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The Order of New Testament Things
Questioning Methods and Meanings

The Bone-Box of James, "the Brother of Jesus"

Both the scholarly and larger lay communities were set abuzz in early October 2002, when an announcement was made that an ossuary – a Jewish "bone-box" used for the "second burial" of Jewish remains in antiquity – had recently surfaced with an Aramaic inscription that stated: "James, son of Joseph, broth(er) of Jesus." The Washington press conference was co-hosted by the Discovery Channel and the Biblical Archaeological Society. The latter entity would publish the more detailed epigraphic evidence suggesting that the inscription was authentic and thus quite likely represented the earliest material evidence for the existence of Jesus, whose name is attested on the box. Ironically, although the bone-box had purportedly once housed the bones of James, he was less a focus, as his brother was much more famous! André Lemaire, a professor of Hebrew and Aramaic philology and epigraphy at the Sorbonne University, was the person who stumbled upon the James ossuary, and he was instrumental in vigorously arguing for its authenticity.[1] As the story goes, Lemaire, while in Jerusalem, was approached by a collector of antiquities who mentioned that he had several artifacts that he would like Lemaire to examine. The collector, Oded Golan, had a fairly extensive assemblage of ancient objects, including an inscription designated as the "Jehoash Tablet," which was claimed to be an artifact connected to the first Temple, built by Solomon. This particular ossuary was one of many in Golan's collection.

The ossuary attributed to James, the son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus, generated greater attention than Golan's other objects, in part because of its presumed ramifications for authenticating a critical component of Christian history. Some scholars were interested in the figure of James himself, whose bones were to have been at one time placed in this ossuary for burial. When examined by Lemaire, the box was empty of bones, although Golan later claimed he had a small bag of fragments that he had preserved. James is an important character in the history of early Christianity as narrated in the Acts of the Apostles. It is believed that this James, either the half-brother of Jesus (by Joseph) or a cousin, took over leadership of the Jerusalem church in its early stages. A similar James is referred to in the apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians, where Paul acknowledges him as one of the "pillars" of the Jerusalem church, alongside Peter and John (Gal. 2:9). Paul also explicitly refers to a James in Galatians 1:19 whom he calls "James, the brother of the Lord." Although often obscure in previous Protestant scholarship, in the decade or so just prior to the announcement of this discovery the figure of James had become an important character for New Testament scholars, not least because of the link he provided between Judaism and Christianity, which is significant also for contemporary Jewish-Christian interreligious dialogue. In other words, here was a venerable early Christian leader who evidently followed Jewish law, including the purity rituals. Indeed, in Galatians Paul refers to "men from James" (2:9), who arrive from Jerusalem in Antioch, and who appear to have some influence on Peter when he withdraws from eating at the same table with Gentiles, who were according to Jewish law considered to be unclean. Acts 15 details some of the broader issues involved in the initial challenges and controversies instigated by the inclusion of Gentiles in the emergent Jewish movement that acknowledged Jesus to be the Messiah and risen Lord. Thus, the James ossuary could provide material evidence that would further knit these early Christian texts together into a cohesive narrative.

Of course, the major hype was generated over the fact that the James ossuary mentioned the name of "Jesus." Aside from the obvious public interest in "proof" for the historicity of Jesus, in the scholarly world this matter is of major significance, since there are relatively few references to the figure of Jesus outside of the New Testament that remain from the ancient world in which he lived. There are some ancient literary references to a figure of "Jesus" or "Christ,"[2] but none of them fully achieve the result of affirming the existence of an individual named "Jesus" who did and said the things that are attributed to him in the Gospels of the New Testament. And to be sure, there is no artifact from the ancient world that attests to the existence of Jesus – no written graffiti, e.g., that states, "Jesus of Nazareth, son of God (and Mary), Savior of humankind, brother of James, was here." The bonebox of James proved to be a major excitement for this reason. For many

scholars the James ossuary became something like the Rosetta Stone, providing an anchor of sorts in terms of historical orientation – that is, providing both an assurance that Jesus of Nazareth really did exist and a key to "translating" the terms of that existence. Frankly, while a few critics – mostly those who do not study the New Testament and early Christian literature professionally – have from time to time doubted that Jesus existed historically, the vast majority of scholars believe he quite likely did. Thus, the James ossuary really tells us nothing new. It does have much more significance for putting us in touch with James of Jerusalem, the brother of Jesus. And, for sure, there were calls for doing DNA analysis, to see what we might learn about the genetics of the lineage of Joseph.

The James ossuary was brought to the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada about one month after its existence had been rolled out publicly with great fanfare. In November 2002, an exhibition of the ossuary went on display, exactly around the same time that the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion held its annual meetings in that city. Obviously the fact that the largest professional gathering of biblical scholars and scholars of religion took place at exactly the same time as the exhibit made for the possibility of a large audience of critical scholars who would not just want to see the exciting artifact for themselves, but who also would be quite willing to comment, blog, and discuss the James ossuary at length in any media format that would be made available. As we recall, there was a definite stir at that conference, with one of the first questions asked of fellow participants being whether or not they had gone out to see the ossuary yet. Some biblical scholars took pride in declaring that they were not going to see the exhibit, that they were not going to give in to the hype and media frenzy. Wherever particular scholars stood, most were aware of the controversy surrounding the James ossuary – and that it was considered by many scholars to be a forgery. The specter of forgery was in fact a major facet of the early conversation, right after the announcement of the ossuary's existence. Scholars were skeptical – it was a bit "too easy" that a bone-box with the three names "James," "Joseph," and "Jesus" surfaced; it was a little too convenient. Indeed, the fact that details regarding the origins of the find were somewhat murky, and remain so, added to the skepticism around the James ossuary's authenticity.

Golan claimed he had been sold the ossuary many decades earlier by an antiquities dealer whose name he could not recall. Given that it was bought off the open market, and not properly excavated, one can reasonably presume that the object had been acquired illegally and most likely looted from its site of origin. The bone-box was in Golan's possession for a long while before he approached Lemaire and asked him to examine the object. It did seem a little too good to be true, that this Israeli collector happened to have

this potentially shocking artifact that somehow lay in obscurity for so long. If Golan had thought to ask someone to look at it years later, why not earlier? Or was the inscription not on the bone-box earlier? Was it in fact a forged inscription, added by someone in order to make an otherwise ordinary ancient ossuary (which is not all that rare a find) into something quite extraordinary – and for sure also incredibly valuable from a monetary standpoint. The James ossuary itself is estimated to be worth several million U.S. dollars, but only because of its inscription and attribution. Any ordinary ossuary or one with the inscription of an unrecognizable figure from the past, which is almost always the case, would be worth much less. This is as close to the "Holy Grail" that collectors and scholars get, and so the value is raised significantly as a result.

Scholars of the New Testament, Christian origins, and early Christianity were, and are, split on the issue of the James ossuary. Many wanted to believe, and still do believe, that the ossuary was the authentic bone-box of James, the brother of Jesus. Others are quite convinced that the inscription of an ossuary dating to the first century CE had been added or altered later, in the much more recent past. There was some evidence for this conclusion in terms of analysis of the lettering. The first part, "James, son of Joseph," seemed to be done in a different cursive script than that of "brother of Jesus." Of course, that could still mean the first part was genuine, which would perhaps not undermine its value all that much. The patina that had developed around the inscription was analyzed as well, and the results of analysis were mixed. Some of these results suggest that the patina could have been added later, others insist that the patina was uneven throughout the inscription, and still others attest to its antiquity and thus proof of the authenticity of the inscription. It did not help that the inscription was partially damaged in the transit of the James ossuary to the Royal Museum of Ontario, when a crack developed in its façade, a fact which only served to heighten the media spectacle surrounding the object. Not only had this sacred relic from the past been at long last revealed, but now it was also damaged!

The Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), which is the main arm of the Israeli government in charge of overseeing archaeological projects and remains, believed the James ossuary was a fake. More specifically, the agency believed that Golan or someone else came across an ancient and authentic ossuary, which was initially uninscribed. According to the IAA's reconstruction of events, someone then added the inscription as a means to create the potential for selling it on the open market at an exorbitant price. Within the year of the announcement of its discovery, the ossuary was confiscated by the IAA and Golan was investigated for forgery and attempt to commit fraud. The forging of artifacts is a widespread phenomenon and has

become increasingly sophisticated, and certainly when it comes to "Holy Land" objects it is all the rage as there is a considerable consumer base for such items. As it turns out, in the investigation of Golan the authorities uncovered a facility that had evidence of a group invested in reproducing replicas of ancient artifacts, with all the tools necessary to create the various elements to indicate "antiquity," such as patinas and inscriptions. Golan was charged, and so began an intricate ten-year long struggle with the Israeli state regarding his alleged involvement in a forgery ring, along with the fraudulent nature of the James ossuary and the Jehoash Tablet. After a long legal process, utilizing an array of experts of all types examining all possible aspects related to the authenticity of the ossuary, the court finally ruled in Golan's favor. No one claimed him "innocent" by any standard. However, it was deemed impossible to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the ossuary, or the inscription on it, was fake. The IAA then waged a legal battle to keep the ossuary in its custody. Golan, however, finally won the privilege to have the ossuary returned to his collection in the spring of 2014. In a somewhat ironic, if circular, twist of events, the James ossuary will now – some twelve years after it was first put on display at the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, only to be seized shortly thereafter – go back on display in a museum, once again as the famous find that attests to "James, the son of Joseph, the broth[er] of Jesus."

While it is quite likely that we will never know with certainty whether or not the inscription on the ossuary signaling this individual "James" from antiquity is genuine, we ourselves are nevertheless highly skeptical of its authenticity. That said, many scholars, particularly those committed to the relative historical accuracy of the accounts of early Christian history that we find in the New Testament, continue to be adamantly committed to the genuineness of the inscription and, more importantly, to its significance as an assurance that events described in the New Testament have a factual, historical, and material basis. In other words, rather than simply pointing us in the direction of a historical curiosity – "look at the way that Jews in the ancient world buried their dead, and isn't it interesting that we find in this instance a reference to an ancient figure who might be James of Jerusalem and also the brother of Jesus" – we find, rather, an opening for a fairly heated public debate regarding the broader historicity of the New Testament materials more generally. In other words, the James ossuary has come to signify a much larger issue regarding our own certainty about the events described in the New Testament and the significance they might have. The James ossuary is thus a site for thinking about some of the most basic methodological issues and questions in the study of the New Testament, Christian origins, and early Christianity.

We raise the matter of the James ossuary at the opening of this book not because we are interested or invested in the outcome of the debates and

controversies that swirled around the bone-box of the brother of Jesus, but because, in our estimation, it provides a helpful heuristic framework in which to think about the larger questions that guide New Testament interpretation and that shape the categories and issues that scholars of early Christianity might use to ask such questions about the material. For instance, that the first major issue became one of "authenticity" versus "inauthenticity" related to the inscription on the James ossuary reveals something important about how scholars have come, over a long period of time in the development of New Testament studies as a discipline, to conceptualize the past. The James ossuary clearly has struck a visceral nerve with scholars and the public, as it appears to be a tangible object that could place one directly in touch with an ancient sacred past. Like the relics of the Middle Ages, which would lure Christian pilgrims from all over to this shrine or that one to see this bone of Saint Peter or that bone of Saint Paul or Mary Magdalene's tooth, so also today we see the power of the object to transport the viewer back in time, to a period of "holy beginnings," allowing us to nearly touch this past, becoming a part of it in an unmediated manner.

One cannot discount the powerfully emotional and mental feature that something like the James ossuary can provide. For us, though, the use of such objects by scholars is most interesting, and we are particularly struck by the deployment of the language of "beginnings" and "origins" to facilitate for a larger lay population the link to the past that is already partly in motion. Scholars do not invest their energies in those emotions, however. They are more concerned about situating the object in question within a larger "order of things," a greater structure of meaning in which the ossuary both invokes and answers questions that New Testament scholarship considers vital for assessing this past. And to be sure, whether the James ossuary is considered to be "authentic" or not is beside the point. Both sides in this debate are still invested in the same fundamental set of questions regarding the New Testament, along with how our investigative efforts should proceed and how they should be framed. The James ossuary controversy thus reveals a great deal about how scholars focus on the past, how we conceptualize history, and how we structure the knowledge that is gleaned from the materials we study.

