest that people become “spirit possessed”; he was instead suggesting a restructuring of outlook and emotions.

The comparison of Jesus' philosophy to Erickson's approach to hypnotherapy is not to say that Jesus was a "hypnotherapist" in the modern sense; that would be anachronistic. I would say, rather, that Jesus naturally found ways to access his own "unconscious potentialities," or as he would have put it, to "enter God's realm." Having gained that access, Jesus expressed from that altered state of consciousness in a way that facilitated altered states in his disciples.

How did he discover those ways? He was probably partly influenced by contact with the language of Pythagorean, Stoic and Cynic philosophers, who used obscure or paradoxical sounding statements and parables, and who had unconventional alternative ways of seeing and being. Jesus was probably also influenced by the preaching of John the Baptist, perhaps mainly by the Baptist's preaching of the "nearness" of God's realm. John the Baptist probably saw that "nearness" in terms of a future time; Jesus saw the nearness in terms of a present inwardness. John may also have influenced Jesus to feel that he was in a state of forgiveness through the baptism ritual. I suspect that mainly Jesus discovered his methods by internal experimentation and external observation of people, as Erickson himself did.

What could Jesus' "therapeutic suggestions" accomplish? To see the possibilities, we need only consider what is known about what modern hypnotherapy has accomplished.

It is well established that in general terms hypnotherapy "can be used to relieve anxiety and pain during childbirth, as an anesthetic during surgery, to reduce stress, to promote healing, and to control habitual behavior."¹⁶⁰

Research indicates that hypnosis can help with pain reduction and control for obstetrics, surgery, dentistry, metastatic breast cancer, and in laboratory experiments.¹⁶¹ Hypnotherapy has also been used effectively on: atopic dermatitis in adults and children¹⁶²; asthmatic patients¹⁶³; migraine sufferers¹⁶⁴; warts¹⁶⁵; and at least one study indicated the possibility that hypnotherapy can have a positive effect on the immunological system.¹⁶⁶ An article in the *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis* pointed to evidence that suggestion can: block skin reaction of poison ivy-like plants; give rise to localized skin inflammation with pattern of previously experienced burn; cure warts; ameliorate congenital ichthyosiform erythrodermia (“fish skin disease”); and stimulate the enlargement of the mammary glands in adult women. (I doubt that last result would have been even considered in Jesus’ time; its value in modern terms would be relative to whom one asked.)

It is probable that, besides inducing brief trance states, the content of the sayings and stories of Jesus invited extended contemplation of his sayings by his original followers to discern meaning and acquire understanding. Such contemplation is likely to have resulted in meditative and altered states of consciousness for some. The stories and sayings “stuck with” people, which is why we still have records of the sayings today. Zen Buddhism provides one example of the use of stories and paradoxical sayings as focal points for meditation. Considering the innumerable different interpretations of Jesus’ sayings that have been published since the beginning of Christianity, it is clear that, at the very least, Christian clergy and Christian mystics have done extensive contemplation of his sayings. The likelihood of Jesus’ followers experiencing meditative states is sufficient reason to consider the benefits of meditation as currently understood.

A 2003 meta-analysis of meditation research defined “meditation” as “a family of practices that train attention and awareness, usually with the aim of fostering psychological and spiritual well being and maturity.”¹⁶⁷ The family of practices uses a variety of focal points for training attention and awareness: passages from scripture, sacred names, points within the body, riddles (Zen), and the “flow of mind” itself. Hypnosis also “trains attention and awareness with the aim of fostering psychological” well being, if not “spiritual well being” and is in that way very similar to what is called meditation.

If contemplation of Jesus’ sayings was not a discipline as formal as meditation and hypnosis, there is reason to suspect that it was nevertheless effective *informal* training. Even today people spend a great deal of time contemplating Jesus’ sayings and trying to understand what they mean. When a story “sticks” with a person, it indicates that the person has thought of and about the story to some extent. Sitting in idle moments, remembering a clever story or thinking about a surprising saying can lead to a “meditative” state as easily as contemplating a sacred mantra or prayer.

The 2003 meta-analysis of meditation research provides a description of the benefits of meditation supported by research. Among the benefits cited in the report are:

“effective intervention for: cardiovascular disease (Zamarra, Schneider, Besseghini, Robinson, & Salerno, 1996); chronic pain (Kabat-Zinn, 1982); anxiety and panic disorder (Edwards, 1991; Miller, Fletcher, & Kabat-Zinn, 1995); substance abuse (Gelderloos, Walton, Orme-Johnson, Alexander, 1991); dermatological disorders (Kabat-Zinn, Wheeler, Light, Skillings, Scharf, Hosmer, & Bernhard, 1998); reduction of psychological distress and symptoms of distress for cancer patients (Specia, Carlson, Goodey, & Angen, 2000); and reduction of medical symptoms in both clinical and non-clinical populations (Reibel, Greeson,

Brainard, & Rosenzweig, 2001; Williams, Kolar, Reger, and Pearson, 2001; Kabat-Zinn, Lipworth, Burney, & Sellers, 1985).”¹⁶⁸

The article also mentions studies indicating that meditation can “produce improvements in” self-actualization, empathy, happiness, improvements in reaction time, school grades, learning ability, recall and creativity.¹⁶⁹

Many of the cited studies probably require better experimental design and further research to be considered “conclusive.” However, the sheer number of possible benefits indicates that accessing human potential through altered states of consciousness has a significant upside with untapped therapeutic possibilities.

The 2003 study also cited the physiological effects of meditation including: improvement in immune system functioning, relaxation, reduced respiration rate, and increased skin resistance, enhanced alpha and theta EEG power.¹⁷⁰ Measured effects of meditation have consistently shown an increase of alpha wave amplitude in the brain.¹⁷¹

One of the instruments used in my research was the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI). Some research using the STAI has indicated measurable reduction of anxiety in meditators, e.g. a 1976 study by Richard J. Davidson, Daniel J. Goleman and Gary E. Schwartz published in *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*.¹⁷² Another study indicated that STAI measured anxiety reduction equally from 20 minutes of three methods: non-cultic meditation, quietly resting in a recliner, and acute physical activity.¹⁷³ That study encouraged me to use STAI for my research since my study did not involve any training and the STAI attained measurable results for those only briefly trained in meditation and even for those who were simply resting.

In my research I also used peripheral skin temperature as a way to detect a meditative state in the participants. The logic of using peripheral skin temperature to detect a meditative state is as follows:

(1) Scientific research indicates that meditation reduces stress.¹⁷⁴ Biofeedback studies have shown that a common indicator that an individual is in a meditative state is the increase of alpha brain-wave amplitude.

(2) One physiological indicator of relaxation and stress reduction is peripheral skin temperature increase, which in biofeedback studies is usually measured as finger temperature. For example a study by Patrick A. Boudewyns in *Behavior Therapy* concluded: "Finger temperature decreased under assumed stress conditions and increased under assumed relaxation conditions."¹⁷⁵ Boudewyns' study included: (A) an experiment to determine basic parameters of finger temperature on a sample of 133 normal adult subjects; (B) finger temperature and self-reported arousal from presumably relaxation-producing situation (relaxation instructions) to presumably stressful situation (electric shock & threat of shock) and back to relaxation-producing situation; and (C) replication of experiment (B) but including a control group.

(3) In "*Fundamentals of EEG Measurement*" M. Teplan notes: "Alpha activity is induced by closing the eyes and by relaxation."¹⁷⁶ Relaxed states in general (including hypnotic states) have been shown to be associated with higher amplitude alpha and theta waves.¹⁷⁷

(4) Since increased finger temperature indicates a relaxed state and a relaxed state is accompanied by increased alpha amplitude, it follows that increased finger temperature

would be accompanied by increased alpha amplitude. At least in terms of increased alpha amplitude, a relaxed state is physiologically equivalent to a meditative state.

(5) Since increased finger temperature indicates a relaxed state, increased finger temperature also indicates a state physiologically equivalent to a meditative state.

(6) Of the physiological effects of meditation and hypnosis, the simplest measure is the relaxation response, which can be measured using peripheral skin temperature. Increase in peripheral skin temperature indicates the relaxation response, which in turn indicates an altered state of consciousness such as those produced during meditation and hypnosis.

Prayer Studies

Jesus taught his disciples to pray. His fundamental approach, as shown in my discussion of his philosophy was to “pray for” what he already perceived to be true: that God is to us as an unconditionally loving Father; that God’s realm is already present; that our Father can be trusted to provide for our daily needs; that we are forgiven to the extent that we forgive; and that God does not test us. His prayers for other may be understood as his beholding the presence of God in and all around them. We are told that his prayers healed not only those who were within his physical reach, but even in at least one case a person far distant from him.

Can prayers and thoughts of healing intention have a healing effect? I suspect that the question cannot be answered definitively by scientific method. First of all, while prayers can be spoken aloud, prayer is fundamentally *internal*; it is a mental or “soul” action which cannot be directly observed in the way physical events can. If “faith” is necessary, that introduces another unobservable element. How could the faith of those

praying be determined? Secondly, there are many ways to pray and some may be effective and others ineffective. In any given experiment some participants may pray effectively and others may not; the mixture of effective and ineffective prayers would hinder obtaining optimal results. Thirdly, conditions for effective prayer may not be limited to the ones who are praying; it may be that recipients of prayer must be receptive to results. There may be “unconscious,” “cosmic” and “spiritual” factors unknown and inherently unobservable to us which affect the outcome of prayer.

On the other hand, despite the obstacles to precise scientific measurement of effects of prayer, experiments have been constructed which indicate that prayer can have scientifically measureable affects. One physician-philosopher, Larry Dossey, has made something of a career by bringing to public awareness scientific studies indicating that prayer can indeed affect people near and far. The studies cited by Dossey also indicate that prayer can affect plants, bacteria, and cells.

Dossey was especially impressed with the experimental approach of the Spindrift organization. Bruce and John Klingbeil, the founders of Spindrift, devised a number of controlled double-blind experiments in which participants prayed for mold, seeds and other simple organisms. Researching prayer for simple organisms has experimental advantages over researching prayer for humans: possible effects on simple organisms are directly observable and simple organisms are less physically and psychologically complex than humans. The results of the experiments indicated that simple organisms thrived more quickly and fully when prayed for.

