

## Chapter 4

### PROPHECY HISTORICIZED OR TRADITION SCRIPTURALIZED? REFLECTIONS ON THE ORIGINS OF THE PASSION NARRATIVE\*

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It has long been recognized that the Jewish Scriptures played a key role in the origins and development of Gospel Passion Narratives, but the nature of the role is still debated. In 1931, Hoskyns and Davey set up the problem by asking:

Did Jesus set his passion in the context of Old Testament scripture? And did an intention of fulfilment condition his words and actions? If this be so, the evangelists are merely drawing out the implications of his passion and emphasizing them clearly in their narratives. Or does the initiative lie rather with the church, in which case it must be supposed that the evangelists... attached a peculiar significance to the death of the Lord, and placed in his mouth words that sanctioned their procedure?<sup>1</sup>

\* It is a pleasure to offer this essay for John Muddiman's Festschrift as a token of my gratitude and affection. I studied with John for my Oxford DPhil and I could not have wanted for a more ideal supervisor. He was incisive and critical while always being kind and encouraging, and he is second to none in providing intellectual stimulation on just about any topic in Christian origins, including the topic of the present essay on the use of the Old Testament in the Passion Narratives. The present essay revises and expands elements in my earlier article 'Scripturalization in Mark's Crucifixion Narrative', in Geert van Oyen and Tom Shepherd (eds.), *The Trial and Death of Jesus: Essays on the Passion Narrative in Mark* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), pp. 33–47.

1. Edwyn Hoskyns and Francis Noel Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament* (London: Faber & Faber, 1931), pp. 62–63. Hoskyns and Davey do not directly answer their own conundrum though an answer is implied in the statement that the evangelists wrote 'to declare that the life and death of Jesus were the fulfilment of the promises made by the living God through the prophets and psalmists of Israel. They were written in order to bear witness to the superseding and fulfilment of the Mosaic law by the gospel, and to the emergence of the new Israel by faith in Jesus' (p. 74).

This conundrum has been at the heart of discussions of the Passion Narrative for some time, not least because of Martin Dibelius's stress on the formative role played by the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> There is consensus that the Passion Narratives in the Gospels are full of echoes, allusions and direct quotations of Old Testament passages. And there is consensus that the narrative has some historical core. The consensus breaks down over the size of the historical core, and the disagreement is focused on the extent to which the Old Testament determined the details in the narrative.

Many scholars take it for granted that the Old Testament<sup>3</sup> had become a kind of historical source-book for the earliest Christians. As R. H. Lightfoot put it in his Bampton Lectures of 1934, its predictions 'would be, on the one side, of much greater value than the fragmentary stories of escaping young men or fearful women; for those Old Testament Passion narratives were divinely granted and attested: it stood so written'.<sup>4</sup> Several scholars have recently pressed this position still further. They claim that the Passion Narrative contains only the most minimal historical core, and that the great bulk of it was derived from the Old Testament. Werner Kelber,<sup>5</sup> Burton Mack<sup>6</sup> and Helmut Koester<sup>7</sup> have all made claims like this, but one version of the thesis has made a particularly marked impact, that of John Dominic Crossan, first in *The Cross that Spoke*,<sup>8</sup> subsequently in *Who Killed Jesus?*<sup>9</sup> and then at greatest length in *The Birth of Christianity*.<sup>10</sup>

2. Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (ET, London: Nicholson & Watson, 1934; German original, 1919 and 1935); see pp. 178–217 on the Passion.

3. The use of the term 'Old Testament' rather than 'Hebrew Bible' is defensible in a context where the Jewish Scriptures are being appropriated by authors who were attempting to illustrate their fulfilment in works that became part of the New Testament. Moreover, the term 'Hebrew Bible' is problematic in a context where it is the Septuagint that is usually in view.

4. R. H. Lightfoot, *History and Interpretation in the Gospels* (The Bampton Lectures, 1934; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), p. 156.

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

6. Burton L. Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), pp. 249–312.

7. Helmut Koester, 'Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels', *HTR* 73 (1980), pp. 105–30, especially 127; more fully *Ancient Christian Gospels: Their History and Development* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), pp. 216–40.

8. John Dominic Crossan, *The Cross that Spoke: The Origins of the Passion Narrative* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988).

The term Crossan prefers for pinpointing the origins and development of the Passion Narrative is ‘prophecy historicized’, a term that in *The Birth of Christianity* he explains like this:

The individual units, general sequences, and overall frames of the passion-resurrection stories are so linked to prophetic fulfillment that the removal of such fulfillment leaves nothing but the barest facts, almost as in Josephus, Tacitus or the Apostles’ Creed. By *individual units* I mean such items as these: the lots cast and garments divided from Psalm 22.18; the darkness at noon from Amos 8.9; the gall and vinegar drink from Psalm 69.21. By *general sequences* I mean such items as these: the Mount of Olives situation from 2 Samuel 15–17; the trial collaboration from Psalm 2; the abuse description from the Day of Atonement ritual in Leviticus 16. By *overall frames* I mean the narrative genre of innocence vindicated, righteousness redeemed and virtue rewarded. In other words, on all three narrative levels – surface, intermediate and deep – biblical models and scriptural precedents have controlled the story to the point that without them nothing is left but the brutal fact of crucifixion itself.<sup>11</sup>

Several important elements in Crossan’s approach make it worthy of special attention. It is a mark of Crossan’s skill as a communicator that he is able to encapsulate his thesis in one aptly chosen term and that his use of this term, ‘prophecy historicized’, has generated fresh interest in the origins of the Passion Narrative.<sup>12</sup> Further, in fine pedagogical style, Crossan makes his point by means of contrast, placing his own view at one pole and Raymond Brown’s view at the other.<sup>13</sup> Crossan is reacting

9. John Dominic Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus? The Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995).