The James ossuary affair, alongside all of its attendant intrigues, identifies for us that scholarly analysis of early Christian material occurs at the highly contentious crossroads of personal and institutional faith orientations, articulations of individual and collective identities, political ideologies and social imaginaries, and multiple operative scholarly discourses. As in all fields of inquiry, our analysis of biblical literature is ultimately about intersecting power relationships, which becomes even more complex at precisely those moments when no one comes to the table neutral about the material at hand.

The questions we ask of ancient materials play a large role in configuring the answers we get to those questions. To be clear, it is not a matter of who is asking the better or worse questions. As with the James ossuary, for us it is not about right or wrong on this score. Rather, at heart, we are invested in exploring what kinds of questions are asked, how those questions shape the subject matter under discussion, and, finally, what those questions say about us. It is an awareness of the larger questions, what we would call "meta-questions," that ultimately is most illuminating for the study of the New Testament, as it is through those that we begin to learn how it is that we come to learn the way we do regarding the material at hand. In other words, underlying all of the scholarly work and the introductory presentations of early Christian texts, practices, beliefs, and social histories is a basic structure of assumptions and values that guide the manner in which much of this work proceeds, which in turn shapes the books, articles, presentations, and such that are produced and consumed. It is a commitment to explore and unmask these assumptions and the implications thereof that frames not only the first chapter of this book, but also in many respects the book in its entirety.

Ways of Knowing a Subject of Study

The primary theme of this book, which we explore in a variety of ways in its different chapters, is that knowledge and information related to the New Testament, as in any other field of human inquiry, are organized in ways that are not in some universal and natural form or the product of necessity. Rather, these structures of knowledge and knowing, the methodologies employed for arriving at the conclusions we do within larger epistemological structures, and even our means of acting and being within these same bodies of reference, all have a root in a vast array of historical, social, political, economic, and cultural factors that help shape how we see and experience the world. Michel Foucault is most often associated with the more fully articulated version of this viewpoint on knowledge and knowing, and *The Order of Things* is his signal work that details a larger historical and epistemological framework to bolster his view that we order the world in specific ways that are unique to particular people groups and individuals in particular time periods and regions of the world. There is no absolute, uniform, timeless way of ordering what we see and experience in the world. Rather, through time, across cultures, and throughout geographical divides people have ordered the world in differing ways, sometimes coming up with drastically divergent means by which to understand and interpret the world than how we might do in our Western context.

To be sure, Foucault does not deny that there is an external "world" that we all experience. Whether one lives in China in the 15th century, or in India in the 6th century, or in the United States in the 19th century, many people in these cultures have come into contact with, say, a cow, a horse, a dog, a rat, or a bird. Certainly, all people in these cultures have encountered some kind of species of animal or reptile. The issue is not that we do not observe, touch, feel, and, in some cases at least, taste these external biological organisms. All humans, to varying degrees, have some form of physical interactions – indeed, entanglements – with animals. The main issue that Foucault and others in his wake have raised is that we categorize our experiences of and observations on these animals in divergent and sometimes contradictory ways depending on how we order knowledge more broadly.[3] And the way we do so is largely a result of historical trajectories of interconnected facets of society that shape the way we synthesize, categorize, and classify our data. It is in precisely the categorization and classification, moreover, that meaning evolves. In other words, things do not order themselves, and do not mean anything in and of themselves. They need to be situated within a larger framework of knowledge – an epistemic system that orders and arranges the thing within the whole – in order to signify meaning in relation to other elements within the configuration of that same system. Admittedly, Foucault's system is more expansive than this, and in some respects the version presented here in rather bare form departs from his original articulation. However, we concur with his basic statement that "the fundamental codes of culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man, from the first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home."[4] In this book we are concerned with the codes within which New Testament scholarship is "at home." Overall, then, the framework within which we proceed to analyze the "Order of New Testament Things" is very much a Foucauldian approach.

One way to illustrate the analytic framework we are delineating herein is to draw on an example offered by Wilfred Cantwell Smith,[5] a scholar of religion who was particularly invested in the meaning of religious traditions and the methods by which we study them. In an effort to describe the complexities of the comparative study of religion, Smith raises the question: What is the functional equivalent of Jesus Christ (known from the Christian tradition) in the Islamic faith? Most people would proffer "Muhammad" as the response. This makes somewhat intuitive sense, since both of these historical personages are founding figures of major "Western" religious traditions. Moreover, both of these figures are venerated in their respective traditions. Smith, however, suggested that a better functional

equivalent would be the Qur'an, even as many people would suggest that "the New Testament" or "the Bible" is the proper corollary of the Qur'an. Now, the key element here is the way in which the information "Jesus," "Muhammad," and "Qur'an" are ordered within a larger system of signification. In other words, if the primary means of organizing data is on appearance, wherein one classifies the information based on whether something is a biological organism or not, then Jesus and Muhammad would seem to be parallels. However, if one is thinking in terms of functionality within a larger system of religious meaning, then the question is not what Jesus Christ is as a biological entity, which would be a scientific categorization, but what Jesus Christ is as a religious signifier. And, while some might suggest that the figure of Jesus is a "prophet," like Muhammad, it is also the case that in principle, within the broader scope of the Christian religious tradition, Jesus Christ functions as "revelation." Certainly the "historical Jesus" may have been a prophet, but, according to Christian interpretation, in the New Testament John the Baptist is the prophet who witnesses to the final revelation of God embodied in Christ. The New Testament in this configuration is not actually revelation per se. Rather, it bears witness to the revelation that is in Christ Jesus. Thus, the equivalent to Jesus Christ in the Islamic religious tradition is the Qur'an, which is the final revelation of God, written down by Muhammad as communicated to him by an angel. In functional terms, Jesus Christ and the Qur'an are the closest corollaries to one another in a comparative framework.

Obviously the example of aligning Jesus with the Qur'an according to functionality leads us into the field of comparative religions as well as fairly heavy-laden theological territory. Jesus Christ, understood as revelation, is a developed concept in Christian theological and religious traditions, although there are bases for this view scattered throughout the New Testament, such as in the Gospel of John and in Paul's letters. That said, our interest here is not to get involved in a discussion of the theological meaning of Jesus Christ. Rather, we want to illustrate that there are a variety of ways to order and classify information, and the guiding framework into which data is placed will ultimately determine how meaning is derived, reified, and contested. It is the pre-existing framework through which information is perceived, processed, analyzed, interpreted, and arranged that makes the fundamental difference in the ways that we receive this information and in what we can do with it, how we will deploy it in the future, and how we will subsequently use it to help us frame other related observations.

For Foucault, broadly speaking, the "order of things" is precisely this phenomenon: our knowledge, although often seemingly self-evident and natural, is in fact based on a highly complex, ever-evolving contingent system that classifies and categorizes information in a way that makes sense

based on the terms and conditions *of that contingent system of knowledge*. This is not to say that perception is then all relative and arbitrary. No one denies the existence of the "thing" that is being ordered or suggests that there is an entirely random manner in which that "thing" is taken up within the ordering process. Looking back at Smith's question, then, one would acknowledge that depending on how the operative system of ordering data is structured, Jesus Christ and Muhammad could be parallels, which would indicate an arrangement based on classifying these "things" in terms of their being biological entities and the significance that holds within Christianity and Islam. Alternatively, Jesus Christ and the Qur'an could be parallels, which would represent a configuration premised on categorizing these "things" in terms of their religious functionality, which exists in relation to other "things" within those larger religious systems.

The upshot of the approach to understanding the ordering of knowledge we have been exploring thus far is that the specific categories and methods we use, as well as the questions we ask, in studying the New Testament are in some sense already predetermined by a long history of development of a modern, Western ordering process. In other words, we investigate the New Testament and interpret it the way we do as part of a modern disciplinary configuration, but it could be otherwise, and elsewhere in other times and/or places it is, and has been, otherwise. We should make clear at this juncture that we are not at all invested in dismantling the "New Testament order of things," that is, in deconstructing the system of ordering entirely. This project is, rather, committed to highlighting and exposing some of the fundamental premises that lie behind how we classify and categorize the information we glean from early Christian sources. That is, when we are presented with information either in a scholarly or more popular/introductory format, it is important to note that the material has already been arranged for us. The basic assumptions that underlie the arrangement are almost never revealed and, frankly, most interpreters proceed without realizing that their investigative endeavors have been negotiated and framed within a larger episteme. Our goal in what follows, then, is to examine more closely some of the fundamental assumptions that undergird the "order of things" as that relates to New Testament scholarship. Our hope is that through detailing some of the ordering principles that shape the ways we examine the New Testament, the questions we ask of that material, and the results we produce for scholarly and lay consumption, we will be able to open a space for exploring more expansive ways in which to think about this ancient material. In other words, the categories, while still relevant in New Testament studies, are, in our estimation, frequently deployed in rather rigid ways that undercut some of the vitality and complexity of human historical phenomena. The problem in this respect does not necessarily lie with the larger

epistemic ordering structure, but with particular internal arrangements that are made based on a variety of other ideological, religious, and/or theological commitments.

Sometimes the "order of things" is impeded not by the system itself, but by the inability to see the potentiality of the larger episteme at work. In the introduction to this book we suggested that feminist and postmodern criticisms and dismissals of historical criticism as a relevant interpretive enterprise were a bit misguided. The historical-critical method of investigating the New Testament arises out of fundamental principles within a larger modern historical-scientific episteme, which is intricately and intimately interconnected with every facet of everyday life, from economic markets and political principles to medical science and the means of social interaction to the role of technology and spirituality in our daily lives. Thus, historical criticism is not something that can simply be dispensed with in favor of greener, perhaps more personal pastures. However, at the same time, if we conceptualize perception and experience within contingent systems of knowledge, then we understand that (a) we could order and arrange the system differently and divergently, and (b) we can also creatively engage, push, and interrogate some of the existing ordering principles to see if they might make better sense out of the information we find, in this case, in the New Testament. It is precisely in this way that we can also talk about our study of the ancient world impacting our assessment of our own, as the two are intertwined through the classificatory system that arranges knowledge and produces meaning. That is, our approach to the ancient materials reveals something fundamental about how we also conceptualize our own world, as the ordering structure invoked in the former is that which structures the latter as well. It is in this way that we can say that the past, as we perceive it through our own ordering episteme, shares the same structure of knowing as our perception of and experience in the present. Therefore the past and the present share in the same system in which things have meaning and make sense – *to us*. As we venture forward into the next section, then, we are ever attentive to the potential for liberative hermeneutics that historical criticism can provide, even as we are fully aware of the limitations and narrowness of its methods based, not in small part, on fairly flat, sterile, and impotent deployments of the ordering principles of knowledge in our world.

Ordering Principles in the Study of the New Testament

In the following discussion we highlight several complexes of categories that we consider to be essential in modern study of the New Testament: origins and linear development; stability, definability, and simplicity; consistency

and coherence; and difference, distinctiveness, and identity. These complexes are not the only ones that could be pulled out and highlighted, nor are they innate principles of ordering themselves, since we ourselves have framed this analysis and commentary in light of a particular understanding and interpretation of history and method of historical criticism as that relates to a larger modern episteme. These categories, then, might be considered epistemological principles or structural coordinates that shape in fairly significant ways the manner in which we generally approach the New Testament, as well as the kinds of questions we raise in our course of study. Moreover, with these categories, sometimes overtly invoked and at other times unwittingly so, the interpreter orders the material in a particular configuration that appears to be natural and obvious – and it is so according to the system of ordering that has been followed. However, we are aware that with the same data another interpreter can rearrange and realign the information and create a substantively alternate constellation that signifies a different set of meanings and purposes. The question that guides us at present is not the differences between two arrangements, or whether they are competing or contradictory, but rather an assessment of the main ordering principles as they are generally and traditionally used by New Testament scholars. Innovative and imaginative readings of the New Testament are ultimately products of rearrangement and reordering. Our purpose in this chapter is to open the door for the latter (innovation) by exploring some of the limitations of the former (the generally and traditionally used ordering principles of interpretation).