Spindrift also tested two approaches to prayer, labeled “directed” and “nondirected.” “Directed” prayer uses words and visualizations to intentionally direct the

outcome. “Nondirected” prayer does not seek a specific outcome but instead attempts to maintain a “pure and holy qualitative consciousness of whoever or whatever the patient may be.”¹⁷⁸ “Nondirected” prayer focuses on the presence of the divine, with an attitude of “thy will be done,” as exemplified in the prayer of Jesus. Spindrift found that the nondirected approach worked significantly better than the directed approach. The outcome of nondirective prayer “is always in the direction of ‘what’s best for the organism.’”¹⁷⁹

Prayer practitioners of the metaphysical movement (New Thought, Christian Science, Spindrift, et al.) do not regard distance as an obstacle to effective prayer. That is also true of many who call themselves “psychic healers” and “non-contact therapeutic touch healers.” Because of their denial of distance as a hindrance, researchers have frequently bundled together these different approaches to healing when studying “distant healing.” For example, in his article “Prayer and Healing” Dossey cited experiments on distant healing performed by William Braud and Marilyn Schlitz. The Braud-Schlitz experiments used practitioners of different systems. Dossey summarized the results of the Braud-Schlitz research:

“In thirteen experiments, the ability of sixty-two people to influence the physiology of 271 distant subjects was studied (William Braud and Marilyn Schlitz, 1983, 1988, 1989). These studies suggested that (1) the distant effects of mental imagery compare favorably with the magnitude of effects of one’s individual thoughts, feelings, and emotions on one’s own physiology; (2) the ability to use positive imagery to achieve distant effects is apparently widespread in the human population; (3) these effects can occur at distances up to twenty meters (greater distances were not tested); (4) subjects with a greater need to be influenced by positive mental intent – i.e., those for whom the influence would be beneficial – seem more susceptible; (5) the distant effects of intentionality can

occur without the recipient's knowledge; (6) those participating in the studies seemed unconcerned that the effect could be used for harm, and no such harmful effects were seen; and (7) the distant effects of mental intentionality are not invariable; subjects appear capable of preventing the effect if it is unwanted.”¹⁸⁰

Several things should be noted about this summary of results: (1) positive mental imagery seems to have been the primary method used, indicating that “nondirected prayer” was not significantly tested; (2) distances over 20 meters were not tested; metaphysical healers claim that there are *no* distance limitations on prayer; and (3) effects can occur without recipients knowing that they are being treated, but recipients can prevent unwanted effects. Those three facts indicate some of the difficulties in testing the effects of prayer, especially when “prayer” is bundled with other approaches described as “distant healing.”

A meta-analysis of research on the efficacy of “distant healing” provides another example of bundling different approaches and drawing conclusions from the bundling. The authors of the study made no distinction between approaches and also bundled in experiments with design flaws. As a consequence of the research the authors included in their meta-analysis, their review in effect showed that some experiments yielded significant effects and others did not. The authors concluded that there was not significant evidence for the effectiveness of distant healing. However, because 57% of the investigations they reviewed showed “statistically significant treatment effects,” the authors also concluded that the “evidence merits further study.” A more useful approach would have been to separate out the different types of “distant healing” and examine only well-designed studies to see which approaches were most effective.¹⁸¹

Overall, research on prayer and “distant healing” indicates that it is not irrational to pray, that our mental intentions may affect others, and that even prayer without specific goals may have positive effects.

Sense of Humor, Laughter and Health

In the section of this paper which described Jesus’ philosophy I attempted to show that many of Jesus’ parables and sayings had the forms of humor and may have provoked laughter (or at least positive moods) in his listeners. The idea that Jesus’ sayings contained elements of humor is not original with me. Theologian Elton Trueblood wrote a discerning book entitled “*The Humor of Christ*” on that very subject in 1975.¹⁸² The scholars of the Jesus Seminar agreed that Jesus’ sayings and parables were characterized by humor. If indeed Jesus was humorous and sometimes strategically provoked laughter, his sense of humor could well have had a therapeutic effect in some cases.

One of the best known cases of the effect of laughter on health is that of Norman Cousins who rationally and intuitively created his own therapy for an illness which had no known cure. His case brought to public awareness the therapeutic potential of laughter.¹⁸³ Cousins’ remarkable experience stimulated research into the effects of laughter. For example, one study demonstrated that laughter raises the “discomfort threshold” in participants who were subjected to pressure induced discomfort.¹⁸⁴ Another study of laughter published in the Japanese journal *Biomedical Research* indicated that laughter has a measureable chemical stress relief effect as well as a subjective uplift effect.¹⁸⁵

Overall, the research on humor and laughter indicates only relatively minor physiological health benefits. Most people would probably agree that humor and

laughter make them feel better subjectively. The benefits of humor and laughter are probably mostly intangible, but the popularity of comedy in the human arts indicates that in some sense laughter is like “a medicine,” even if it is not “the best medicine.”

Conclusion of Literature Review

Jesus’ philosophy expressed and promoted optimism, faith, love, forgiveness, prayer and joy. Medical research indicates that each of those factors have measurable health benefits. Jesus’ style of expression in many cases was akin to the methodology used to induce hypnotic and meditative states. It is probable that the combination of the content and style of Jesus’ sayings would have successfully suggested healing ideas akin to the therapeutic suggestions of hypnotherapists. If Jesus “hypnotically” suggested the factors of optimism, faith, love, forgiveness, and joy into the unconscious of his listeners, it is likely that a portion of those who heard him experienced healings that seemed to them “miraculous.”

If prayer works to some extent, as indicated by modern research, then no doubt Jesus’ prayers were as effective as those of anyone today.

The combination of all the elements of Jesus’ philosophy is likely to have been more powerful than any of those elements considered separately. It is probable that Jesus’ effect on his contemporaries was at least as powerful as any “psychic” or “spiritual” healer today. The evidence from analysis of Jesus’ philosophy correlated with modern research strongly indicates that he was an effective healer in his time, which conclusion is in alignment with the way he is portrayed in the Gospels.

This is not to conclude that any of the accounts of healing in the Gospels are accurate eyewitness reports. It is more likely that his followers knew of cures he

facilitated and their memories became the basis for stories of healing imagined by the Gospel authors.

Any cures Jesus *might* have facilitated *might* have been psychological and psychosomatic in nature rather than purely somatic in nature. On the other hand, it might also be the case that he healed all manner of illness; after all, the same could be said of even the humble placebo.

More important than whatever happened historically with regard to Jesus and healing, clearly the elements of his philosophy, *if conscientiously applied*, are beneficial to general well-being of humans and humanity. Jesus' philosophy has positive relevance to and bearing upon human health and society.

As shown in the discussion of the *philosophy* of the *historical* Jesus, the elements of his philosophy have no requirement to accept Christian dogma. One may think of Jesus as a great philosopher without adopting the view that he was the biblically prophesied "Messiah" or "Christ." One may adopt his philosophy with believing in "Judgment Day," "resurrection," "Virgin birth," "transubstantiation," or any other dogmas created by his followers. While his philosophy was not "secular" in a modern sense, it can still be adopted as a non-atheistic philosophy in the modern era without adopting any particular *religious* affiliation.

Scientific research indicates that the universe is so structured that optimism, faith, love, forgiveness, humor, meditation and prayer are beneficial to human beings. Was the universe so structured as the result of a random accident of material forces? That would be more amazing and "miraculous" than if the universe is so structured as the result of Benign Intelligent design.

I do not believe that “Intelligent Design theory” should be part of science curriculum in schools; the theory is metaphysics, not science. “Intelligent Design” has been used as a disingenuous subterfuge to smuggle religion into science curriculum. “Intelligent Design” theory tends to assume a “Deistic” concept of God: Creator at the beginning and outside the universe. However “Pantheism” and “Panentheism” are not inferior to “Deism” and “Theism” as ways of thinking about and relating to “God.”

What I do believe is that Jesus should be in the philosophy curriculum along with the Stoics, Cynics, Pythagoreans, Platonists, Aristotelians, and Neo-Platonists. His philosophy can be abstracted from the religion about him and explored critically as other philosophies are explored critically. I believe the historical Jesus, as a philosopher, still has some important things to teach us about healing, ourselves and the nature of the universe. I believe “God’s Realm” is an inexhaustible treasure still awaiting our discovery.

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Design

I tested the hypothesis that the philosophy of the historical Jesus had (and can still have) therapeutic effects by means of an experiment utilizing three instruments of measurement. I tested the effects of listening to Jesus' words on the Peripheral Skin Temperatures (PST) of participants, to measure for physical relaxation. In addition, the experiment used two psychological instruments: the "State-Trait Anxiety Inventory" (STAI) and the "Profile of Mood States" (POMS) instrument. The STAI was used to measure any shifts in temporary anxiety state and the more stable trait anxiety. Self-reported anxiety indicates how "stressed" a person feels. The POMS was used to test for any shifts in moods that could be beneficial to the overall well-being of the individual. The feelings measured by POMS are related to psycho-physiological moods such as anxiety, depression, and anger that may affect health and healing. The STAI and POMS instruments were used to investigate whether or not contemplating Jesus' sayings contributes to diminishing anxiety and stressful moods.

If contemplation of Jesus' sayings increased relaxation and diminished anxiety and stressful emotions that would indicate that such contemplation has a therapeutic value. It would further indicate that a meditation method based upon the sayings of the historical Jesus could provide an alternative and therapeutic form of meditation for those who do not relate to Eastern traditions and whose spirituality is connected to Christian traditions. Such a method might also have appeal beyond those who identify themselves as Christians, since the method would not require membership in a Christian church, acceptance of Christian creeds, or participation in Christian rituals.

Population:

The participants consisted of 60 English speaking volunteers aged 21 or older from the Kansas City, Missouri area without regard to race, gender, or religious beliefs. Participants in this study were recruited from the Unity Village Chapel in Unity Village, MO. Volunteers were solicited to participate in this study by church announcements through Unity organizations in the Kansas City, Missouri area and were asked to contact the PI.

Unity is a Christian organization whose publications, prayer ministry, retreats, and classes are also used by people affiliated with other Christian denominations, non-Christian faiths, and also people not affiliated with any faith. The inter-denominational and inter-faith appeal of Unity publications and programs indicates that most religious beliefs of Unity students are within the mainstream of the general population.