There is, in our view, one additional element that is important to the discussion that follows. The discipline of study of the New Testament, and of biblical scholarship as a whole for that matter, was forged in a period of high intellectual activity centered in major universities in Europe. From the 18th century onwards the university concept took on more of the shape we know today, and the study of philology, philosophy, history, and theology were central disciplines during this time of this heightened intellectual engagement. At the same time, we see a spurt of growth and expansion of the scientific disciplines, such as biology and chemistry. None of these areas of study are unique to the modern era, of course, but certainly major scientific advances were being made during that time. Not the least of these, in the 19th century, was the rise of evolutionary theory, most closely associated with Charles Darwin (1809–1882). The theory of development and evolution across time and according to environmental circumstances was already part of a rich intellectual heritage of Western philosophy – seen, for example, in the philosophical history of the development of human institutions outlined in G. W. F. Hegel's (1770–1831) work. The further application of developmental themes to humans and human social organization was a

natural step to take. The study of the New Testament was forged in this environment, wherein scientific discourses had a significant influence on the human sciences in philology, philosophy, history, and theology.

At the same time, the universities in Europe, along with the various disciplines, and certainly the study of the Bible in particular, were seeking to create distance between the investigation of the physical and historical world and the control of ecclesiastical authorities. At one level, most disciplines in the university setting were conscious of the importance of this divide. Certainly, the controversies of the past, such as the trial of Galileo Galilei (1633), had made clear that the advancement of knowledge should not be subject to any limitations set by religious authority. The loss of the vast and exclusive claims of the Catholic Church on political and social conditions, as well as the spread of Protestantism, also aided significantly in the growing influence of the "secular" state, where rational principles separate from church dogma would guide law, societal organization, national interests, education (including universities), and so forth. Combined with the cross-fertilization between the natural and human sciences, the ground was rich for the planting of a substantively new approach to the study of the Bible, evolving into a complex of methods we now call "historical criticism." Early proponents and practitioners of historical criticism consciously deployed the term "scientific" for their approach to biblical texts and traditions, utilizing the term *Wissenschaft*, which in German means something akin to "scientific investigation." This term signified in particular the need and desire for the study of the Bible to be separated from church interference and the control of ecclesial dogma, as well as a claim that the Bible must be investigated like any other humanly produced text. According to early historical critics, such study was to be accomplished particularly through the scientific method of collection of data, observation and analysis of the material, and then placing the results of inquiry within a framework that made sense of the discrete bits of data presented to the researcher. It was understood that the investigation of the past would have to be somewhat reconstructive, and that it would not be possible to achieve the exactitude that many felt the sciences provided – but neither were such reconstructions meant to be aligned with the unbroken lines of religious and social tradition that had for so long served to justify the present. That said, these scholars of the 18th and 19th centuries were clear that such an approach to the biblical material resulted in some radically new ways of understanding those texts and the ancient world that produced them, from how we thought about the composition of the documents to the manner in which we conceptualized the development of the Jewish and Christian religions. Most of the historical work done today on the New Testament has its methodological grounding in the approaches and results of this earlier period of historical-critical scholarship.

Going one step further, however, we should emphasize one important feature of this period of the "birth" of modern New Testament studies that is often downplayed or overlooked by scholars examining the meta-questions related to the field we are engaging in this book. Namely, the study of early Christianity by the historical critics of this time was heavily influenced by conceptions generated elsewhere in the broader intellectual milieu. Such influence was not something that happened mechanistically, but rather it was a product of the convergence and confluence of ideas that were taking shape in the rich environment of the universities and among the interactions of the social elite. It was also rather commonplace, moreover, for scholars of, say, the biological sciences to reflect on the larger philosophical and theological questions raised by their work. Darwin himself is known to have contemplated the implications of his own research on natural selection for thinking about the place of God in the schema of the universe, leaning at one time toward a theistic approach to the evolutionary process: the idea that there might be a divine "hand" operative in the natural selection process. In any case, as a result of this rich and varied interaction among the natural and human sciences, and also the burgeoning of fields like anthropology and sociology, and the turn to the origins of religion in both of these areas of inquiry, the study of the New Testament was infused with concepts drawn from the scientific "order of things."

In an intellectual environment so focused on the natural world, it was *natural* for Bible critics, immersed in this larger ethos, to deploy various concepts that are most closely connected to a "scientific worldview." So, from questions related to origins and beginnings, to development and stability, to genetic relations, all of these were notions taken over from a larger scientific discursive world. To be sure, of course, it was not simple borrowing without thought or attribution. Currents in philosophy and the science of philology were also influencing the other manifestations of scientific investigation of human phenomena, as well as the study of the New Testament. That is, the model we have inherited and in many cases prefer is one of cross-fertilization rather than simply a mechanical framework for the process. In a best-case scenario, we might consider this to be an environment of free-flowing and mutual movement of ideas, language, and structures of knowing. All of that said, however, we also need to keep in mind that these dynamics profoundly shaped the New Testament "order of things."

It is not coincidental that many of the ordering principles that continue to shape historical study of early Christianity are deeply rooted in a kind of language and epistemological structure that we now would most closely associate with disciplines such as biology, chemistry, and physics, as well the related discourses and methods of the Social Sciences. As disciplines have become more differentiated and isolated in the contemporary intellectual

landscape, it has become less apparent that the earlier polymathic and integrative environment of intellectual activity in the 18th and 19th centuries, and even earlier to be sure, made it possible for the modern study of the New Testament and its continuing use and development of the ordering principles of this earlier period to think and look a lot like what we would now call the natural sciences. Even as many New Testament scholars who investigate the historical and social contexts of those writings would insist that they do not assume an atheist or agnostic stance toward their subject matter, and that they believe that God really did work in history to initiate and be involved in the experiences of the early Christians, the methods used to derive the results of study are consistent with the ordering principles used in the natural sciences. Indeed, if it were not for that deep historical connection and legacy, the modern study of the New Testament would look and feel remarkably different than it does. It is only because the field participates in the epistemological foundations of the sciences that it proceeds the way it does in terms of analysis and interpretation. Of course, the study of history in the 18th and 19th centuries, alongside the development of the discipline of philology, had a significant impact on the manner in which New Testament studies proceeded, and these two disciplines more than any other were intimately connected with the origins of modern biblical scholarship. However, it should be noted that those disciplines were already participating in the cross-fertilization we have described above, so influences from history and philology only served to bolster and reinforce the embeddedness of the scholarly episteme in early Christian studies within the larger scientific paradigm. It is to the exploration of this episteme that we now turn.

Origins and linear development

To some of our readers, it probably goes without saying that one of the major impulses in the study of the New Testament has been a quest for origins and beginnings, whether it be a search for the historical Jesus, the earlier or earliest church or emergent Christian community, the earliest Gospels or sayings or traditions, the beginning point of theological reflection on Christ or ecclesiology, the various early Christian rituals such as baptism or the Lord's Supper, the mission to the Gentiles, or any other number of original and originary moments in the first decades of early Christianity.[6] Frequently, the underlying premise of such engagements is as follows: that which is chronologically more original, prior, or earlier is also thought to be that which is more historically grounded. That is, the earlier the better, for what is earlier is in some way more "real" or authentic. For example, that which is closer in chronological period to the lives of Jesus or Paul carries the implied stamp of

being more historically accurate and reliable, bringing with it a certain epistemological primacy in terms of configuring those principles that are determinative for assessing the truth-validity of what comes after that which is earlier. Interest in origins leads to a question such as whether, for instance, the Gospel source Q, or the Gospel of Matthew, or the Gospel of Mark, the Epistle to the Galatians, or the Gospel of Thomas, or the Didache represents the "real" point of entry into the development of the Christian tradition as known today. Naturally, the trajectories that we observe in early Christianity will vary depending on where one begins. So the origin point is critical in almost all historical studies conducted on the New Testament.

Within the New Testament "order of things," an origin point provides the initial coordinate by which everything else can be traced, the single point from which all things flow. In some sense, much of what we do in the historical arena of study related to the ancient world is predicated first and foremost on having a place to start from and with. This may seem like a relatively basic point to make; it is also one that is all too infrequently the subject of critical reflection. It is, as one would expect in terms of ordering principles, an assumption that guides the basic framing of our evidence. Everything has a beginning point – the Earth, humans, the universe. It has become natural to think of historical phenomena in the same way – as "things" that have a beginning and a teleology, a moving toward some end. Interestingly, within this framework, there is an implied order to how things unfold. Although we may frequently speak of a random world, the natural order is in fact, according to modern conception at least, anything but random. It operates according to rules and laws – and rules of law. The universe expands according to fixed rules, even if those rules are not always obvious to us. And even when one raises the matter of relativity one still knows how to plot the coordinates to engage in alternative configurations of the physical universe. The ability to predict is critical in this respect. And while scholars of the New Testament, Christian origins, and early Christianity have not been involved in the predictive process in usually such a deliberative way, the basic historical methodologies act according to the same rules. In order to reflect on where things come from, how they began, and how they developed, and to be able to describe those facets in comprehensible ways, one has to assume that there are originary moments and that whatever emerges from that beginning point develops and evolves in some fashion. To be sure, even as linear movement forward is the assumed principle, scholars still acknowledge there will be messy elements along the way. We thus understand "linearity" to denote the basic principle that the phenomena that emerge at a beginning have a forward movement of sorts. Like the universe, it expands, after the "big bang," according to a certain logic.

Now, we should be clear that the notion of a beginning point and a linear development of some kind for a historical religion or people group is not simply a modern conception. Ancient writers had long conceived of their pasts as having moments of beginning and also development and change over time. Thus, the concept of origins, as an ordering principle, is not purely the product of the development of the modern "order of things." One could point to any number of ancient Greek or Roman writers of history or epic and easily trace out the commitment to origins and linear movement as key ordering principles. Indeed, Rome itself has its moment of origins with the rape of a virgin by a war god and the resultant brothers suckling at a she-wolf – it does not get any more fixed than that! The ancient Jewish writer Josephus (c. 37–100) seeks to demonstrate for the Roman world that Judaism has a particular point of origin, that it is an ancient ethnic, religious, and political entity with a distinct heritage. Moreover, in his linear developmental history Josephus is able to show that any problematic aspects of Judaism with respect to Roman rule arise from elements that are not representative of the "core" of Judaism itself. Thus, both deviation and normativity can be traced fairly clearly. The early Christian ecclesial authority and historian Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 265–340) extensively detailed the origins of Christianity in his *Ecclesiastical History.* He was adept at showing the clear line of the Christian faith moving from Jesus through the authoritative apostles of the early Christian community to their disciples and so on, with a demonstrable lineage extending into the time of Eusebius. Were there deviations and "heresies"? Absolutely! But those could readily be explained by examining the offshoots from the main line that culminates in orthodoxy. Heresy, for Eusebius, is an evident deviation from the truth of the Gospel that was passed on through a single chain of early Christian leaders.

It would thus be inaccurate and misleading to suggest that somehow only moderns are interested in origins and beginnings, and in the perceptible linearity of development and evolution. At the same time, there are some key differences that should not go unnoticed, not least that an entire technology of historical study has evolved to support the modern quest for origins as a major ordering principle of the discipline. When someone picks up the multi-volume works of James Dunn (*Christianity in the Making*) or N. T. Wright (*Christian Origins and the Question of God*), one does not get the impression that they are in the same historical territory as ancient writers like Josephus and Eusebius. In the latter we are in a rather obvious arena of tendentious, ideologically inclined historical narrativizing that pays little attention to the weighing of evidence or close historical assessment. True, modern scholarly quests for origins are without a doubt similarly invested in the ideological commitments that result from their treatment of origins

and development. What is different, however, is the presumed objective and neutral operative framework, just like science – indeed, it is a "historical science." This is the major shift, and accounts, at least in part, for the prodigious amount of scholarship on the matter of Christian origins. No contemporary scholar would pick up Josephus or Eusebius, for example, and simply move forward with an assessment of Jewish or Christian origins and development based on these sources. One will use these ancient sources, but critically evaluate them *based on other kinds of evidence*, the latter of which represents the more sophisticated historical technologies of the modern critic. Hence, while origins as a principle of historical investigation is not new in and of itself, the manner in which it is configured within the modern New Testament "order of things" is. And within that modern framework, the possibilities for configuring origins are multiple and varied – the only universal commitment among New Testament scholars seems to be that there is a beginning and there is linear development.

For instance, earlier scholars like Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) utilized the theory of evolution more explicitly, understanding the development of the phenomenon of early Christianity as moving from a simple to a complex organism.[7] Drawing more generally on the work done in the anthropology of religion such as that of Edward Burnett Tylor (1832–1917) and James George Frazer (1854–1941), historians such as Troeltsch saw development as an obvious way in which to articulate the structure of Christian institutional growth.[8] Therein the Jesus movement moves to another stage, from charismatic leadership in gatherings of believers to a fairly rigid structure of ecclesiastical hierarchies wherein dogma and authority rather than experience become the major foci. This basic movement from simple (charismatic leadership and experience) to complex (highly structured church hierarchies) represented one earlier model for understanding early Christian development.

The linear accent of the developmental model focuses on the movement from simple to intricate, which proceeds according to a natural progressive order observable in many other comparable institutions and religious movements, and of course also nature itself. Earlier, Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860) detailed his Hegelian dialectical understanding of the development of early Christianity in similar terms, in his case being invested in the "thesis-antithesis" model, wherein conflict between the two was resolved in a "synthesis." For Baur, in what is one of the most oft-cited examples of this modality of thinking, the more conservative, law-bound movement of Peter (associated with early Christian communities in Jerusalem) came into conflict with the relatively law-free program of Paul (associated with non-Jerusalem, Gentile communities). This conflict resulted in a synthesis propagated by the writer of the book of Acts, who sought to resolve it

by mediating between the two polar positions. This resolution of the conflict, whether it was historically factual or simply a product of literary fiction, in the end becomes the basis for the further development of the ancient church, which in some sense incorporated aspects of "law" (even if not "Jewish" per se) and "freedom." Again, one can readily see here a set of rules that are operative that explain how the evolution of the church took place. We note, moreover, that both Troeltsch and Baur had a preference for the earlier period of Christianity, prior to the rise of the structured ecclesial hierarchies, which, for these two Protestant interpreters, was readily associated with the Catholic Church, a definite negative in their view.[9]

Generally speaking, in terms of where New Testament scholarship has evolved from scholars of Christian origins in the 19th century, we see a similar pattern of thinking about origins and development, even as many critics have also wanted to challenge the dominant narrative offered by ancient writers like Eusebius or even the New Testament itself. Indeed, on the current and persistent methodological scene, critics frequently disagree on the beginning point or the movement therefrom, and the fixing of the origin point is frequently used in debates regarding the "true" nature of early Christianity. Was early Christianity at its core what later became touted as orthodox Christian faith? Was it something different and perhaps more radical? Scholars who posit different points of origin or who emphasize different texts or documents as more primary over others frequently are engaging in larger ideological and theological debates about the fundamental core of Christianity as a religious phenomenon. For instance, notable "popular" New Testament scholars, such as Bart Ehrman and N. T. Wright, are highly invested in their own theological/ideological commitments when they perform in public. Ehrman, for example, is insistent that the Gospels are not documents that can be utilized for the grounding of personal faith, as the fundamental core of the "gospel" is based on relatively non-trustworthy accounts of Jesus. Wright, by contrast, is adamant that the Gospels offer a portrait of Jesus that is relatively reliable, and certainly something that can (and should!) ground Christian faith. The issue for us is not who is right or wrong, but that both Ehrman and Wright have profound personal investment in the outcomes of their research, which obviously dictates how they utilize the principles of ordering in New Testament scholarship to come up with the results that they do. The ways in which they investigate the original documents are similar, based on the same principles of analysis and interpretation. However, their characterizations of those same *original* documents dictate how origins are, in turn, constructed or deconstructed. In other words, the nature of the origins as assessed and interpreted by scholars determines the implications of the development that follows. In our view, there is no escaping this particular scenario, and any reader and

consumer of New Testament scholarship, whether advanced or introductory, would do well to bear this in mind.

Ultimately, the ordering principle of origins and linear development has a profound impact on the entire field of New Testament studies. It would be difficult to find a particular area in the discipline that has been untouched by commitments to beginnings and evolution. One only need to look at the subfield of textual criticism to see precisely the manner in which the origin and linear development principle operates. We know, for example, that we do not possess the original manuscripts of the New Testament texts – or any early Christian texts for that matter. Moreover, we know, based on the manuscripts we do possess, that there was tremendous textual diversity and pluriformity in the various manuscript trajectories and traditions that arose in the early centuries in which Christian movements were taking shape. That being a given, we still observe a fairly strong commitment by text critics to affirming original textual trajectories over others that deviate and become desecrated, polluted, or deformative in some way. The most recent turn in text-critical studies is to embrace these "deviations" as offering important insights into the world of the early Christians in their own right, and so there has been a movement, at least in part, to embrace the multiformity of early New Testament textual traditions. Now, it may no longer make sense to speak of "original texts," since texts frequently are composed over longer periods of time, with additions and deletions made in the process of composition. At the same time, the notion of there being a "beginning text" is still vital for many scholars, even if they can only refer to an originary text in a relative sense. And this should give us pause. It is in the textual discussion in particular that we see most clearly the invocation of the rhetoric of biology and evolution, with the designation of species of texts, derivations, branches, and such.[10] The biological metaphor may well be the primary conceptual metaphor operative in textual transmission assessments, but that same model is active beyond just textual traditions. Fundamentally, we almost always conceive of Christian origins in terms of an implicit biological organism: a "thing" that originates, grows, and evolves, with offshoots sprouting in a variety of directions. It is true that few scholars consider the earliest iterations, those nearest the origin point, to be the "monkeys" whilst the latter developments are more evolved, even as there might be quite a few "missing links" between the earlier species and our own. In this respect, the judgment, as noted earlier, is the opposite: the point of origin is the point of definition for that which follows, and it allows the scholar to determine what is "true" to the beginning and what is a derivation.

Especially helpful at this juncture are the comments by Edward Said, who, in his discussion of the renowned New Testament text critic A. E. Housman, notes that

since there can be no absolutely correct and "original" text firmly anchoring subsequent transcriptions in reality, all texts exist in a constantly moving tangle of imagination and error. The job of the textual critic is, by fixing one text securely on the page, to arrange all other versions of that text in some sort of linear sequence with it … [D]iscursive prose about a text only makes explicit the implicit filiation which the cumulative emendations and restorations of the edited text have established.[11]

In this formulation it becomes evident just how fundamental it is to establish the beginning point so as to be able to coordinate all that follows. Furthermore, without a firm commitment to a linear (and stable – on that more below) development, there is no way to confidently affirm the lineage and true character of that which originates at the founding or beginning moment. Obviously, without a certain measure of faith in linearity there would also be no purpose in referring to an originating point. The developmental lines may be messy and blurry, and they may be obscured at points, but the commitment to an originary moment entails the ability to reasonably predict the broad contours of the "tradition" and to allow it to be identified, quantified, described, analyzed, and interpreted.

From the perspective of de-introducing the New Testament we would raise the question as to what is lost in such formulations of early Christianity, its texts, and its communities and practices. That is, we would inquire as to what extent the obsession with origins and development is a product of our modern episteme, deeply rooted in a scientific configuration that necessarily hinges on beginnings and some traceable form of linear development. Further, it is important to consider whether this ordering principle adequately captures the complex vicissitudes that would seem to constitute the historical "process." In other words, it is worth deliberating whether we are doing more of a disservice to our study of the ancient past by consistently constructing our subject – be it texts, people, communities, or practices – as having a single moment of beginning at a fixed point in time. Foucault's comments on "tradition" and how it operates for us within our modern framework are quite helpful on this score:

Take the notion of tradition: it is intended to give a special temporal status to a group of phenomena that are both successive and identical (or at least similar); it makes it possible to rethink the dispersion of history in the form of the same; it allows a reduction of the difference proper to every beginning, in order to pursue without discontinuity the endless search for the origin; tradition enables us to isolate the new against a background of permanence, and to transfer its merit to originality, to genius, to the decisions proper to individuals.[12]

For Foucault, there is in some respects no "origin" point for historical phenomena. Rather, the ordering concept of "origin" serves our modern interests quite well, as it allows us to reify unity at the expense of historical differences, creating a stable context and background against which our historical tasks and modern investments can effectively operate. Without a fixed origin point we would have a most difficult time tracing out with certainty historical, conceptual, and theological lineages, which in our epistemological framework are central not only for understanding history, but indeed for doing history in the first place. As Foucault notes in his essay on Nietzsche and genealogy, "the true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost *identities*, without a landmark or a point of reference."[13] In this respect, the focus on beginnings, and the movement that proceeds, functions to anchor our own world and its episteme. As Foucault states, "an entire historical tradition (theological or rationalistic) aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity – as a theological movement or a natural process."[14] Herein lies a more sublimated feature of the modern "order of things," since, irrespective of one's own belief in divine or supernatural reality, the ordering principles presuppose in many respects a teleological movement that embeds the deeply rooted Western belief in a supra-human purposeful force that drives history forward.[15]

Nearly a century ago, some scholars were already raising such questions about linearity and origins. Walter Bauer, in his often overlooked and frequently misunderstood study entitled *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*,[16] noted that the Eusebian paradigm of a steady movement from the orthodox origin of the Christian faith in the earliest Christian communities outwards to increasing heretical splintering off from the "true" character of that faith did not cohere with the ancient evidence – even as orthodoxy can clearly be traced, in Eusebius's view, down to his own present time. Bauer's analysis focused on regional developments in early Christianity. He ascertained that different locales and regions throughout the Roman Empire had diverse versions of Christianity, some of which seemed to start with more "orthodox" (as that came to be defined later) beliefs and in time turned more "heterodox," while others seemed to start off with the reverse, with "heterodox" (as defined by a later standpoint in church history) beliefs being the earliest expressions of the Christian faith. Upon reading Bauer's erudite treatment, one does not come away with ready answers or an easily attained framework in which to understand origins and development. Rather, one becomes all the more aware of how complex, and story-driven, the emergence of any particular movement, belief, or practice in fact is – and likely always has been.

In the end, we would argue that rather than talking of "origins" and "linearity" one should conceive of early Christian phenomena as *emergent*. That is, there is no true moment of beginning – there is no "big bang" for a particular Gospel tradition, manuscript, New Testament concept, or early Christian practice. Rather, there inheres a confluence of streams, both synchronic and diachronic, that swirl together, in the process generating all kinds of innovative and inspired emergent phenomena. Historical investigative efforts, and the concomitant interpretive results, may be better spent examining the broader confluence of ideas, practices, personages, circumstances, experiences, and such that created the context for the emergence of phenomena which we may never be able to pinpoint or to fully define with exactitude. That is not to suggest that ancient writers did not present us with narratives and stories and frameworks that do often compel us to think of an originary moment and subsequent linear development. Our sources for early Christianity do seek to elucidate the definitions of the movement. However, for the historian of the New Testament, it would be better to see these definitions as a matter of identity formation (see below) rather than as precise historical fixed points of reference. We do definitely capture glimpses and even more powerful images of the emergent character of what we call the New Testament and early Christianity, but we submit that the desire to firmly coordinate the phenomena ends up oversimplifying much more complicated historical processes.

In our view, there is no precise origin of Christianity, just as there is no particular person such as Jesus or Paul who is the singular "founder" of the movement. And yet, to be sure, what we now call early Christianity did emerge within a particular region and time period; it did not disappear from the scene, even as it was constantly reconfigured; and it did feature major figures who were seminal or remembered as such for the emergence of the movement(s). In our minds, however, this comprises a different understanding than that which is engendered by fixating on the precision of origins and development. Indeed, we would argue that the heterogeneous framework we are articulating here elucidates differences in the emergent period of early Christianity, and encourages multiplicity, complexity, and also contradiction in our understandings of the New Testament.[17] There is no easy story – no readily transparent narrative for us to grasp. And questioning the manner in which the modern "order of things" shapes our apprehension of the past is a good place to begin in terms of rethinking the whole enterprise of New Testament study and interpretation. In the ordering principles that follow, one will see the continuous replaying of these same themes in the modern New Testament "order of things," similarly indebted to the epistemic scientific structures of thinking and being.