In terms of self-description, a higher percentage of Unity congregants (90%) than non-Unity people (58%) see themselves as honoring all paths to God and as open-minded (93% to 69%) about spiritual development and growth.

Attendees of Unity programs are diverse in terms of age, gender, and ethnicity. They tend to be somewhat older with higher levels of education than the general population. There is a higher percentage of female Unity students than is found in the general population. The percentage of attendees who are members of non-white ethnic groups is somewhat lower than the general population.¹⁸⁶

The PI welcomed volunteers who heard of the research through Unity friends but who were not themselves involved in Unity.

The participants in this experiment consisted of 64% females and 36% males recruited through Unity Churches in Unity Village, MO and Overland Park, KS. The age

group percentages of the participants were: between 21 and 29 years, 2%; 30 to 60 years, 49%; 61 to 70 years, 36%; and over 70 years, 13%.

Due to some technical difficulties with temperature logger and computer recording at a few points during my research, the PST data for a few participants was lost. Data did not record for 2 participants in the “Authentic sayings” group and for 3 participants in the “Attributed group.” In order to balance the number of participants in each group, PST was recorded for one more volunteer for the “Attributed group,” making a total of 28 measurements in each group. In the end, there was PST data for 56 volunteers and STAI and POMS data for 60 volunteers.

One participant told me at the beginning of her session that she had “hot flashes” which might affect her PST during the session. I decided to do the session anyway, in case she did not have “hot flashes” during the session. After the participant listened to the recording, she told me she had a “hot flash” toward the end and where the recording was when she had it (it was about 18 minutes into the 26 minute recording). There was a dramatic temperature increase at the point described by the participant after a steady temperature during the first part of the recording. Since I was testing for relaxation, I did not use the temperature increase from that participant in the study, but used only the data from the first 18 minutes. The PST data from all other participants was used starting at 2 minutes and ending with the end of the recording. I used the 2 minute mark to be sure that the temperatures of participants had reached a normative point and was not rising or falling as a result of the difference between their temperature and the temperature of the thermometer before it was attached.

Volunteers were asked if they were 21 years or older and any who were under 21 were thanked for their interest and told they were not eligible for the study. They were also asked if they have been diagnosed with ADD, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, dementia, hearing impairment, or bipolar disorder. If the prospective participant had been diagnosed with any of those disorders, they were excluded from the study.

Inclusion Criteria

- 21 years or older
- Literate in English
- Participants showed willingness to participate by signing a voluntary informed consent form.

Exclusion Criteria

- Self reported ADD or other impairment that would inhibit ability to listen to recordings and sustain normal focus of thought for the 30 minute experimental periods.
- Diagnosed with schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, dementia, hearing impairment, or bipolar disorder.

Protection of the authentic responses and contamination prevention:

- Participants were asked to refrain from discussing their experience with anyone until the research project is complete.
- Participants were asked if they had heard other participants discuss their experience; those who heard discussions by other participants were excluded from the study.

The 60 volunteer participants were randomly assigned to the experimental or comparison group. Those whose last names had an even number of letters were assigned to the experimental group and those whose names had an odd number of letters were assigned to the comparison group. Once one group had 30 participants the remainder of volunteers was assigned to the other group.

Individuals in the experimental group and comparison group made appointments for 1 hour at times amenable to both the participants and the PI. At the beginning of the sessions, participants were asked not to discuss their experience with others until after they had been contacted and told the research is complete. What they would be doing during the session was briefly described.

Confidentiality Statement

The following statement of confidentiality was included as part of the informed consent form:

“Your participation in this study and any forms generated will be held in strict confidence. Your name will not in any way be associated with the research findings. The information will be identified only by a code number. There is no financial cost to you to participate in this study. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary.”

Method of sharing results with research participants

Participants were asked if they would like to receive a summary of the study results upon completion of the dissertation. Those who indicated that they would like to receive a summary will be mailed printed information including the purpose of the study,

a brief background and theoretical information section, and the results of the study, with discussion. All participants will be informed that the entire dissertation will be available on-line at www.holosuniversity.net if they would like to read it in its entirety.

Procedure

Both groups were asked to participate for a one hour session. All participants were told that they were part of a study of effects on finger temperature and emotions in subjects who sit and listen to readings for periods of 30 minutes. Both groups were asked to take the STAI and POMS before and after participation in the listening part of the study. Once they completed the STAI and POMS forms, participants were provided with a comfortable chair and instructed to listen to a 30 minute recording. They were told that they could, if they chose, close their eyes at any time during the session. They were then connected to the finger temperature monitor and the recording was played for them.

The experimental group listened to a recording of the sayings of the historical Jesus and the comparison group listened to a recording of sayings attributed to Jesus by Gospel authors. After filling out the STAI and POMS instruments the second time, both the experimental and comparison group were asked to write comments describing their experience and any insights or feelings they may have had.

Recordings

The scripts used for the recordings consisted of words attributed to Jesus, selected from the four canonical Gospels and the “Gospel of Thomas.” The recording of “Attributed (Gospel) sayings” heard by the comparison group (A1) consisted of sayings which scholars contend did not originate with Jesus. The recording of “Authentic (Jesus)

sayings” heard by the experimental group (A2) consisted of sayings which the same scholars contend originated with Jesus.

Selected passages for the “Attributed” recording were selected from each of four canonical Gospels to reflect ideas specific to each Gospel writer. The sayings were arranged in the traditional order of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. A central part of Matthew’s agenda was to present Jesus as the Messiah who was upholder of Mosaic law, so selections reflecting that agenda were in the script. Mark’s agenda was to present Jesus as the Messiah who would return at final judgment and resurrection, so selections reflecting that agenda were used from Mark. Those passages were actually based to great extent upon the book of Daniel and other Hebrew scriptures. Luke was an advocate for the poor and engaged in polemics against establishment figures, so passages reflecting his opposition to the rich and the Pharisees were used. John was concerned to present Jesus as Word of God or “Cosmic Christ.” Consequently John attributes many sayings to Jesus claiming his divinity in the form of “I am” statements. John also emphasized love, oneness and peace. Therefore the script contained many “I am” statements from John. Passages in the “Attributed” recording were taken from a traditional translation (NRSV) to reflect the “liturgical” quality and purposes of the canonical Gospels.

The “Attributed sayings” were selected to reflect the depiction of Jesus found in the different Gospels, including his statements about Jewish Law and the “final days.” On the other hand, it seemed to me that sayings about judgment and the “end of the world” in those Gospels could evoke adverse reactions in listeners. Since I did not want to intentionally produce a negative effect with the “Attributed sayings,” I chose to end the

recording on a relatively positive note with the “gentler” sayings from John. Based upon comments of the participants, John’s sayings proved in fact to be better received and more comforting to participants than the apocalyptic and moral commandments in the earlier passages of the script.

Here are a few examples of comments from participants on the moral law and eschatological sections at the beginning of the recording:

I became very *relaxed due to Jim’s voice – not the Biblical passages chosen*. Most of those were somewhat *negative* in content, at least *in the beginning*.”

“Interesting passage from the Bible, full of hell and brimstone (whatever that is?). The *part of Christianity I do not like*; believe like me or you are condemned to hell.”

“All of the quotes in the beginning seemed to be *bad/judgmental/negative*. As they went on they *started to be more positive*, but all seemed to say that Jesus was the only way.”

“My general observation is that *the bible readings were progressing from a negative tone to a positive tone* as they progressed.”

15 out of 23 participants in the “Attributed” group who commented on the experience explicitly mentioned having a negative reaction to the first part of the “Attributed sayings” recording.

Authentic (Jesus) sayings were selected and arranged in way to present the whole of Jesus’ philosophy. For the most part the sayings were organized in a way that reflected my discussion of Jesus’ philosophy in the first part of this paper. I attempted to arrange the sayings in such a way that the early passages laid out foundational ideas

relatively clearly. It was my hope that the context provided by the early passages would make later passages more easily understood.

The sayings and parables of Jesus can be confusing and even with the relatively straightforward passages at the beginning, a few participants commented on the surprising and confusing nature of some of the sayings. For example:

“I found some of the *passages unfamiliar and cryptic* and that surprised me.”

“Occasionally, his parables leave me a little *confused* as to their interpretations in our daily lives.”

“Some Bible verses are *difficult to understand* (what they mean) and I felt cut off by them.”

A few of the Authentic sayings were taken from the Gospel of Thomas, so technically those sayings were not “Bible passages,” but the sayings did reflect the views of historical Jesus, according to scholars. I used the Jesus Seminar’s “Scholars Version” (SV) translation which sought to reflect the informal language of the Greek used in the Gospels. The Greek used in Jesus’ sayings in the Bible is informal and conversational rather than polished, formal and liturgical.

For the recordings I read the passages myself and attempted to read them in way appropriate to the content. Since I have no way of knowing the tone, pitch, or pace of Jesus’ speech patterns, I chose to read at a moderate pace in calm tones and my normal pitch. I read the parables as if telling a story, rather than in a preaching tone. I read the aphorisms as if citing proverbs. I chose to read the preaching and prophetic sections of the attributed sayings in a moderate tone rather than a fervent “preachy” tone; my intention was to simply convey the meaning, not to emotionally manipulate and

evangelize. While I am not a professional actor or “recording artist,” I am confident that my voice and readings were adequate to the task. My confidence was verified by comments from seven participants who commented that my voice was soothing or pleasant, which indicated that my readings did not detract from experiencing the ideas in the sayings. None of the participants complained about how the passages were read.

[For scripts, see Appendix B]

Measurement Tools

Peter A. Parks, PhD, a psychologist, counselor and biofeedback trainer graciously provided the equipment and guidance for peripheral skin temperature (PST) aspect of the research. An RC-30B Temperature Data Logger was used to measure peripheral skin temperatures of participants. The thermometer was taped to participants’ index fingers on their dominant hands. The Data Logger recorded temperatures in degrees Celsius to 0.1 of a degree. The Logger was set to record a reading every 10 seconds. The Celsius measurements were used in the statistical evaluation. Biofeedback monitors are non-invasive and have no side-effects.