Stability, definability, and simplicity

From the above discussion it should be clear that if precision and exactitude are at least goals in historical investigation, then it will follow that other ordering principles, alongside origins and linear development, will undergird sustained efforts to coordinate and affix points of interpretive relevance. As we use them here, the categories of "stability," "definability," and "simplicity" are interrelated, and more or less signify the same general principle that is operative in the New Testament "order of things": the need for creating a constant and unchanging subject for investigation. Postmodern considerations have for some time focused on the instability of the subject – that people are not entities that can be solely defined by a rigid set of rules and laws governing how subjects think about themselves, experience the world, and interact with others. The theme of many postmodern methodologies is in fact the fundamental instability of the subject, and much is owed therein to both Freudian and particularly Lacanian psychoanalytic applications. In our exploration here, however, we are less interested and invested in rehashing and rehearsing postmodern configurations, although no doubt our argument in this chapter as a whole is somewhat in conversation with such notions. Rather, we are consciously reflecting here on the idea of constants as those are conceived of in historical analysis and conceptualized and manifested in the study of the New Testament. In so doing, we aim to question the possibility and indeed usefulness of this ordering principle. Our own stance, in contrast to some of the positions outlined in the Introduction, is based on the premise that historical investigation is not only possible, but also an engaging, necessary, and potentially transformative project. It is a matter, rather, of how we proceed in such investigation that is at issue.

As anyone who has undertaken even a rudimentary science experiment in high school knows, in order to test a hypothesis one must set a series of limitations on the process of inquiry and investigation. This must be done in order to create a controlled environment so as not to interfere with the end result. Now, contemporary scientists might well question why pursuing hypotheses, and seeking to refute them, is the best way to actually come up with advances in science. Following what many historians would suggest with respect to investigating the New Testament, many scientists would claim, in fact, that the better way to proceed is to ask a series of good questions with a view to providing responses to those queries.[18] That said, regardless of the particular method by which one works, there is a direct need for affixing the constants or "control group" by which one can conduct historical exploration. Even in cases where the results are predetermined and actually configure the way in which the coordinates are arranged – which happens in our field more often than New Testament

scholars would like to admit – the "experiment" only works if the interpreter can count on there being stable, fixed, and definable elements that provide limitations and boundaries for the historical work. That is, the absolute requirement of restrictions and confinements for historical work is one of the key components that reinforce the categories of stability and definability. In short, we cannot, it is presumed, move forward in the interpretation of the New Testament data without a sure footing and a firm foundation that guarantee that the ground will not shift as we are busy mining for the "truth" regarding Christian origins, beliefs, and practices.

And this is where the concept of "simplicity" comes into play, as any attempt at regulating boundaries and imposing limitations will necessarily streamline and simplify the incalculable and often inscrutable complexity that is at work in every historical moment. Most scholars may not necessarily be conscious of, or willfully employ, an approach that is committed to simplifying the data. Indeed, the illusion is quite the opposite: scholars are working with and sifting through a myriad of multifaceted traditions and historical circumstances reflected in the New Testament writings, deciphering the nuances in order to provide a relatively objective assessment of the discrete bits of data that lie before them. The "story" of what it is that New Testament scholars do often stands in contrast to what actually happens in practice. And in this respect, the need for constancy is a key factor, and one that overlaps with the other categories discussed below. Overall, then, we seem not to move forward in the interpretive task without a strong orientation to stability, and without data that is firmly fixed. Through the category of stability, meaning can be rendered in a clear and patent manner, which can in turn be delineated and defined, and that, finally, can be quantified for scholarly and popular consumption.

There are innumerable ways in which the category of stability works itself out in the study of the New Testament. Whether at the more advanced level of scholarly research production or the level of the introductory textbook, one is regularly exposed to this ordering principle. If one opens up an introduction to the New Testament, for instance, almost everything presented therein has been manufactured based on the premise of constants, even as the scholar responsible for writing that book may be relatively unware of the operation of this ordering principle. One speaks with confidence of early Christian texts as fixed entities, the content of which we can be relatively certain is as we have it now before us in our Bibles. We are also introduced to communities of believers in different cities and regions of the Roman Empire, assessing their theological beliefs as a unified pattern, even as we might also suggest that there were "opponents" whose opposition is similarly traceable and definable. Similarly, we will need to know something about the conceptual backgrounds in Judaism, Hellenism, and

Romanism that influenced the theological developments evident in early Christian belief. It is ubiquitous in New Testament introductions, for example, to refer to "Jewish Beliefs and Practices in the Diaspora and Palestine" and "Greek and Roman Beliefs and Practices." We additionally encounter the constitution of early Christian communities, composed of either or both constituents of Jews and Gentiles, with a firm "faith" that we know what "Jew" and "Gentile" mean when we deploy these categories as signifiers of ancient identity. And so on.

Without a strong guarantee of carefully regulated boundaries and borders, it is much more difficult to make specific and relatively certain statements about ancient Christian materials. Indeed, we might consider this a situation not unlike receiving a coloring book, where there are traced-out shapes of identifiable objects defined by firm black lines on a white or newsprint background. The task of the one using such a tool is to provide the shades of color that help give the black and white lines more depth and bring the image to life. While there might be variations on the coloring activity – some might choose to color a figure of a bear brown, others purple, most often dependent on their level of commitment to presenting the *realia* of the object – most consider the *lines* that outline the colorless figure to be hard and fast guidelines, as without those the figure would lose shape, and perhaps not even be recognizable as a figure in the first place. So we are called upon – culturally, socially, and perhaps even with an underlying moral imperative – to "color inside the lines." And such is also the case in the field of New Testament studies, in so far as failing to color within the lines results in a distorted and unreliable figure, which becomes functionally problematic in aiding the coordination of other bits of data that we are seeking to pull together in order to create a recognizable and consumable constellation of information. It should be pointed out, of course, that even if there is coloring outside the lines, we are always aware of the fact that there are lines to begin with. That is, even those interpreters who seek to bend the rules, who push the limitations of analysis beyond the merely obvious shades and patterns, still understand that there are borders and boundaries and lines. To color outside of a line is to already recognize there is a line. And therein lies the rub of much New Testament scholarship: the lines are in place before we even begin our historical interpretive tasks. It is these lines in fact that need to be challenged (and erased!) if historical work is to reflect more accurately the booming, buzzing confusion that is human historical experience.

Our contention is that stability, definability, and simplicity are potent theoretical concepts that help establish constancy in coordinates for plotting out interpretive results for New Testament analysis, but they do not necessarily reflect well the more incarnate realities of early Christianity. We can refer to

"Pauline communities," and by that signify a consistent, demarcated, boundaried, and stable gathering of people in Galatia, Corinth, Rome, or elsewhere whom we understand to read and think in similar ways. Yet this kind of historical homogeneity is also highly improbable. The fact is that every member of a community experiences the enunciative language of (Paul's) letters differently, configured in a highly complex set of networks of meaning, some shared with other members of the group, and others not.[19] There is no unified perspective, audience, or reception of a letter from Paul. There may be a discourse that arises that is accessible and readily apprehended, but that discourse represents something supra-human and not the particularities and contingencies of historical personages in concrete periodic moments that converge to generate the emergent discourse.[20]

Yet, when modern New Testament scholars describe the "Pauline communities" or "Pauline assemblies," there is a decided focus on "coloring within the lines." Even when a feminist scholar like Antoinette Clark Wire famously argues that behind the Corinthian correspondence lies an oppositional movement of female prophets that Paul seeks to oppose, we cannot assume that the female prophets, who are at once addressed and erased in Paul's discourse about veiling (1 Cor. 11), are a unified, boundaried, and stable *counter*-group.[21] It is understandable, of course, that it is tempting to utilize these categories that assure constancy. Many scholars would, in fact, consider these categories necessary. Herein, then, Paul becomes a stable entity, the Corinthian community to which he writes is similarly constant, and the opposition group to whom Paul responds in at least a portion of the letter is also firmly delineated as a distinct segment of the community that is challenging Paul's authority or at the minimum asserting its own in contradistinction to his. The picture that is offered in scholarly analysis is simple and straightforward, and as a result there is broader approximation of what conflicts might have existed in Corinth, based on an abstracted, distilled, and highly diluted representation of a more concretely messy configuration of human experience.

Whether we are examining Pauline communities and the reception of his letters or the development of the oral and textual history of the sayings of Jesus and the composition of the New Testament (and other) Gospels, we consistently rely on the principle of stability in our defining of the parameters of our study, making sure that we know where the lines are for our historical work and then that we "draw" within them. Some will argue that there is no other way to go about historical work than to do precisely this. And, to be sure, any presentation of information necessarily requires a framework in which it is assessed and interpreted. In the model of historical work we are affirming as part of de-introducing the New Testament, we do

not believe one can necessarily escape this particular reality. It is, in the end, a result of what Fredric Jameson refers to as the "prison house of language."[22] That said, at the same time we need to be aware that the presentation and maintenance of the information within the "lines" is also a distortion of the fluidity and instability that are inherent in all historical experiences and products, inherent in all human beings and human communities.

Consistency and coherence

Stemming from the focus on stability, definability, and simplicity, the categories of consistency and coherence arise quite naturally. If one is to think of stability as the "lines" within which we must draw, then in consistency and coherence we are dealing with the colors with which we choose to detail the subject. In other words, bears are a variety of colors – white, black, brown – but they are not purple or pink or orange, and if we see colored bears like this, often drawn outside of the lines as well, we may very well assume they have been done by children with imagination and a carefree attitude about the bears rather than an "adult" with a view to precision and accuracy in representation. And herein lies the focus on patternization and flattening in the study of historical data. Very much like our contemporary scientific foci (that is, outside of the realm of quantum physics), in order to study a particular subject one has to presume, within reasonable parameters, that not only is the entity stable in its basic orientation, but that it also has consistency and coherence in terms of its overall structure. In other words, as a corollary to stability (the "lines") one also has to imagine the presence of coherence (the "coloring"). The basic element in view here is that enunciative statements are presented and sketched out in a way that we recognize as functionally intelligible, understandable, and reliable.

There are numerous points of entry through which we might draw out some of the ways in which these ordering principles are manifest in the study of the New Testament. In general terms, one could look to any of the New Testament texts, say the Gospel of John or Paul's letter to the Romans as examples. Scholars are adept at tracing out every possible bit of data from these texts that can be used for interpreting those same texts. First and foremost, one of the main presuppositions is that an "original" author (and usually only one author – for some reason we do not imagine New Testament texts to be co-written) has a particular message that he or she wishes to communicate, and that the text is shaped with this communicative end in view. In principle, such an assumption is largely true. However, the focus on coherence and consistency suggests that an author will also communicate clearly and convincingly, and that every phrase is constructed with a high level of intentionality. With coherence in mind, interpreting a text presumes

that every word "counts" and is meant to be exactly where it is in relation to other words. Perhaps there are texts that meet these high standards – certainly modern scientific papers seek to communicate in text and symbol as accurately as possible the point that is to be made. The question for our ancient literature, however, is that we are dealing with a complex intersection of communicative strategies and interests, where literary artistry may be as important as the straightforward communication of a propositional statement. And certainly we cannot and should not assume that every New Testament text offers us a clear and coherent, or even completely rational and articulate, "message." There are tropes and themes, to be sure. However, it is the modern scholar, and not the ancient author, who seeks to connect these themes together into a much larger whole – often, in our view, making more of a text than is actually in that text.[23]

Historical critics tend to have the view that our ancient authors approached the task of writing a narrative and/or communicating complicated theological themes or nuanced instruction on community practice with a superior rhetorical awareness about the capacity of their specific audiences to understand coupled with an almost superhuman ability by these authors to transcend their own mental limitations and human fragilities when it came to composing texts. It is as if there is a commitment to an incarnational framework for the high-minded theological concepts of the New Testament (such as "Jesus became human"), but when it comes to thinking of the New Testament itself as a product of human enfleshment, we quickly can lose sight of the implications of such a view of humanity. It is in this way that our ancient writers are often conceived in somewhat cardboard-cutout fashion, almost lifeless, and devoid of what it is that makes us human, not least *making mistakes*, or at the minimum reflecting inconsistency, incoherence, and failure in the art and act of communication, the latter being comprised of the use of the wrong words to signify an idea, poorly phrased sentences, grammatically improper sentences, and so on. In the quest for coherence it is often overlooked that, aside from all of the other social and cultural facets that played out in the process of textual transmission in early Christianity, scribes also corrected grammar and clarified ideas, and often outright added their own content to texts – which we would say renders texts more, and not less, unstable and incoherent.

This is not to say that we cannot perceive, as noted above, various themes that emerge as we read the Gospel of John or the letter to the Romans. However, at the same time, in making meaning with biblical texts we are also *looking for* patterns and themes, and it need not be the case that just because we find something emerging throughout a particular text that the author in fact intended as much. Moreover, we frequently assume that all the twists and turns of intertextuality, including references to other biblical texts, and especially Hebrew Bible/Old Testament materials, is deliberate.