To measure participants’ psychological responses to the recordings, two instruments were used: the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) and the Profile of Mood States (POMS) Brief assessment. The STAI measures temporary *states* of anxiety and the more stable anxiety *traits*. POMS measures transient fluctuating mood states in six categories: tension-anxiety, depression-dejection, anger-hostility, fatigue-inertia, vigor-activity, and confusion-bewilderment.

The STAI consists of a series of 40 statements, 20 ask for self-report regarding “how respondents feel ‘*right now*, at this moment” and 20 ask for “how people *generally*

feel.”¹⁸⁷ The “feel right now” statements evaluate *state* of anxiety (S-Anxiety scale) and the “generally feel” statements evaluate *trait* anxiety (T-Anxiety scale).

The S-Anxiety scale measures “feelings of apprehension, tension, nervousness, and worry.” Scores on the S-Anxiety scale have been used to measure decreases in stress resulting from relaxation training and changes in anxiety experienced by patients in counseling.¹⁸⁸ That is the primary reason for my using the STAI, since I was testing to see if listening to “Jesus sayings” measurably decreases stress.

“More than 2,000 studies using the STAI have appeared in the research literature since the *STAI Test Manual* was published” in 1970, according to the *STAI Test Manual*.¹⁸⁹ The STAI has been used in medicine, dentistry, education, psychology, and other social sciences.¹⁹⁰

Each statement on the S-Anxiety scale asks respondent to identify the *intensity* of their feelings regarding their agreement with the statement in terms of: (1) not at all; (2) somewhat; (3) moderately so; and (4) very much so. The T-Anxiety scale questions have responses to measure the *frequency* of their feelings: (1) almost never; (2) sometimes; (3) often; (4) almost always.¹⁹¹

POMS is a widely used instrument for measuring patient responses to therapeutic intervention. According to the POMS technical manual, “By the end of 1992 there were almost 2,000 citations of the POMS, and by the end of 2002 the number approached 3,000. . . . In the past decade, approximately 3,800 authors cited the POMS in 1,000 reports published in about 400 journals.”¹⁹² In addition, “seven areas of research have provided evidence of the predictive and construct reliability of the POMS. These seven areas are: (1) brief psychotherapy studies; (2) controlled outpatient drug trials; (3) cancer

research; (4) drug abuse and addiction research; (5) studies of response to emotion-inducing conditions; (6) research on sports and athletes; (7) studies of concurrent validity coefficients and other POMS correlates.”¹⁹³

The POMS Brief consists of 30 words describing different psycho-physiological feelings, by which participants rate their identification with those feelings in terms of “not at all,” “a little,” “moderately,” “quite a bit,” or “extremely.” My research was not technically a therapeutic intervention, but since the POMS can measure short term shifts in moods related to mental and physical health, I thought it might provide useful data for measuring mood shifts induced by listening to the recordings used in my experiment. I used the POMS Brief form since the longer form is used for more extensive psychological analysis.

I was especially interested in the POMS scores for “Depression-Dejection” and the “Total Mood Disturbance” (TMD). The “Depression-Dejection” category scores correlate with sense of personal inadequacy, feelings of unworthiness, emotional isolation and guilt.¹⁹⁴ I theorized that since Jesus’ philosophy emphasized the value of humans as children of God, hearing those ideas might help somewhat uplift the listener’s sense of self-worth. The TMD is used to identify “a single global estimate of affective state.”¹⁹⁵ I analyzed the TMD to see if any shift occurred toward a health enhancing affective state in listeners.

CHAPTER 7: RESULTS

Analysis

The results of this study were analyzed using the mixed design ANOVA test. The mixed design ANOVA test is used where there is a combination of one independent measures factor and one repeated measures factor. The mixed design ANOVA analyzes variance using degrees of freedom, sums of squares, and mean squares to calculate variance ratios (F values) and is appropriate for measurements under different conditions over time. Calculating the F value measures the variability of the scores from the mean of the sample using the sums of the squares of the differences between the mean and individual scores. Dividing the sums of the squares by degrees of freedom produces an average variability of a score in the sample.

The mixed design ANOVA method allows measurement of variability produced by random error and systematic differences, within conditions and between conditions. The F value is the variance ratio of between conditions variance to error variance, which can also be expressed as the ratio of systematic differences plus error variance to error variance. When the null hypothesis of an experiment is false, the ratio of F is expected to be greater than 1 because the systematic differences should be greater than the error variance. The larger the systematic differences, the larger the F value. What amounts to a significant F value will vary according to sample size degrees of freedom and the number of conditions degrees of freedom.

I chose to use the ANOVA statistical test because it is best suited to my research, which involved measurement of one independent factor and one repeated measures factor. The independent factor consisted of the participants listening to sayings of the

historical Jesus and the participants listening to sayings attributed to Jesus which probably did not originate with him. The repeated measure factor consisted of measurements done before and after the listening sessions.

The scores used for analysis of the STAI and POMS were the standard scores used for those instruments. The scores for the finger temperature measurement were the difference between the participants' base finger temperatures (2 minutes are beginning) and their peak finger temperatures while listening to the recordings. The results from the STAI, POMS, and finger temperature measurements were analyzed using the mixed design ANOVA test.

Results of Peripheral Skin Temperature (PST) Test

Hypothesis 2: Listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus has the effect of producing the lowered sympathetic nervous system arousal in participants as measured by an increase in peripheral skin temperature.

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant statistical change in peripheral skin temperature while listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus.

Hypothesis 3: Listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus increases the peripheral skin temperature significantly more than listening to the attributed sayings of Jesus.

Null Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in peripheral skin temperature increase from listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus compared to listening to the attributed sayings of Jesus.

The experiment investigated the question of whether or not listening to sayings of Jesus (authentic or attributed) would produce spontaneous relaxation responses in listeners similar to relaxation responses observed in people practicing meditation, using

relaxation exercises and being hypnotized. Peripheral skin temperature (PST) is a good measure of relaxation, since increased PST often accompanies a relaxation. In previous experimentation and during this experiment I have observed that different individuals have different “normal” PST and that the PST normally fluctuates moment to moment. For a person in a stable temperature environment, PST normally increases and decreases in a range of 1 to 3 degrees Celsius. If a participant’s PST fluctuated in that fairly narrow range, it would not necessarily indicate a relaxation response. If within a stable temperature environment a participant’s PST increased by 4 or more degrees Celsius (7.2 degrees Fahrenheit), there is a good chance that participant had a relaxation response. For purposes of statistical analysis, base PST was compared to peak PST during the listening session. Comparison of those scores for all participants provides a picture of average temperature increase of the study population during the sessions. However, looking at individual PST measurements also provides a valid picture of relaxation responses, since one can see whether or not an *individual’s* PST rose 4 or more degrees during the session.

ANOVA mixed design variance ratios for Factor A (attributed v authentic sayings) were $F(1, 28) = 4.20$; for Factor B (before and after listening), $F(1, 58) = 4.00$. The results of the analysis rejected Null hypothesis 2 with regard to factor B: listening to a recording of sayings of Jesus, *both* Attributed and Authentic, was associated with significant variance of PST with respect to a rise in temperature. Therefore Hypothesis 2 that listening to sayings of Jesus produces a relaxation response is supported.

However, there was no significant difference in relaxation response between listening to Attributed and Authentic sayings (factor A). The experiment failed to reject the Null hypothesis 3 that “listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus increases the

peripheral skin temperature significantly more than listening to the attributed sayings of Jesus.”

In both groups there was, on average, a significant increase in PST. The mean scores for base temperature were: 30.475 degrees for the “Attributed sayings” group and 31.31 degrees for the “Authentic sayings” group. The mean scores for peak temperatures were: 32.47 degrees for the “Attributed sayings” group and 33.01 degrees for the “Authentic sayings” group. The difference between base and peak temperatures were: 2 degrees for the “Attributed sayings” group and 1.7 degrees for the “Authentic sayings” group.

14.29 % (4 out of 28) participants in each group experienced marked relaxation responses above 4 degrees Celsius (7.2 degrees Fahrenheit). It is interesting to note that on average participants in the “Attributed sayings” group had slightly greater difference between base and peak temperatures than did the “Authentic sayings” group. On average the “Authentic sayings” group had slightly higher base and peak temperatures. Again, those differences were not statistically significant. Those relatively equal scores indicate that simply sitting and listening for 30 minutes to passages from revered texts *could* produce relaxation responses in listeners, even if listeners disagree with much of the content (as in the “Attributed” group) or find the content somewhat confusing (as in the “Authentic” group).

While there was no significant difference between “Attributed” and “Authentic” sayings with regard to relaxation response/ meditative experience, there was a difference in *comments* upon the two recordings. The difference in responses to the different

content was indicated not only by comments but also by results measured by the STAI and POMS instruments.

The table below shows the ANOVA summary of PST scores.

Table 1: ANOVA Summary Table of PST Scores from Listening to Gospel & Jesus Sayings

<u>Source of Variation</u>	<u>Degrees of Freedom</u>	<u>Sums of Squares</u>	<u>Mean Square</u>	<u>Variance Ratio (F)</u>	<u>Probability</u>
Factor A	1	12.37	12.37	0.5	p > .05
Error A	54	1325.25	24.54		
Factor B	1	95.64	95.64	28.46	p < .01
Factor AxB	1	1.62	1.62	0.48	p > .05
Error B	54	181.59	3.36		
Total	111	1616.47			

Self-Evaluation Instruments: STAI and POMS

Hypothesis 4: Listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus results in significant reduction of health-counterproductive emotions (tension-anxiety, depression-dejection, anger-hostility, fatigue-inertia, and confusion-bewilderment).

Null Hypotheses 4: Listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus has no significant effect on health-counterproductive emotions.

Hypothesis 5: Listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus results in significantly greater reduction of health-counterproductive emotions than listening to the attributed sayings of Jesus.

Null Hypothesis 5: There is no significant difference in effect on reduction of health-counterproductive emotions between listening to authentic sayings of Jesus and attributed sayings of Jesus.

STAI

According to analysis using the ANOVA mixed design variance ratios, the results of the experiment failed to reject the Null Hypothesis with regard to Anxiety State as measured by STAI. For variance ratios $F(1, 28)$ and $F(1, 58)$, Factor B (listening) was 0.32 lower than critical value of F distribution.