That is, our premise is that of consistency of intention to utilize pre-existing scriptures, when in fact all kinds of extra-textual materials might end up in a text without any particular purpose. Of course, early Christian writers did "cite" Hebrew Bible texts, such as the Psalms, Isaiah, the Pentateuch, and much more. It may be the case that they cited such texts from having access to scrolls or books, it could be that they had the material memorized, or it could be some other means of "knowing" such texts entirely. Further, despite the presence of explanation and interpretation at times, we cannot always readily decipher the connection of the pre-existing to the context or the logic and rationality of its deployment. And in order to make things work out in terms of coherence, scholars will frequently engage in extensive exegetical contortions to make sense of the pre-existing text or tradition, often depending upon a fairly sophisticated understanding of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek grammar, an understanding which is itself based on modern, and not ancient, philological study and codification. In other words, what is presented as apparent and clear in modern scholarship is frequently not the case when one looks more closely at the ancient materials themselves.[24] We assume intentionality when there might well be randomness, we assume rational progression in argumentation when we might find inconsistency and contradiction, and we assume an overall coherent structure in terms of content of a text when there might well be disarray and even confusion.

Some three decades ago, Heikki Räisänen wrote a book on Paul's view of the law that provides a particularly cogent example of a challenge to coherence and consistency as categories in New Testament study.[25] The topic of Paul's position on the Jewish law in both Romans and Galatians has been one of the most heated and controversial discussions in the history of the discipline, with scholars seeking to grapple with what seems to be at times an opposition to, and at other times an appreciation for, the Jewish law. Earlier German Protestant scholarship had proposed a fairly sharp break with the law in Paul's understanding of the new community founded "in Christ," and this view has been challenged by much anglophone scholarship in the past half-century or so, as we will discuss in Chapter 2. A significant portion of New Testament scholarly energy has been placed in service of attempting to resolve the puzzle of the law in Paul's thought, using everything from Jewish and Greek background traditions to complicated exegetical configurations in order to ascertain the correct interpretation of Paul's relationship to the law.

Räisänen's proposal went against the grain in that he quite simply argued that Paul was inconsistent in his rhetoric, and thus was possibly, if not likely, inconsistent regarding his views on the law. Ultimately, Räisänen argued, it becomes very difficult to put together a fully coherent theological position on the law based on Paul's writings as the primary source for such a position. To be sure, in the letters we get broad threads and themes, and

certainly one can discern therein a sense of the spirit of Paul's relationship to the Jewish law and its place in his broader theological view. However, any attempt to make sense of all of Paul's statements as (a) stable and coherent in their own right, and (b) connecting together into a larger theological framework that stands above the letters themselves, simply involves too many contortions and loopholes to fully work. In fact, we might not even know whether Paul was anti-law or pro-law – or, even if he were one or the other, what precisely that would entail in his ancient context as opposed to how it would look in our own. We simply know that in his writings the (Jewish) law has a complicated and convoluted, if not also contradictory, positioning. Needless to say, Räisänen's view has not gained widespread scholarly acceptance in large part because his framework does not provide for a fully coherent, stable, and abstracted Pauline position on the law. That said, it should be noted that Räisänen arrives at his position on inconsistency using the exact same scientific categories of analysis that other historical critics do. It is only that he uses the principles of coherence and consistency to show that Paul is neither coherent nor consistent – he disproves the hypothesis, if you will.

Broadly speaking, not only do we have the larger issue that authors are not necessarily, if ever, fully consistent in their presentation of subject matter, but their approaches to writing may not be particularly useful in terms of providing overarching patterns of cohesion of theological and narrative themes in the New Testament. For instance, letters are frequently written for specific contexts, and the content is contingent, especially regarding the rhetorical strategies that are employed. It is possible, for that reason, that the law in the letter to the Romans functions differently than in Galatians or Philippians, since the writer(s) of those letters may well have had different rhetorical interests, and the subject matter thus is shaped and molded to be persuasive in that context, without any intention to reflect a broader personal theological perspective on the law. Paul's discussions of Christ and his significance for communities can be viewed similarly, that is, as highly contextualized configurations that seek to persuade an audience to act in a particular manner, which is seemingly the goal of most of Paul's letters.[26] Thus, even Paul's view of Christ, at least as written in the letters, is quite likely inconsistent. That does not mean he did not have some broad ideas of who Christ was and his significance for early Christian life and community. However, even in that respect, views change over time, and there is no reason to assume that even if Paul had some relative consistency in his views that he himself did not "grow in understanding." Another similar example is that of the literary activity in the Acts of the Apostles. If we assume that the sole purpose of the speeches in Acts is to provide a historically accurate presentation of what was actually said on a particular occasion that will read

very differently than if we understand the writer of Acts to be creating "speech-in-character," which serves to curtail the thought and expression to how the writer of Acts assumed particular characters would speak. Thus, it is very possible that much of the so-called theological content in the speeches of Acts only generally represents the author's own views, and, rather, reflects his (or her) narrative artistry. Thus, the notions we have of how ancient people think reflect a view in which there is only static individualism, with no sense of development or of changing one's mind or an ever-expanding conceptual world in which new connections are made, articulated, and elaborated.

Through the examples we have briefly discussed above, it should hopefully become apparent that throughout the discipline of New Testament studies scholars seek to shore up the data, ensuring that, in this instance, it is "colored" appropriately so that it is recognizable, easily grasped and quantified, and readily available for interpretive consumption. One could add a variety of other subsidiary ordering principles that would also aid to bolster these overarching ones. For instance, genetic connections and interrelations offer a means by which we link a variety of discrete material in either a particular text or across a variety of texts. It is the strategy of interconnecting materials that helps us further draw the lines that generate the image of the larger stable structure of the New Testament. There is a clear sense of "cause and effect" in these epistemic ordering principles, even as it should be noted that just because there is a genetic connection does not mean that there is necessarily a positive development, as that connection is generally assessed from the vantage point of a particular value judgment. Connections and interrelations are assumed throughout the New Testament materials, and scholars are adept at creating them when they often seem absent, helping provide the "missing links" that conveniently knit together the threads that are being traced. And to be sure scholars also find mutations and deformities and perversions, although, again, the latter is a particularly pejorative term often reflecting the value judgment of interpreters. Thus, the issue here in terms of the New Testament "order of things" is not necessarily the manner in which the genetic relationships are formed and shaped – be they conceptual, textual, or social – but that they exist in the first place. Their existence allows the critic to tease out the lines of the larger picture, at times carefully brushing away the dust of the centuries that can occlude from full view the presumed inner dynamics that were operative in early Christianity.[27]

Difference, distinctiveness, and identity

Difference, distinctiveness, and identity comprise three interrelated categories that in many respects readily evolve out of the principles that we have delineated above. In order to fully identify a phenomenon that we can

call "early Christianity," and a set of texts that we can label as the "New Testament," we require stable coordinates and categories that will allow our subject matter to rise above and out of its historical context and fully reveal itself to the modern critic. That is to say, early Christianity and the New Testament have to be grasped as actual entities in order to be interpreted as such. If they cannot be separated out clearly and consistently and coherently from the larger environment, then we cannot actually talk about these subjects – they have to be distinctive, different, and in many respects have a separate (even if "but equal") identity that frames the "self-awareness" of the subject. In other words, if early Christians of, say, the late first century CE could be in a position to not actually recognize themselves as "Christian," since belief in Jesus as the "risen Messiah," for example, need not on its own lead to a distinctive category of identity, then we are left with a quandary: what makes these people different from someone who might be Jewish or Greek or Roman – and how would we even know what "Jewish," "Greek," or "Roman" might mean within a larger network of contingent identity markers? Thus, within the broader ordering structure of the episteme of New Testament studies, identity is both *stabilized* as an actual thing to be quantified by particular identifiable features, and also *differentiated* from the identity of "others" who are not considered to be "early Christian."[28] And it is in this distinction that we can also begin to develop and refer to *innovation* by these identified groups/subjects.

Similarly, we may well ask: even if we could identify early Christians as a distinct group in antiquity, how would we know that we have identified a "religious," a "political," or a "social" movement? It seems very obvious to us today, in a world that appears to be sharply categorized into discrete domains of religious and secular or private and public (regardless of whether that reflects "reality"), that early Christianity is a religious movement. However, it is not at all the case that the historical contours of the ancient world support that particular modern assumption. Here is a very good point at which to examine how our own ordering of the world affects the ways in which we arrange and assess the data related to the ancient world. A very strong case can be made that when the Roman Empire came to oppose early Christians it was on the basis of political, and not religious, interests, since religious investments, as we would see them, were "political" from the Roman perspective, even as a recent scholarly cottage industry concerning "Roman religion" might insist otherwise. Moreover, we might well see, as some scholars of early Christianity invested in modern social-scientific approaches would have us do, that early Christians actually functioned as a social movement. The increasing emphasis on ancient guilds and associations as the location of early Christian gatherings would imply that early Christians may have been

more of a social organization than a strictly religious phenomenon, at least as the latter is seen by modern eyes. That said, most scholars of ancient Christianity might also argue the case both ways: early Christians constituted a religious social movement or a politically motivated religious group. However, the lines are very difficult to draw, and it may well be that the majority of early Christians were very much unlike how we perceive them today, including the notion that many may have been polytheists despite the clear impression in the "authoritative" documents that they were not of that orientation. We actually do not know the answers to most of these questions even if our categories and methods suggest that we do.

Some of these facets of ordering can be observed in the tremendous amount of recent work that has gone into studying the Roman Empire as the backdrop for the emergence of early Christianity. We will address this trend in more detail in Chapter 2; for the moment we note simply that the broader focus on empire and imperialism, by which we largely mean the Roman institutions and their diverse machineries of implementation, helps to contextualize the New Testament, not unlike the way in which Judaism has often done as well. In some sense, related to the above point about making the distinction between politics and religion, the contrast between Roman Empire (as a political entity) and Judaism (as a religious entity) provides an excellent example of how distinction and differentiation serve to formulate how the identity of early Christianity is presented and interpreted. What is drawn into the conversation creates, to a large extent, the identity of the New Testament texts, concepts, and early Christian practices.

"Empire," then, has had the inadvertent effect of creating a unifying principle for reading the New Testament as the textual product of a single occasion. Granted, there is a diversity of viewpoints among scholars about, for instance, the precise relationship of the Gospel of Matthew versus John's Gospel versus Paul with respect to the Roman Empire. However, the growing consensus in New Testament scholarship is that the Roman Empire is the objective reality that provides the context for interpretation, irrespective of internal differences between the New Testament texts. "Empire" is thus stabilized as a mechanism that controls the terms on which the New Testament is written, produced, transmitted, and consumed. Further, imperial prowess and processes are located as that which must be violent and oppressive in contradistinction to the early Christian message, even if the latter is viewed by some scholars as compromised in many respects. Doubtless it is the case that the Roman mechanism of government and intervention differed substantially depending on locale and context – classicists and ancient historians have made much of the differences in governmentality and cultural orientation between the Roman "center" and the "provinces," for example.

Yet empire, and perhaps especially imperial images, provide the broad universal link across local differences, since the Romans deposited these potent displays of Roman claims to power throughout the empire and imposed them on the territories it controlled. Regardless of regional particularities, then, Roman visual representation is often stabilized as that which knits the territories together into the "fatherland." Herein the modern turn to Roman visual images in New Testament studies, which we will discuss further in Chapter 3, proves particularly useful, since the image can be said to provide the representation of the local operative ideologies, rather than, say, the more seemingly speculative work of archaeology and textual analysis. The Roman imperial thread serves to make sense of Christian community identity and theological claims. Scholarly disagreement with respect to the specifics does not change the stable entity that forms the backdrop against which early Christian responses can be measured and engaged. Differences in interpretive orientation and outcome[29] do not detract, for most scholars at least, from the notion that behind these divergences lies a common thread of major importance that underpins, in unison, the background against which Christian responses to the world can be coordinated and, therefore, something of the common ground from which a construction of meaningful difference and identity originates.