Participants in this research had noticeably lower anxiety states (as measured by STAI) than adult norms. The mean for working adults in the 50 to 69 age group (the age group from which most of the present experiment drew) is 33.355. The pre-test mean for participants in this research was 29.55. It may be that the relatively low pre-test anxiety level affected the outcome in terms of how much their anxiety state *could* decrease.

While the decrease in anxiety state was not statistically significant, the mean scores indicate that the “Authentic” group had a noticeable decrease in anxiety state: from 29.3 to 24.9; a decrease of 4.4 points compared to the 0.1 decrease in the “Attributed” group. The decreased anxiety state of the “Authentic” group, considered in light of participants’ comments, suggests that listening to authentic sayings was more effective at reducing anxiety than listening to the attributed sayings.

Surprisingly, while the STAI state measurements failed to reject null hypotheses 4 and 5, the STAI trait measurements *did* reject those null hypotheses. This was a surprising result because the trait scores are generally more stable than the state scores.

The STAI trait scores supported the hypothesis that listening to authentic sayings more effectively reduced anxiety than listening to attributed sayings.

The ANOVA mixed design analysis of variance ratios rejected the Null Hypotheses 4 and 5. Listening to recordings significantly affected participants' perceptions of how they generally felt. Examining the mean scores we can see that the difference in pre-test and post-test scores was primarily affected by the scores of those in the "Authentic" group. The scores of the "Authentic" group showed a 2.56 average decrease in trait anxiety, compared to only a 0.73 decrease in the "Attributed" group.

Means: before recording

Attributed group (A-1): 32.4

Authentic group (A-2): 33.03

Means: after recording

Attributed: 31.67 (down 0.73)

Authentic: 30.47 (down 2.56)

The tables below show the ANOVA summaries of the STAI results.

Table 2: ANOVA Summary Table of STAI-S Scores from listening to Gospel Sayings & Jesus Sayings

<u>Source of Variation</u>	<u>Degrees of Freedom</u>	<u>Sums of Squares</u>	<u>Mean Square</u>	<u>Variance Ratio (F)</u>	<u>Probability</u>
Factor A	1	81.675	81.675	0.95	p > .05
Error A	58	4966.15	85.62		
Factor B	1	151.875	151.875	3.68	p > .05
Factor AxB	1	138.675	138.675	3.36	p > .05
Error B	58	2393.95	41.275		
Total	119	7732.327			

Table 3: ANOVA Summary Table of STAI-T Scores from Listening to Gospel Sayings & Jesus Sayings

<u>Source of Variation</u>	<u>Degrees of Freedom</u>	<u>Sums of Squares</u>	<u>Mean Square</u>	<u>Variance Ratio (F)</u>	<u>Probability</u>
Factor A	1	2.41	2.41	0.03	p > .05
Error A	58	4821.68	83.13		
Factor B	1	81.67	81.67	7.91	p < .01
Factor AxB	1	25.21	25.21	2.44	p > .05
Error B	58	598.62	10.32		
Total	119	5529.59			

POMS

The results of the ANOVA mixed design variance ratios analysis of the POMS scores failed to reject the Null Hypotheses 4 and 5. The POMS TMD scores are calculated by adding the scores for Tension-Anxiety (T), Depression-Dejection (D), Anger-Hostility (A), and Fatigue-Inertia (F) and Confusion-Bewilderment (C) and subtracting the Vigor-Activity (V) scores. The TMD raw scores were sometimes negative numbers when the sum of the T, D, A, F and C scores was less than the sum of the V scores. In analyzing the TMD, I used raw scores in one analysis and raw scores plus 20 in a second analysis. I did the second analysis to check and see if results from using some negative scores would produce different results than using all positive scores. The results from both analyses were the same. In both analyses, the TMD failed to reject the Null Hypotheses.

I also did an analysis of D scores using “T-scores” provided on the POMS Brief score sheet; the variance ratio on D scores was higher than that of the TMD scores, but still not significant. I would note however that the mean scores on the POMS indicated decreased Depression-Dejection and the “Authentic group” decrease in D was greater than the decrease for the “Attributed group.”

Mean scores for Depression-Dejection:

Attributed: 35.43 to 34.97 (down 0.46)

Authentic: 34.27 to 33.2 (down 1.07)

The Total Mood Disturbance mean scores increased for the “Attributed group” and decreased for the “Authentic group.”

Mean scores for TMD:

Attributed: 18.03 to 19.37 (up 1.34)

Authentic: 17.83 to 15.53 (down 2.3)

While the differences on the POMS scores were not statistically significant, the differences were in the same direction as the results of the STAI, viz. listening to authentic sayings of Jesus tended to decrease health counterproductive emotional states more than listening to attributed sayings. In one test (Total Mood Disturbance), the attributed sayings seemed to slightly *increase* health counterproductive emotions.

The tables below show the ANOVA summaries of POMS results.

Table 4: ANOVA Summary Table of POMS D Scores from Listening to Gospel & Jesus Sayings

<u>Source of Variation</u>	<u>Degrees of Freedom</u>	<u>Sums of Squares</u>	<u>Mean Square</u>	<u>Variance Ratio (F)</u>	<u>Probability</u>
Factor A	1	64.54	64.54	2.76	p > .05
Error A	58	1356.33	23.385		
Factor B	1	17.64	17.64	0.77	p > .05
Factor AxB	1	67.23	67.23	2.94	p > .05
Error B	58	413.13	22.89		
Total	119	1918.87			

Table 5: ANOVA Summary Table of POMS TMD from Listening to Gospel & Jesus Sayings

<u>Source of Variation</u>	<u>Degrees of Freedom</u>	<u>Sums of Squares</u>	<u>Mean Square</u>	<u>Variance Ratio (F)</u>	<u>Probability</u>
Factor A	1	124.03	124.03	0.537	p>.05
Error A	58	13405.67	231.13		
Factor B	1	7.5	7.5	0.12	p >.05
Factor AxB	1	97.2	97.2	1.59	p> .05
Error B	58	3546.8	61.15		
Total	119	17181.2			

Conclusion regarding effect on moods of listening to recordings

Null hypotheses 4 and 5 can be rejected based upon STAI-T results. Furthermore, there were differences in other scores (STAI-S, POMS-D and POMS-TMD) which all “leaned” in the direction of the STAI-T results, i.e. listening to recordings reduced anxiety and negative moods, authentic sayings more effectively than attributed ones. By rejecting Null Hypotheses 4 and 5, the STAI-T results supported hypotheses 4 and 5: (4) listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus results in significant reduction of health-counterproductive emotions and (5) listening to the authentic sayings of Jesus results in significantly greater reduction of health-counterproductive emotions than listening to the attributed sayings of Jesus. The results that were not statistically significant for STAI-S, POMS-D and POMS-TMD also indicated support for the hypotheses 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 8: DISCUSSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This dissertation was concerned with 2 main questions: (1) “could the historical Jesus of Nazareth legitimately be classified as a philosopher whose philosophy had therapeutic value for his contemporaries?” and (2) “does the philosophy of Jesus have therapeutic value for at least some people in our era?”

I believe it is also important to state a couple of ideas this dissertation was not concerned to answer: (1) “was Jesus the Christ as advocated by traditional Christianity?” and (2) “is Jesus’ philosophy uniquely therapeutic in contrast to other ‘ancient philosophies’?” Regarding the first question, I would only say that whether or not Jesus was or is the Christ is a matter of faith which ultimately can be neither proven nor disproven by historical or scientific methods. Regarding the second question, I believe that other ancient philosophies could have therapeutic value for people in our era and that that question could be examined by methods similar to those used in this study. It is beyond the intended scope of this paper to make a case for or against the therapeutic value of Stoicism, Cynicism, Pythagoreanism, Taoism, Moism, or any other ancient philosophy or religion. The current study suggests that both ancient and modern philosophies and religions could be tested and compared for therapeutic value in terms of effects upon relaxation response, meditation induction, and reduction of emotions such as anxiety related to health and healing.

Returning to the original main questions of this dissertation, the methods used here indicate an affirmative answer to both those questions.

“Could the historical Jesus of Nazareth legitimately be classified as a philosopher whose philosophy had therapeutic value for his contemporaries?” The identification and

analysis of Jesus' words indicate philosophical ideas and methods similar to the philosophies of his era. Similarities of Jesus concepts and methods to the philosophies of Stoicism, Cynicism, Pythagoreanism, Taoism, and Moism were illustrated. Regardless of however else he might be classified, Jesus clearly had a philosophy which can be discussed in comparison to other philosophies. Was that philosophy therapeutic for his contemporaries? Jesus' reputation as a healer in his own time suggests that it was. The research on modern listeners supports the proposition that Jesus' ideas had therapeutic value for his listeners.

“Does the philosophy of Jesus have therapeutic value for at least some people in our era?” The results of the experiment involving listening to recordings of Jesus' words indicate that for some people today hearing his ideas can reduce negative emotions and induce a relaxation response.

The most interesting result of this experiment may be the surprising effect upon “anxiety trait” levels as measured by the STAI. It appears that listening to Jesus' sayings had the statistically significant effect of shifting people's perceptions of how they generally feel; i.e. how they have felt *in the past!* This suggests that, in effect, people can shift their self-perception e.g. from “I am usually anxious” to “I am sometimes anxious” or even “I am rarely anxious.” Would such shifts have short or long term spiritual, psychological or physiological benefits? That could be worthwhile to explore.

This experiment does not indicate what percentage of the world's population could reduce their anxiety and other disturbing feelings by hearing Jesus' philosophy.

What the experiment does show is that people whose beliefs are similar to those of Unity students could benefit from listening to and contemplating the philosophy of the

historical Jesus. The people most similar to Unity students are probably students of Religious Science and New Thought, since those three organizations have the same roots and nearly identical beliefs. Other groups with beliefs and practices similar to Unity include Theosophists, “Positive Thinking” Christians (followers of Norman Vincent Peale), and members of mainline churches who regularly read Unity literature. The number of people who could benefit from Jesus’ philosophy might well go far beyond the people who are sympathetic to the Unity church. It could be illuminating to conduct an experiment similar to the one done for this paper, but involving members of traditional Christians and/or people who consider themselves “spiritual” but who are not affiliated with any organized religion.