Indeed, it is one thing to accept Vincent Wimbush's proposition that all biblical texts are responses to the world in which they are situated, and therefore are rhetorical constructions in which those responses are embedded, and that in those responses we detect traces of negotiation, and possibly of rhetorical and social formation.[30] It is quite another to suggest that there is a universal series of such contexts and processes in the ambient sphere of early Christian textual production and identity formation that in some sense predetermines particular kinds of realities and experiences in stabilized and normative ways. Even if one could somehow position the various writers on some kind of "response to the Roman Empire" grid, one would still need to contend with the mass of self-identified early Christians themselves – however such identifications functioned in practice – who are not represented or may not identify with the so-called "authorial" perspective we tease out of the New Testament texts. Where is a Philemon or a Phoebe to be positioned in such configurations? And what basic set of criteria is used for measuring the nature of the response? This further goes to show that we actually know relatively little about early Christians in general – or about the ancient writers and readers of the New Testament – and that our views of ancient Christian phenomena are largely shaped by the perspectives of the texts themselves, perspectives which only exist for the modern scholar dependent on the assumptions we have just denoted.

Although the use of the Roman Empire and especially its visual imagery is only one small example, its attraction to modern scholars is palpable,

as these vivify an objective apparatus constructed through texts and archaeology, with the major accent falling on the former. We can *see* the empire in action, and pictures do not lie! These images make things real – or make them appear so. In this way, the various entities (armies, emperors, cities, battles, etc.) that they invoke also take on the appearance of the real in the process. So whether we are talking about early Christian groups or particular theological concepts that need an objectifiably traceable "background" in order to bring them into existence and imbue them with meaning, in all cases, when these differentiated elements are deployed it is with the aim of producing such an immutable background over against which early Christianity can stand out, in whatever shape the particular configuration of data we have arranged allows.

The question of what makes someone "Christian" in antiquity provides an excellent foray into the basic issues raised in this chapter. How is it that we order and arrange our data in order to produce ancient Christians? At one level, it would appear that there are traces of evidence in the ancient materials that offer us a basic outline of what someone who might have identified as a Christian could have looked like. However, upon closer inspection one has to raise the question of whether or not we have not simply created the category of "early Christian" as a result of our own ordering principles for framing the New Testament data. To a large extent, we have to decide on the features that we will use to differentiate early Christians from their larger context before we actually begin our investigation. How else would we know what it is we are seeing unless we have some preconceived notion about the data for which we are looking? This is, in fact, the great unspoken problem regarding the study of the New Testament. Here, more than in any of the other categories we have discussed above, we have to fall back on the ordering principles that undergird our study of the ancient materials.

To be sure, inevitably we need to utilize the New Testament and other early Christian texts to formulate what it is that constitutes the distinctive identity and also the innovative contribution of early Christianity *in relation to* other movements, identities, and religions. That said, a potent question is how we might move from the texts to the realities behind those texts, to the historical personages and communities to which the texts do not give us direct access. This is probably one of the more difficult principles to grasp, since the automatic assumption is that all early Christians in the ancient world knew and believed what the New Testament texts set forth (as a coherent and consistent whole!), just like all ancient Jews knew and believed what is present in the Torah and Mishnah and Talmud. The fact of the matter is, however, we simply have no idea what it is that the people "on the ground" thought or believed, and from what evidence we glean from the ancient sources the best guess is that some people likely "fit" the description

that we construct from the New Testament, but many others quite possibly did not. And "not fitting in" did not preclude them from being "Christians."

The natural question will be, then, from where does the concept of "Christian" originate? Functionally speaking, it is only with the emergence of the structural hierarchy of the church that we begin to observe the emergence of Christianity, which is an *institutional representation*. In the final analysis, it is actually institutions, and not people on the ground, that help to solidify tradition and stabilize concepts. Somewhere along the way some people – but by no means all people – decided that "this" and not "that" represents what Christianity is – and the "this" and "that" changes based on individual authorities and over time and across cultures as well. We can only guess as to what degree the institutionalized forms represent the general mass of people left out of the structural hierarchies. However, we can also assume with some degree of confidence that the overarching determinations of councils and those in significant positions of power are relatively unreflective of what the "others" thought. That said, we have only the institutionalized forms with which to work. Indeed, it is this same framework by which we know that something is "Roman": it is only through the institutional structures, in their multitudinous expressions, that we can frame what it means to be "Roman." Yet what it meant to be "Roman" in general, even if one were a small cog in the larger wheel of the institutionalized form such as a solider in the Roman legion, is much more complicated. One often had multiple loyalties and affiliations, and a vast array of other factors that combined to shape the identity of the individual over the course of a lifetime. Being "Roman," at its most basic form, signifies someone who lived during the period of "Roman history" and participated in that arena in some way.

In a similar way, being "Christian" means, in the ancient context, in some way being related to the materials that we sift out as being "Christian-related." But that is not saying much! And to be sure, in so far as we only identify "Christian" materials by key words and concepts (e.g. "Christ Jesus"), we likely miss a variety of texts that may be Christian*ish* and affiliated in some way with our structure of identification but which do not fit the categories we have set out to create difference and distinction. And lest we forget, the production of individual texts and the collection of such into an authoritative canon such as the New Testament do not occur at the grassroots level. Rather, it is institutional investment and initiation that bring about interests in solidifying the boundaries of what counts as "Christian," what emphatically does not count, and what is simply left by the wayside. To that extent, our modern attention to identity and distinction is not original – in every time period people in institutional contexts have sought to draw the lines and patrol the boundaries. The difference is, however, that many modern scholars understand themselves to be doing something

different – they are discovering the lines and uncovering the boundaries that have always existed.

In this respect we, as modern scholars, are frequently unaware of our own positioning within institutional settings that similarly function to dictate the terms and conditions of "discovery," which is what often opens up the space for critique of the historical-critical task. We are not seeking to undermine this task. However, we note that a lack of reflection on the larger framing issues of historical study – some of them quite basic – has not helped in making a strong case for the relevance or importance of historical study of the New Testament. In short, then, a great deal of reflection is required on the ways in which we create early Christian identity through distinction and difference. It may well be that the New Testament is, in the end, much less distinctive and innovative than scholars suggest. And, to be sure, in what other ways can we rethink the boundaries of identity in order to reshape the landscape of what it means to be "Christian" in the ancient world? Such imaginative exercises are not mere language games, but critical components of a larger historical enterprise that seeks to use the current categories in ways that open up other historical possibilities and configurations for discussion and analysis.

Ways of Knowing New Testament "Things"

As we have moved through this opening chapter, we have sought to develop a larger framework that contours the chapters that follow. In particular, we have focused on the modern epistemic "order of things" that shapes the order of New Testament "things." That is, we have argued that the modern framework for viewing and interpreting the world is the major factor in organizing the historical data for the ancient world, how we classify and analyze that data, and, finally, the results we produce for both academic and popular consumption in our world. Most scholars would agree that there is the inevitable problem of the "two horizons," where we, as modern readers, have to negotiate our own assumptions about the way the world operates along with those of the ancient materials.[31] The "two horizons" framework refers to the meeting of the two interpretive spheres – the ancient world's and our own. The essence of this approach highlights the intersection and convergence of the two perspectives, and accents the need to negotiate that meeting in order to better arrive at a more accurate interpretation and representation of the ancient materials. It is not our world – and we are in a position to be able to work around that particular quandary and still access ancient meanings.

Our standpoint in this chapter is fundamentally juxtaposed to the "two horizons" approach. Making critical use of Foucault's work, we have contended that there is in fact no way to negotiate the "two horizons." In fact, we have gone one step further to suggest there is only one horizon – and that is the horizon of the present, which is ever present, even as we most often do not perceive it as such. Again, as we have emphasized above, this focus on the modern episteme and its powerful ordering function does not mean that the ancient world does not exist. For us, the ancient world most certainly exists, as surely as this book does. And further, we want to be clear in our claim that the task of historical work is by no means devalued in this framework. Rather, we understand historical work on the New Testament, conducted in the tradition of historical criticism, to be of immense value and of paramount importance. Where our approach differs from many others is that we are committed to the understanding that there is no escape from the ways in which our modern, science-infused, "order of things" shape how we view the world. Now, that is not to say there is no possibility for the use of imagination and creativity in terms of expanding upon the operative ordering principles, making them work at a higher level than they are often deployed. We do believe in invigorating historical-critical work with an inspired deployment of ordering principles, in some sense using its logic against itself in order to explore the contradictions and embrace them, therein also moving into a realm that challenges our own "order of things" on its own terms.

Foucault was, in many respects, seeking to engage long-held issues and problems in epistemology that can be traced back to one of the forefathers of such thinking, namely Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). The basic issue that Kant, among many others, sought to address is how we perceive and order the world in a way that allows us to have access to some *objective* reality. Is that even possible? Kant's system is highly formalistic and involves a great deal of speculative reasoning. Foucault, who wrote his dissertation on Kant under the noted Marxist scholar Louis Althusser, sought to think about epistemology in materialist terms, with a healthy infusion of other philosophical traditions that moved beyond a strictly Marxist tenet that economics – and the relationship to the means of production in particular – was the sole cause of the epistemic structure of perceiving, knowing, and experience. Ultimately, for Foucault, the system of knowing and perceiving is arbitrary at one level, but also conditioned by a variety of historical and social intellectual processes that have gone into shaping the overarching system of knowledge. The episteme out of which we order the world does not simply arrive on the current scene of any time period as something descended from the "heavens" or given by God. On the other hand, neither it is entirely a momentary, impressionistic product that arises from sensory

apprehension. It is, rather, a fairly complex configuration of the intersection of the temporal moment at hand and the history of intellectual development.

Within this schema, once the episteme is in place, even as it may shift and morph over time, it is also fairly stringent in the application of its principles. So there is a very clear sense and apprehension of objectivity from within the system – and there is a patent logic and an evident set of congruencies and principles of verifiability and veracity that shore up the core of the ordering system. "Things" thus appear as they naturally are to the episteme, but not as they would necessarily be within an entirely different ordering system. Hence, there is a measure of objectivity in an explicit system propelled by contingency, which means that objectivity itself is highly contingent.[32] The epistemological framework rests on the notion that objectivity is always relatively so, but there is no specific relative position to be held apart from the episteme either, and any principle of relativity only exists in so far as it is objectively ordered as such within the larger episteme. In short, there is no magic "red pill" that reveals the reality behind the Matrix, but neither, at the same time, is there a "blue pill" that necessitates a state of harmony with status quo ignorance. For Foucault, there is something in between these two options, and historical work can and should take place with the full knowledge of the relativity of the objectivity that arises out of our diverse analytic projects.

Given that we are focused in this chapter, and in this book as a whole, on the epistemic framing of the discipline dedicated to the study of the New Testament and early Christianity in a variety of formats and functions, our aim is to elucidate the broader context of interpretation – to denaturalize, if you will, via the process of de-introducing the manner in which information about the "facts" of the New Testament appears before us. In this respect, then, knowing that the modern episteme is deeply rooted in a scientific framework, and that the ordering principles of this structure of knowledge play out in historical study of the New Testament, helps us understand how it is that the New Testament "historical science" is so adamantly committed to "getting it right," to revealing the coherent principles and stable outlines of the emergent organism known as "early Christianity."[33] Again, we see revealed here the broader stabilizing work of the New Testament "order of things," an epistemological framework that is thoroughly grounded, as we have repeatedly noted, in a firm commitment to identifying and positioning the coordinates that allow the modern interpreter to firmly fix the data points in order to allow for precise and accurate evaluation and interpretation.

We should make it clear that over the last two centuries there have been numerous scholars who have been hermeneutically self-aware and reflective on the rich tradition of historiographical reflection and who would agree that there is no direct access to historical facts as such. The German tradition of New Testament scholarship is surprisingly rich in such

reflection, wherein the *science* of New Testament study and historical analysis more generally does not construct a system in which we have direct access to a historical moment that is uninterpreted or unmediated. It is, in fact, the recognition that everything we read in the New Testament is fully mediated to us by "witnesses" and "interpreters" in the early period of the emergence of Christianity that gives us pause in our attempt to construct a fully objective history that we can directly access.[34] In this respect, then, the historical study of the New Testament can seem different than studying contemporary subjects in a science lab. However, to the degree that both of those participate in the same episteme, and construct their subject and its apprehension through language, they are actually not all that different. Yet for the moment we posit a particular fictive distance between the New Testament and the lab bench. We also recognize that attempting to appear to enter into an interpretive world that acknowledges the role of human meaning-making, and proceeds as if that role can be negotiated in a way that provides substantive grounding for current theological commitments, in some sense represents a docetic view of history. In this view, there is the appearance of "incarnation" that ultimately represents a rather limited understanding of such. In this kind of historical understanding there is a strong commitment to the objective principles of science along with an acknowledgment that objectivity is not at all attainable in the historical sciences.