It could also be illuminating to conduct experiments using different arrangements of biblical and non-biblical proverbs and parables to find out which kind of wisdom teachings are most effective at inducing meditative states, relaxation responses and reduction of negative emotions.

In this experiment I was interested in seeing whether or not there would be occurrences of “spontaneous” relaxation responses indicating meditative states. Consequently, the recordings were designed as “readings” and not as recordings intended to induce meditative states.

I decided to do an additional preliminary investigation to see what might result from a recording designed to be more conducive to meditation. I thought this experiment might be relevant to my discussion of implications for future research. I also thought this experiment would be a step toward designing effective meditation methods using wisdom sayings. Such meditations could have the benefits revealed in studies of Eastern

meditation methods with the additional benefit of conveying ideas useful for development of virtuous qualities (here I do not use the term “virtuous” in any absolute sense, but rather to refer to whatever qualities different schools of thought might consider desirable).

For this preliminary exploration, I asked a few extra volunteers to listen to a meditation recording which consisted of a few words of instruction followed by selected passages from the authentic sayings of Jesus. As with the main experiment, I had volunteers read and sign the “Consent” form. Because this experiment was only exploratory and was not intended to be analyzed statistically, because the experiment was not significantly different from my original experiment, and because I have been effectively leading meditations for over 30 years, I did not submit a protocol for review.

For the meditation recording I attempted to use passages that would be minimally confusing and which would focus on Jesus’ ideas of a present benevolent “Father God” and on statements regarding the implications of humans being “children of God.” The only exception to that general scheme was the first statement “do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,” which was intended to begin the meditation on a note of paradox to briefly confuse the conscious mind and facilitate access to the unconscious. Further, the recording was designed with longer silent pauses between sayings. The pauses were either 30 seconds or 1 minute, based upon the length of the saying (longer pauses for long parables, shorter pauses for short aphorisms). Based upon my own experience, I reckoned that the amount and placement of silence on the recording was about what would be appropriate and effective for beginner students in meditation. [See Appendix B for script]

The volunteers were asked to take the STAI questionnaire before and after listening to the recording. Their PST was measured during the recording. I did not have enough copies of the POMS on hand to use in this experiment.

There were 7 participants (2 male, 5 female). The age range was: one under 30 (14%); 4 between the ages of 30 and 60 (57%) and 2 over 70 (29%). In the PST measurements, the average base temperature was 28.83 degrees Celsius (83.89 F) and the average peak temperature was 31.81 degrees Celsius (89.26 F). The mean base temperature of all participants in the original experiment was 30.89 degrees. One participant in this extra experiment had unusually low PST, 22 degrees Celsius, which brought down the average base and peak temperatures.

The average difference between base and peak temperatures in the “extra” experiment was 2.98 degrees Celsius, which was about 1.0 degree (1.8 F) higher than the average of the original “Attributed” group and 1.28 degrees (2.3 F) higher than the “Authentic” group. 2 of the 7 participants (29%) in the extra experiment had temperature increases of 4 or more degrees Celsius, compared with the 4 of 28 (14%) participants in each of the original two groups. In other words, the preliminary results indicate that twice as many participants had relaxation responses when the recording was designed to be a meditation than when the recording was designed as a “reading.”

On the STAI, the mean for pre-listening scores were 28.14 on the anxiety-state questions and 33.86 on the anxiety-trait questions. The mean post-listening scores were 21.14 on the state questions and 29.29 on the trait questions. The mean decrease in anxiety-state scores was 7 compared to the 0.1 and 4.4 decreases for the experimental “Attributed” and “Authentic” groups, respectively. The mean decrease in anxiety-trait

scores was 4.57 compared to the decreases of 1 and 2.56 for “Attributed” and “Authentic” groups respectively.

The number of participants in the exploratory experiment was insufficient to support claims of statistically significant results. Nevertheless, the designed meditation recording at first sight appears to be more effective than the designed readings for inducing meditation experiences, relaxation response and decreased anxiety (state and trait). These results suggest it would be worthwhile to do further research into the effects of designed meditations based upon sayings of Jesus and other wisdom sayings.

ENDNOTES:

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⁸⁴ Mt 8: 30, SV.

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- ⁸⁵ Mk 6: 8, NIV.
- ⁸⁶ Mt 10: 10, NIV.
- ⁸⁷ Lu 9: 3, NIV.
- ⁸⁸ M.-O. Goulet-Cazé, *op cit.*, p. 16.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁹⁰ This parable, while not found in the canonical Gospels, has been recognized by the scholars of the Jesus Seminar as an authentic parable of the historical Jesus.
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- ⁹³ Long, *op cit.* p. 42.
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APPENDIX A - CONSENT FORM

Consent Form for Participants of “Effects of Listening to Bible Passages” Study

Holos University Graduate Seminary supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

The principle investigator, Rev. James Gaither, is interested in studying the effects of listening to different Bible passages on finger temperature and moods. The purpose is to compare the effects of hearing different biblical passages.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to fill out two mood state assessment forms, once at the outset of the study and once at the end. Then you will be asked to sit in one place for about 30 minutes listening to a recording of Bible passages, while a temperature monitor is attached to your finger. Though initially you may find wearing the temperature monitor slightly distracting, once you begin listening to the recording you should not have any problem focusing.

After the 30 minutes is complete you will be asked to fill out the mood state assessment forms again and write a short paragraph describing how you felt about the experience and any insights you may have gained.

Your participation in this study and any forms generated will be held in strict confidence. Your name will not in any way be associated with the research findings. The information will be identified only by a code number. There is no financial cost to you to participate in this study. Your participation is solicited, although strictly voluntary.

Your participation is greatly appreciated. If you would like additional information concerning this study, its procedures or its purpose, before or after it is complete, please feel free to contact James Gaither by phone, mail, or email.

If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Holos University Graduate Seminary Dean of Academic Affairs through the University at (888) 272-6109, 1501 East Broadway, Bolivar, Missouri, 65613.

APPENDIX B - RECORDING SCRIPTS

These are Readings from the Gospels (Attributed Sayings)

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hell of fire. (Matt 5: 17-22)

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away; it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell. (Matt 5: 27-30)

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name? And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers. (Matt 7: 21-23)

The kingdom of heaven is like a net which was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind; when it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into vessels but threw away the bad.

So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous, and throw them into the furnace of fire; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. (Matthew 13: 47-50)

When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left.

Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you

welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry and feed thee, or thirsty and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger and welcome thee, or naked and clothe thee? And when did we see thee sick or in prison and visit thee?'

And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'

Then he will say to those at his left hand, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.'

Then they also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?'

Then he will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to me.' And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." (Matthew 25: 31-46)

Woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. Woe to you that laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. (Luke 6:24-26)

A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he forgave them both. Now which of them will love him more? (Luke 7: 41-42)

Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. (Luke 10: 19-20)

All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Luke 10: 22)

I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear him! (Luke 12: 4-5)

Who then is the faithful and wise steward, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed in coming,' and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the unfaithful. And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every one to whom much is given, of him will much be required; and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the more. (Luke 12: 42-48)

Woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and salutations in the market places. Woe to you! For you are like graves which are not seen, and men walk over them without knowing it.

Woe to you lawyers also! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and consent to the deeds of your fathers; for they killed them, and you build their tombs. (Luke 11: 42-48)

When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid.

But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just. (Luke 14: 12-14)

You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men. . . . You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who speaks evil of father or mother, let him surely die'; but you say, 'If a man tells his father or his mother, What you would have gained from me is Corban' (that is, given to God) -- then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God through your tradition which you hand on. And many such things you do. (Mark 7: 8-13)

What comes out of a man is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of a man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness,

deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man. (Mark 7: 20-23)

Take heed that no one leads you astray.

Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places, there will be famines; this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs.

But take heed to yourselves; for they will deliver you up to councils; and you will be beaten in synagogues; and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear testimony before them. And the gospel must first be preached to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you up, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say; but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

And brother will deliver up brother to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; let him who is on the housetop not go down, nor enter his house, to take anything away; and let him who is in the field not turn back to take his mantle. And alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days!

Pray that it may not happen in winter. For in those days there will be such tribulation as has not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, and never will be. And if the Lord had not shortened the days, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect, whom he chose, he shortened the days.

And then if any one says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

But take heed; I have told you all things beforehand. But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before all these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but

my words will not pass away.

But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. Take heed, watch; for you do not know when the time will come. It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his servants in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. Watch therefore -- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning -- lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. (Mark 13: 5-36)

Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.

The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man.

Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment. (John – 5: 19-29)

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber; but he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the gatekeeper opens; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.

Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He who is a hireling and not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming

and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own and my own know me, as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.

For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again; this charge I have received from my Father. (John 10: 1-5, 7-18)

He who believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And he who sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world.

He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day. For I have not spoken on my own authority; the Father who sent me has himself given me commandment what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has bidden me. (John 12: 44-50)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13: 34-35)

Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way where I am going. . . . I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.

If you had known me, you would have known my Father also; henceforth you know him and have seen him. . . . He who has seen me has seen the Father. . . . The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I go to the Father.

Whatever you ask in my name, I will do it, that the Father may be glorified in the Son; if you ask anything in my name, I will do it.

If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him; you know him, for he dwells with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you desolate; I will come to you.

Yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me; because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. . . . If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

These things I have spoken to you, while I am still with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

You heard me say to you, 'I go away, and I will come to you.' If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I go to the Father; for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe.

I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. . . .

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.

By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy

may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.
(John 14: 1- 15: 12)

Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee before the world was made. I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them to me, and they have kept thy word. Now they know that everything that thou hast given me is from thee.

I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and thou in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.

Father, I desire that they also, whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world.

O righteous Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee; and these know that thou hast sent me. I made known to them thy name, and I will make it known, that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.
(John 17: 5-7, 20-26)

These are the Sayings of Jesus (Authentic Sayings)

Don't worry about your life - what you're going to eat and drink - or about your body - what you're going to wear. There is more to living than food and clothing, isn't there? Take a look at the birds of the sky: they don't plant or harvest, or gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. You're worth more than they, aren't you? Can any of you add one hour to life by worrying about it? Why worry about clothes? Notice how the wild lilies grow: they don't toil and they never spin. Yet let me tell you, even Solomon at the height of his glory was never decked out like one of them. If God dresses up the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into an oven, won't God care for you even more, you who don't take anything for granted? (Mt. 6: 25-30)

What do sparrows cost? A penny apiece? Yet not one of them will fall to the earth without the consent of your Father. As for you, even the hairs on your head have all been counted. So, don't be timid: you're worth more than a flock of sparrows. (Mt. 10: 29-31)

Once there was this man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that's coming to me." So he divided his resources between them. Not too many days later, the younger son got all his things together and left home for a faraway country, where he squandered his property by living extravagantly. Just when he had spent it all, a serious famine swept through that country, and he began to do without. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to feed the pigs. He longed to satisfy his hunger with the carob pods, which the pigs usually ate; but no one offered him anything. Coming to his senses he said, "Lots of my father's hired hands have more than enough to eat, while here I am dying of starvation! I'll get up and go to my father and I'll say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and affronted you; I don't deserve to be called a son of yours any longer; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" And he got up and returned to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was moved to compassion. He went running out to him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and affronted you; I don't deserve to be called a son of yours any longer."

But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Fetch the fat calf and slaughter it; let's have a feast and celebrate, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and now is found." And they started celebrating.

Now his elder son was out in the field; and as he got closer to the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servant boys over and asked what was going on. He said to him, "Your brother has come home and your father has slaughtered the fat calf, because he has him back safe and sound."

But he was angry and refused to go in. So his father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, "See here, all these years I have slaved for you. I never once disobeyed any of your orders; yet you never once provided me with a kid goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours shows up, the one who has squandered your estate with prostitutes - for him you slaughter the fat calf."

But the father said to him, "My child, you are always at my side. Everything that's mine is yours. But we just had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead, and has come back to life; he was lost, and now is found."

(Luke 15: 11-32)

Whoever tries to save his soul will lose it, but whoever loses his soul will save it.
(Lk. 17: 33)

Ask - it'll be given to you; seek - you'll find; knock - it'll be opened for you. Rest assured: everyone who asks receives; everyone who seeks finds; and for the one who knocks it is opened. Who among you would hand a son a stone when it's bread he's

asking for? Again, who would hand him a snake when it's fish he's asking for? Of course no one would! So if you, neglectful as you are, know how to give your children good gifts, isn't it much more likely that your Father in the heavens will give good things to those who ask him? (Mt. 7: 7-11)

Suppose you have a friend who comes to you in the middle of the night and says to you, "Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine on a trip has just shown up and I have nothing to offer him." And suppose you reply, "Stop bothering me. The door is already locked and my children and I are in bed. I can't get up and give you anything." - I tell you, even though you won't get up and give the friend anything out of friendship, yet you will get up and give the other whatever is needed because you'd be ashamed not to. (Lk. 11: 5-8)

Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a toll collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed silently as follows: "I thank you, God, that I'm not like everybody else, thieving, unjust, adulterous, and especially not like that toll collector over there. I fast twice a week, I give tithes of everything I acquire." But the toll collector stood off by himself and didn't even dare to look up, but struck his chest, and muttered, "God, have mercy on me, sinner that I am." Let me tell you, the second man went back to his house holy but the first one did not. (Lk. 18: 10-14)

Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. (Thom. 62: 2)

Once there was a judge in this town who neither feared God nor cared about people. In that same town was a widow who kept coming to him and demanding, "Give me a ruling against the person I'm suing." For a while he refused; but eventually he said to himself, "I'm not afraid of God and I don't care about people, but this widow keeps pestering me. So I'm going to give her a favorable ruling, or else she'll keep coming back until she wears me down." (Lk. 18: 2-4)

Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mk 11: 22-25)

When you pray, say, "Father, let your name be revered. Let your rule be established. Give us our daily bread. Forgive our debts to the extent that we have forgiven those in debt to us. You do not test us; you deliver us from evil." (See Mt. 6: 9-13 & Lk. 11: 2-4)

You won't be able to observe the coming of God's realm. People are not going to be able to say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'Over there!' On the contrary, God's realm is within you. (Luke 17: 20-21)

If your leaders say to you, 'Look, the Father's realm is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the Father's realm is within you and it is outside you." (Thomas 3: 1-3)

It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here!' or 'Look there!' Rather the Father's realm is spread out upon the earth, and people don't see it. (Thomas 113: 2-3)

There is nothing hidden that will not be revealed. (Thom. 5: 2; see Mt. 10: 26)

Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you'll be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. . . . For the measure you give will be the measure given to you. (Lk. 6: 37-38)

Why do you notice the sliver in your friend's eye, but overlook the timber in your own? How can you say to your friend, "Let me get the sliver out of your eye," when there is a timber in your own? You phony, first take the timber out of your eye and then you'll see well enough to remove the sliver from your friend's eye. (Mt. 7: 3-5)

If you have money, don't lend it at interest. Rather, give it to someone from whom you won't get it back. (Thom. 95: 1, 2)

Give to the one who begs from you. (Mt. 5: 39-42)

Pay the emperor what belongs to the emperor, and God what belongs to God! (Luke 20: 25)

What does God's rule remind me of? It is like leaven which a woman took and concealed in fifty pounds of flour until it was all leavened. (Luke 13: 20-21)
It's like a mustard seed. It's the smallest of all seeds, but when it falls on prepared soil, it produces a large plant and becomes a shelter for the birds of the sky. (Thomas 20: 2-3)

God's rule is like this: Suppose someone sows seed on the ground, and sleeps and rises night and day, and the seed sprouts and matures, although the sower is unaware of it. The earth produces fruit on its own, first a shoot, then a head, then mature grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, that farmer sends for the sickle, because it's harvest time. (Mark 4: 26-29)

Listen to this! This sower went out to sow. While he was sowing, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Other seed fell on rocky ground where there wasn't much soil, and it came up right away because the soil had no depth. But when the sun came up it was scorched, and because it had no root it withered. Still other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it, so that it produced no fruit.

Finally, some seed fell on good earth and started producing fruit. The seed sprouted and grew: one part had a yield of thirty, another part sixty, and a third part one hundred. (Mk. 4: 3-8)

Heaven's rule is like a proprietor who went out the first thing in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the workers for a silver coin a day he sent them into his vineyard. And coming around 9 a.m. he saw others loitering in the marketplace and he said to them, "You go into the vineyard too, and I'll pay you whatever is fair." So they went. Around noon he went out again, and at 3 p.m., and repeated the process. About 5 p.m. he went out and found others loitering about and says to them, "Why did you stand around here idle the whole day?" They reply, "Because no one hired us." He tells them, "You go into the vineyard as well."

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard tells the foreman: "Call the workers and pay them their wages starting with those hired last and ending with those hired first."

Those hired at 5 p.m. came up and received a silver coin each. Those hired first approached thinking they would receive more. But they also got a silver coin apiece. They took it and began to grumble against the proprietor: "These guys hired last worked only an hour but you have made them equal to us who did most of the work during the heat of the day." In response he said to one of them, "Look pal, did I wrong you? You did agree with me for a silver coin, didn't you? Take your wages and get out! I intend to treat the one hired last the same way I treat you. Is there some law forbidding me to do with my money as I please? Or is your eye filled with envy because I am generous?" (Mt. 20: 1-15)

No one can be a slave to two masters. No doubt that slave will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and disdain the other. You can't be enslaved to both God and greed. (Matt 6: 24)

How difficult it is for those who have money to enter God's realm! It's easier for a camel to squeeze through a needle's eye than for a wealthy person to get into God's realm. (Mk. 10: 25)

There was a rich person who had a great deal of money. He said, "I shall invest my money so that I may sow, reap, plant, and fill my storehouses with produce, that I may lack nothing." These were the things he was thinking in his heart, but that very night he died. (Thom. 63: 1-3)

The Father's rule is like a woman who was carrying a jar full of meal. While she was walking along a distant road, the handle of the jar broke and the meal spilled behind her along the road. She didn't know it; she hadn't noticed a problem. When she reached her house, she put the jar down and discovered that it was empty. (Thom. 97:1-4)

Foxes have their dens and birds have their nests, but human beings have no place to lie down and rest. (Thom. 86: 1, 2)

Fortunate are you poor! God's realm belongs to you. Fortunate are you hungry! You will have a feast. Fortunate are you who weep now! You will laugh. (Luke 6: 20-21)

God causes the sun to rise on both the bad and the good, and sends rain on both the just and the unjust. Tell me, if you love those who love you, why should you be commended for that? Even the tax collectors do as much, don't they? Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect. (see Mt. 5: 45, 46, 48)

There was a man going from Jerusalem down to Jericho when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him, beat him up, and went off, leaving him half dead. Now by coincidence a priest was going down that road; when he caught sight of him, he went out of his way to avoid him. In the same way, when a Levite came to the place, he took one look at him and crossed the road to avoid him. But this Samaritan who was traveling that way came to where he was and was moved to pity at the sight of him. He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring olive oil and wine on them. He hoisted him onto his own animal, brought him to an inn, and looked after him. The next day he took out two silver coins, which he gave to the innkeeper, and said, "Look after him, and on my way back I'll reimburse you for any extra expense you have had." (Lk. 10: 30-35)

A person was receiving guests. When he had prepared the dinner, he sent his servant to invite the guests. The servant went to the first and said to that one, 'My master invites you.' That one said, 'Some merchants owe me money; they are coming to me tonight. I have to go and give them instructions. Please excuse me from dinner.' The servant went to another and said to that one, 'My master has invited you.' That one said to the servant, 'I have bought a house, and I have been called away for a day. I shall have no time.' The servant went to another and said to that one, 'My master invites you.' That one said to the servant, 'My friend is to be married, and I am to arrange the banquet. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me from dinner.' The servant went to another and said to that one, 'My master invites you.' That one said to the servant, 'I have bought an estate, and I am going to collect the rent. I shall not be able to come. Please excuse me.' The servant returned and said to his master, 'Those whom you invited to dinner have asked to be excused.' The master said to his servant, 'Go out on the streets and bring back whomever you find to have dinner. (Thomas 64: 1-11)

Love your enemies. (Mt. 5: 44)

Don't react violently against one who is evil: when someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other as well. When someone wants to sue you for your shirt, let that person have your coat along with it. Further, when anyone conscripts you for one mile, go an extra mile. (Matt 5: 39-41)

Forgive and you'll be forgiven. (Lk. 6: 37)

A secular ruler decided to settle accounts with his servants. When the process began, the debtor was brought to him who owed ten million dollars. Since he couldn't pay it back, the ruler ordered him sold, along with his wife and children and everything he had, so he could recover his money. At this prospect, the servant fell down and groveled before him: "Be patient with me, and I'll repay every cent." Because he was compassionate, the master of that servant let him go and canceled the debt.