In our understanding that lies behind the questions and queries posed in this chapter, we are positioned in a framework that in some sense is more akin to the study of quantum physics, where randomness and chance are prominent, where there is discontinuity and contradiction, where the more we learn about one facet of an element the less we know about another, where disorder and chaos seem to be the order of things. In terms of how we proceed in our daily lives, we consider the quantum level of physics to be radically different from our own world, and in some sense it exists as a theory that is completely unrelated to our actual experience of reality, or at least our apprehension and framing of that experience. In our estimation, however, we would do well to consider historical study of the New Testament in a similar light, as producing results that are fundamentally unstable and incoherent. Such effects are not simply a result of deploying differing "witnesses" or variant hermeneutic prisms that arrange data for us, and which we in turn evaluate and interpret and then render accessible in alternative narrative forms. Rather, we understand that, without our epistemic system and its principles of ordering the ancient world, the New Testament would appear as a "booming, buzzing confusion." And while we appreciate the vibrant complexity and contradiction that lurk beneath the surface at the "quantum level" of history, we are also committed to a kind of "this-worldly" apprehension of the early Christian past. The two

need not stand as options between which one must choose, but there definitely is a distinct tension that exists as a result. There are the "things" that our episteme orders and interprets relatively well, and then there are the "other things" that challenge the principles of ordering that seem so natural and universal. We live in both worlds simultaneously, and in some sense being aware of the latter helps us better assess the limitations of the former.

Further, in our view it is knowing how the order of New Testament "things" functions to categorize and classify data and to produce results for analysis that allows one to be a *critical* reader of New Testament scholarship, from introductory materials to specialized studies. Understanding how the system works allows one to appreciate the results that arise out of historical work, to assess those results, and finally to interrogate the results of all research, with the express purpose of engaging the larger meta-issues of the epistemic framework that is implicitly working behind the scenes. We would argue, further, that it is the task of the critic to provide historical counter-readings, not only as a means to test the hypotheses of New Testament research but to actually expose the hypothetical nature of all research in the first place. This orientation does not mean, as we have repeatedly emphasized, that one abandons the epistemic framework and its ordering principles. This is functionally impossible. Rather, in our estimation we could use the larger "order of things" in creative and imaginative ways. That is, we could utilize the ordering principles as a means to expand beyond the often facile deployment of those same principles, even in scholarly work on the New Testament that utilizes the language of "distance," "interpretation," and "narrative" as code words to signify something of the relative nature of human meaning-making activity but that ultimately ends up reifying the more superficial deployment it has the appearance of avoiding.

Ultimately, we contend that historical work can be more complex than it currently is. Such complexity entails a willingness to embrace contradiction and unknowing as constitutive features of historical analysis. In this respect, we would argue that scholarship on the New Testament should by no means abandon the operative ordering principles, but that scholarly analysis requires more critical complexity in both its historical work and in its presentation to scholars and students. There is no reason, for instance, that introductions to the New Testament could not be much more complicated and multi-layered in the exhibition of the products of New Testament scholarship. In fact, a more multi-faceted presentation might even encourage critical thinking in students and scholars, challenging all to reflect on and to evaluate the episteme in which they live, move, and have their being. In our assessment this is the task and potential of historical-critical work on the New Testament.

Notes

1. André Lemaire, "Burial Box of James the Brother of Jesus," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 28.6 (2002), 24–33. For further discussion of the various issues we raise here concerning the James ossuary, see R. Byrne and B. McNary-Zak, eds., *Resurrecting the Brother of Jesus: The James Ossuary Controversy and the Quest for Religious Relics* (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Craig Evans, *Jesus and the Ossuaries: What Jewish Burial Practices Reveal about the Beginning of Christianity* (Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2003); and James Tabor, *The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007).

2. Among ancient literary sources, there are only a few "famous" passages that mention the Jesus of the New Testament. Josephus refers to more than 20 individuals named Jesus in his writings, and the Jesus of the New Testament is thought to be mentioned in the famous, if "inauthentic," *Testimonium Flavianum* (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3). Josephus also refers to the stoning of "James, the brother of Jesus" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.9.1). The Roman historian Tacitus refers to Nero blaming the Christians, who had followed "Christus" who had been executed under Pontius Pilate, for the Great Fire of Rome (*Annals*, 15.44). And Suetonius mentions that Claudius expelled Jews "who constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus" (*Claudius*, 25.4).

3. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 128–129.

4. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xx.

5. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 17–18.

6. For a discussion of the issues at stake in this area of investigation, see Todd Penner, "'In the Beginning': Post-Critical Reflections on Early Christian Textual Transmission and Modern Textual Transgression," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 33 (2006): 415–434.

7. See Ernst Troeltsch, *Religion in History* (trans. J. L. Adams and W. E. Bense; Fortress Texts in Modern Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

8. For an analysis of how history and historiography worked on both sides of the Atlantic during the 19th-century development of "Early Church History" as a discipline, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *Founding the Fathers: Early Church History and Protestant Professors in Nineteenth-Century America* (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 97–204.

9. Unlike in nature, it is not always the "higher" form that is most prized in the study of history, and this is particularly the case in the study of the Bible, where the conflicts between Protestant and Catholic interpretation frequently played a role in the assessment of the ancient data. That is, Protestants in some sense saw themselves as circumventing the ecclesial hierarchies and going back to the "source" in the scriptures themselves. For a methodological analysis of this shift and its implications for the study of religion see Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago Studies in the History of Judaism; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

10. For a discussion of the intersection of the discipline of textual criticism with the rhetoric of science, see Yii-Jan Lin, "The Erotic Life of Manuscripts: A History of New Testament Textual Criticism and the Biological Sciences" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 2014).

11. Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (Morningside edition; New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 206.

12. Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith; New York: Pantheon, 1972), 21.

13. Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *Language, Counter-memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (ed. D. Bouchard; Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139–164; 150–151. The use of italics here signals our change to the plural.

14. Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 150.

15. One sees this clearly in Hegel's dialectics, and in Kantian epistemology as well. In more recent times the work of Michel de Certeau has been especially critical for historiography. De Certeau notes that the ordering principles behind the Western theological tradition were transferred into the configuration of the modern nation-state, which assumes the structure, authority, and function of the former church. As a result, progress becomes a key concept (particularly in ethics and culture), reflected, one can infer, in the discourses of historiography, which in some sense became an alternative way of doing, and implicitly affirming, although for the most part unconsciously, theology in a secular, de-sacralized, emergent modern world episteme. See De Certeau, *The Writing of History* (trans. T. Conley; European Perspectives; New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 178–179.

16. The German appeared in 1964. See Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (trans. Philadelphia Seminar on Christian Origins; ed. R. A. Kraft and G. Krodel; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

17. In Foucault's framework, which we are following here to a certain extent, there is no linguistic product (a statement, concept, etc.) that does not "presuppose others … that is not surrounded by a field of coexistences, effects of series and succession, a distribution of functions and roles" (*Archaeology of Knowledge*, 98). In other words, there is no specific originating statement – there is only one that is tied to innumerable and often untraceable nexuses of meaning of which the statement that stands out for our observation and analysis is a moment – a fragment – of an extended series of significations that flow in and out of the statement in "our hands." In other words, there is never a precise moment of origin and never a clear path of development.

18. See the argument made by David J. Glass and Ned Hall, "A Brief History of the Hypothesis," *Cell* 134 (2008): 378–381.

19. As Christopher Stanley has proposed in his work on the use of scripture in Paul, it is quite possible that Paul's audiences had a range of responses to his rhetorical efforts, including not "getting it" at all. That there would be multiple responses to Paul's argumentative strategies is just one example of how much more complex the situation on the ground is than has been supposed and imagined by much New Testament scholarship. See Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York: T & T Clark, 2004).

20. It is for this reason that Foucault focuses on discourses rather than historical moments – they generate a particular set of rules by which they can be engaged, but there is a fiction that is also in play as a result, of which Foucault is also well aware. See Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, 138–140.

21. See Antoinette Clark Wire, *The Corinthian Women Prophets: A Reconstruction through Paul's Rhetoric* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990).

22. See Fredric Jameson, *The Prison House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972).

23. There is a long and venerable hermeneutical tradition that argues for this particular approach to interpretation, wherein making more of a text in the act of interpretation is what pushes interpretation into the realm of "art." See the modern classic articulation of such an approach in Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (trans. G. Barden and J. Cumming; New York: Seabury Press, 1975). However, historical critics, by and large, do not see themselves as seeking to create art in their interpretations, but rather reflecting things as they actually are in the text.

24. For a development of this approach with respect to the Hebrew Bible, see Jacques Berlinberlau, *The Secular Bible: Why Nonbelievers Must Take Religion Seriously* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

25. Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 29; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983).

26. For an overview of how Paul's use of the art of persuasion, along with our own use of rhetoric, can be understood in differing and even contradictory ways, see Todd Penner and Davina C. Lopez, "Rhetorical Approaches: Introducing the Art of Persuasion in Paul and Pauline Studies," in *Studying Paul's Letters: Contemporary Perspectives and Methods* (ed. J. Marchal; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 33–52.

27. A good example of this principle of ordering in action is found in Jens Schröter, "Beginnings of the Jesus Tradition: Tradition-Historical Observations on an Area of the History of Early Christian Theology," in *From Jesus to the New Testament: Early Christian Theology and the Origin of the New Testament Canon* (trans. W. Coppins; Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2013), 73–94. Also see Francis Watson, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2013). The main aim in this scholarship is to generate extensive networks of genetic connections that serve to create a definable and stable Gospel tradition. The linear development, albeit complicated, confirms the veracity of the material contained in the tradition, testifying to the historical truth that lies behind contemporary theological and church commitments. The genetic tracings by scholars create this absolute certainty, and without that interconnection the New Testament looks more like an American university fraternity party (wild and out of control, with arrests to follow later in the evening and stories to tell the next day) than one of the Oxford college's literary clubs (disciplined, ordered, and regal, with only minor infractions along the way).

28. In terms of historical understanding, scholars may acknowledge "hybrid" identities, such as "Jewish-Christian" and "Gentile-Christian," that are more difficult to draw out and delineate than "Jewish" and "Gentile" and "Christian."

Aside from these particular examples, however, the notion of hybridity is somewhat under-discussed in modern New Testament research aside from scholarly trajectories that take seriously the notion of "hybridity" as it has been developed in postcolonial discourses. For an array of such approaches as they are applied to the full range of New Testament writings, see F. S. Segovia and R. S. Sugirtharajah, eds., *A Postcolonial Commentary on the New Testament Writings* (Bible and Postcolonialism 13; London: T & T Clark, 2009).

29. Even when scholarly differences seem to be as thoroughgoing as that between Richard Horsley, who reads Paul as "anti-imperial," and J. Albert Harrill, who reads Paul as an example of *Romanitas*, the common thread is that the Roman Empire is that which provides the means by which early Christians and the New Testament can be "measured" and to which it can be compared. See, for example, Horsley, *1 Corinthians* (Abingdon New Testament Commentaries 1; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1998), and Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in Their Roman Context* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

30. While we are aware that Wimbush's framework has itself evolved considerably, we find ourselves returning to his classic formulation in Vincent L. Wimbush, "… Not of This World …": Early Christianities as Rhetorical and Social Formation," in *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack* (ed. H. Taussig and E. A. Castelli; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1996), 23–36.

31. This particular framing can be found in Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, which offers something of a classic formulation of the "two horizons" interpretive situation. For a fairly extensive discussion, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1980).

32. For an exploration of how objectivity has a history, see Lorraine J. Datson and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Zone Books, 2010).

33. For a well-articulated statement of how historical assessment of the New Testament might directly rely on knowledge from the sciences, and natural science in particular, see Frederik Wisse, "The Origin of the Christian Species: Lessons from the Study of Natural History for the Reconstruction of the History of Earliest Christianity," *Canadian Society of Biblical Studies Bulletin* 63 (2003–2004): 5–23.

34. See the discussion in Schröter, "New Testament Science beyond Historicism: Recent Developments in the Theory of History and Their Significant for the Exegesis of Early Christian Writings," in *From Jesus to the New Testament*, 9–20.