As soon as he got out, that same fellow collared one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred dollars, grabbed him by the neck and demanded: "Pay back what you owe!" His fellow servant fell down and begged him: "Be patient with me and I'll pay you back." But he wasn't interested; instead, he went out and threw him in prison until he paid the debt.

When his fellow servants realized what had happened, they were terribly distressed and went and reported to their master everything that had taken place. At that point, his master summoned him: "You wicked servant," he says to him, "I canceled your entire debt because you begged me. Wasn't it only fair for you to treat your fellow servant with the same consideration as I treated you?" And the master was so angry he handed him over to those in charge of punishment until he paid back everything he owed. (Mt. 18: 23-34)

There was this rich man whose manager had been accused of squandering his master's property. He called him in and said, "What's this I hear about you? Let's have an audit of your management, because your job is being terminated."

Then the manager said to himself, "What am I going to do? My master is firing me. I'm not strong enough to dig ditches and I'm ashamed to beg. I've got it! I know what I'll do so doors will open for me when I'm removed from management." So he called in each of his master's debtors. He said to the first, "How much do you owe my master?"

He said, "Five hundred gallons of olive oil." And he said to him, "Here is your invoice; sit down right now and make it two hundred and fifty."

Then he said to another, "And how much do you owe?" He said, "A thousand bushels of wheat." He says to him, "Here is your invoice; make it eight hundred."

The master praised the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly. (Lk. 16: 1-8)

You must be sly as a snake and as simple as a dove. (Mt. 10: 16)

Struggle to get in through the narrow door; I'm telling you, many will try to get in, but won't be able. (Lk. 13: 24)

Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the realm of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the realm of God as a little child will never enter it. (Luke 18: 16-17, NIV)

The sabbath day was created for Adam and Eve, not Adam and Eve for the sabbath day. So the son of Adam is lord even over the sabbath day. (Mk. 2: 27, 28)

Whenever you enter a town and they welcome you, eat whatever is set before you. (Lk. 10: 7, 8)

It's not what goes into a person from the outside that can defile; rather it's what comes out of the person that defiles. (Mk. 7: 15)

Why do you wash the outside of the cup? Don't you understand that the one who made the inside is also the one who made the outside? (Thom. 89: 1)

A city built on a high hill and fortified cannot fall, nor can it be hidden. (Thom. 32)

Since when is the lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket or under the bed? It's put on the lampstand isn't it? (Mk. 4: 21)

Salt is good. But if salt loses its zing, how will it be renewed? It's no good for either earth or manure. It just gets thrown away. (Lk. 14: 34-35)

Since when do people pick grapes from thorns or figs from thistles? (Mt. 7: 16)

... to those who have, more will be given, and from those who don't have, even what they do have will be taken away. (Mk. 4: 25)

You know, it's like a man going on a trip who called his servants and turned his valuables over to them. To the first he gave 30,000 silver coins, to the second 12,000, and to the third 6,000, to each in relation to his ability, and he left.

Immediately the one who received 30,000 silver coins went out and put the money to work; he doubled his investment. The second also doubled his money. But the third, who had received the smallest amount, went out, dug a hole, and hid his master's silver.

After a long absence, the servants' master returned to settle accounts with them. The first, who had received 30,000 silver coins, came and produced an additional 30,000, with this report: "Master, you handed me 30,000 silver coins; as you can see, I have made you another 30,000." His master commended him: "Well done, you competent

and reliable servant! You have been trustworthy in small amounts; I'll put you in charge of large amounts."

The one with 12,000 silver coins also came and reported: "Master, you handed me 12,000 silver coins; as you can see, I have made you another 12,000." His master commended him: "Well done, you competent and reliable servant! You have been trustworthy in small amounts; I'll put you in charge of large amounts."

The one who had received 6,000 silver coins also came and reported: "Master, I know that you drive a hard bargain, reaping where you didn't sow and gathering where you didn't scatter. Since I was afraid, I went out and buried your money in the ground. Look, here it is." But his master replied to him: "You incompetent and timid servant! So you knew that I reap where I didn't sow and gather where I didn't scatter, did you? Then you should have taken my money to the bankers. Then when I returned I would have received my capital with interest. So take the money away from this fellow and give it to the one who has the greatest sum." (Mt. 25: 14-28)

What do you think of this? If someone has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders off, won't that person leave the ninety-nine in the hills and go look for the one that wandered off? And if he should find it, you can bet he'll rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn't wander off. (Mt. 18: 12-13)

Is there any woman with ten silver coins, who if she loses one, wouldn't light a lamp and sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? When she finds it, she invites her friends and neighbors over and says, "Celebrate with me, because I have found the silver coin I had lost." (Lk. 15: 8-9)

Heaven's realm is like some trader looking for beautiful pearls. When that merchant finds one priceless pearl, he sells everything he owns and buys it. (Matt 13: 45-46)

Heaven's realm is like treasure hidden in a field: when someone finds it, that person covers it up again, and out of sheer joy goes and sells every last possession and buys that field. (Matt 13: 44)

This concludes the sayings of Jesus.

Jesus Meditation Script used in Preliminary Exploratory Research for Possible Future Experiments

Instructions: Sit in a comfortable and still position. Put your hands on your lap, palms up. Take a few moments to feel your breathing.

As you listen to the sayings of Jesus, relax and experience them with your imagination and feelings. In the silence time that follows each saying, think about what the sayings mean or simply be open to your intuition about what they mean. Spend some time

silently being open to the deeper meaning that may apply to your own life and consciousness.

Jesus said:

Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. (Thom. 62: 2)

You won't be able to observe the coming of God's realm. People are not going to be able to say, 'Look, here it is!' or 'Over there!' On the contrary, God's realm is within you. (Luke 17: 20-21)

It will not come by watching for it. It will not be said, 'Look, here!' or 'Look there!' Rather the Father's realm is spread out upon the earth, and people don't see it. (Thomas 113: 2-3)

If your leaders say to you, 'Look, the Father's realm is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the Father's realm is within you and it is outside you." (Thomas 3: 1-3)

Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the realm of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the realm of God like a little child will never enter it. (Luke 18: 16-17, NIV)

Heaven's realm is like treasure hidden in a field: when someone finds it, that person covers it up again, and out of sheer joy goes and sells every last possession and buys that field. (Matt 13: 44)

What does God's rule remind me of? It is like leaven which a woman took and concealed in fifty pounds of flour until it was all leavened. (Luke 13: 20-21)

It's like a mustard seed. It's the smallest of all seeds, but when it falls on prepared soil, it produces a large plant and becomes a shelter for the birds of the sky. (Thomas 20: 2-3)

Don't worry about your life - what you're going to eat and drink - or about your body - what you're going to wear. There is more to living than food and clothing, isn't there? Take a look at the birds of the sky: they don't plant or harvest, or gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feeds them. You're worth more than they, aren't you? Can any of you add one hour to life by worrying about it? Why worry about clothes? Notice how the wild lilies grow: they don't toil and they never spin. Yet let me tell you, even Solomon at the height of his glory was never decked out like one of them. If God dresses up the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into an

oven, won't God care for you even more, you who don't take anything for granted? (Mt. 6: 25-30)

Ask - it'll be given to you; seek - you'll find; knock - it'll be opened for you. Rest assured: everyone who asks receives; everyone who seeks finds; and for the one who knocks it is opened. Who among you would hand a son a stone when it's bread he's asking for? Again, who would hand him a snake when it's fish he's asking for? Of course no one would! So if you, neglectful as you are, know how to give your children good gifts, isn't it much more likely that your Father in the heavens will give good things to those who ask him? (Mt. 7: 7-11)

Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. (Mk 11: 22-25)

Once there was this man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, "Father, give me the share of property that's coming to me." So he divided his resources between them. Not too many days later, the younger son got all his things together and left home for a faraway country, where he squandered his property by living extravagantly. Just when he had spent it all, a serious famine swept through that country, and he began to do without. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him out to his farm to feed the pigs. He longed to satisfy his hunger with the carob pods, which the pigs usually ate; but no one offered him anything. Coming to his senses he said, "Lots of my father's hired hands have more than enough to eat, while here I am dying of starvation! I'll get up and go to my father and I'll say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and affronted you; I don't deserve to be called a son of yours any longer; treat me like one of your hired hands.'" And he got up and returned to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was moved to compassion. He went running out to him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and affronted you; I don't deserve to be called a son of yours any longer."

But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring out the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Fetch the fat calf and slaughter it; let's have a feast and celebrate, because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and now is found." And they started celebrating.

Now his elder son was out in the field; and as he got closer to the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the servant boys over and asked what was going on.

He said to him, “Your brother has come home and your father has slaughtered the fat calf, because he has him back safe and sound.”

But he was angry and refused to go in. So his father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, “See here, all these years I have slaved for you. I never once disobeyed any of your orders; yet you never once provided me with a kid goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours shows up, the one who has squandered your estate with prostitutes - for him you slaughter the fat calf.”

But the father said to him, “My child, you are always at my side. Everything that’s mine is yours. But we just had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead, and has come back to life; he was lost, and now is found.” (*Luke 15: 11-32*)

God causes the sun to rise on both the bad and the good, and sends rain on both the just and the unjust. Tell me, if you love those who love you, why should you be commended for that? Even the tax collectors do as much, don’t they? Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Do not judge and you will not be judged. Do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you’ll be forgiven. Give and it will be given to you. . . . For the measure you give will be the measure given to you. (*Lk. 6: 37-38*)

When you pray, say, “Father, let your name be revered.

Let your realm arrive. Let your rule be established.

Give us our daily bread.

Forgive our debts to the extent that we have forgiven those in debt to us.

You do not test us; you deliver us from evil.” (See *Mt. 6: 9-13 & Lk. 11: 2-4*)

Amen – so it is.