10. John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately after the Execution of Jesus* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998). The thesis is mentioned but discussed at less length in *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper-SanFrancisco, 1991). See especially pp. 385–86.

11. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, p. 521.

12. See, for example, Daryl D. Schmidt’s endorsement of the thesis in ‘Septuagintal Influence in the Passion Narratives’, *Forum* NS 1.1 (1998), pp. 95–118, especially 107. Cf. Marcus Borg’s use of Crossan’s terms in N. T. Wright and Marcus Borg, *The Meaning of Jesus: Two Visions* (London: SPCK, 1999), pp. 84–85. The Jesus Seminar overall finds the thesis persuasive. The proposition ‘Detailed information about the crucifixion of Jesus is derived from prophecy historicized’ receives a ‘red’ rating, ‘The Jesus Seminar: Voting Records: The Passion Narrative’, *Forum* NS 1.1 (1998), pp. 227–33 (230).

13. Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave: A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels* (2 vols.; Anchor Bible Reference Library; New York: Doubleday, 1994).

to Raymond Brown's massive, two-volume commentary on the Passion Narrative, published in 1994. He characterizes Brown's view as *history remembered* and he explains it like this:

Jesus' companions knew or found out what happened to him, and such historical information formed the basic passion story from the very beginning. Allusions to biblical precedents were illustrative or probative for that story, but not determinative or constitutive of its content. Maybe, from all the details known to them, they chose those that fitted best with such biblical precedents, but in general it was history and not prophecy that determined narrative sequence and structure.<sup>14</sup>

On one occasion Crossan puts percentages on the relative degrees of prophecy historicized and history remembered contained in the Passion Narrative:

Basically the issue is whether the passion accounts are prophecy historicized or history remembered... Ray Brown is 80 percent in the direction of history remembered. I'm 80 percent in the opposite direction.<sup>15</sup>

In *Who Killed Jesus?*, Crossan uses the Darkness at High Noon (Matt. 27.45 // Mark 15.33 // Luke 23.44 // Peter 5.15; 6.22) as his primary illustration of how the phenomenon works:

To explain those accounts as 'history remembered' means that Jesus' companions observed the darkness, recorded it in memory, passed it on in tradition, and recalled it when writing their accounts of the crucifixion. It happened in history, and that is why it is mentioned in gospel.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast, Crossan's explanation of 'prophecy historicized' involves reading the Gospel accounts alongside Amos 8.9-10:

On that day, says the Lord God,  
I will make the sun go down at noon  
and darken the earth in broad daylight  
...I will make it like the mourning for an only son,  
and the end of it like a bitter day.

With reference to these verses, Crossan explains:

By 'prophecy historicized' I mean that no such *historical* three-hour-long midnight at noon accompanied the death of Jesus, but that learned Christians searching their Scriptures found this ancient description of

14. Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, p. 520.

15. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 1, quoting a *New York Times* article.

16. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 2.

future divine punishment, maybe facilitated by its mention of ‘an only son’ in the second-to-last line, and so created that *fictional* story about darkness at noon to assert that Jesus died in fulfillment of prophecy.<sup>17</sup>

The model is an attractive one. The earliest Christians were, of course, immersed in Old Testament language and imagery and it is straightforward to imagine elements from the Psalms and Isaiah finding their way into their narratives. It would be difficult to doubt, for example, that ‘prophecy’ has been historicized in a case like Luke 23.46, where Jesus serenely prays in Lucan fashion, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my spirit’, following Ps. 31.6, in contrast with the starker cry of dereliction found in the parallel place in Mark and Matthew.<sup>18</sup>

But while Crossan is surely right to criticize any naïve and simplistic appeal to ‘history remembered’ as the fundamental answer to the origins of the Passion Narrative, there are several important difficulties with Crossan’s thesis. I will attempt to draw attention to these while explaining why ‘prophecy historicized’ is not adequate in itself to explain the origins of the Passion Narrative.

### **The Stark Contrast**

One of the difficulties with Crossan’s discussion is the way in which he characterizes Raymond Brown’s views. Brown does not use the term ‘history remembered’. This is Crossan’s means of describing Brown’s approach and it is far from ideal.<sup>19</sup> While Brown does see the ‘basic incidents’ of the Passion Narrative as derived from ‘early Christian memory’,<sup>20</sup> he also sees the whole process, from eye witness and ‘ear witness’ through to the evangelists, as involving embellishment from the Christian imagination.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, he is keen to point out that scriptural

17. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 4 (emphasis original).

18. For those who think that Luke had access to Matthew as well as to Mark, Matthew’s redactional addition in 27.50, ἀφῆκεν τὸ πνεῦμα, could have provided the stimulus for Luke’s use of the Psalm. Cf. Michael Goulder, *Luke: A New Paradigm* (JSNTSup, 20; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), p. 708. If this is the case, Luke’s activity might better be characterized here as ‘scripturalizing’ the Matthean tradition (see further below).

19. Crossan speaks of ‘prophecy historicized’ and ‘history remembered’ as ‘my terms’, *Birth of Christianity*, p. 478.

20. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, vol. 1, p. 16.

21. See, for example, Brown’s comment, ‘I do not think of the evangelists themselves as eyewitnesses of the passion; nor do I think that eyewitness memories of Jesus came down to the evangelists without considerable reshaping and development’, *Death of the Messiah*, vol. 1, p. 14.

reflection played an important role in the selection and interpretation of features of the Passion Narrative. It is worth noting, for example, that in the very example prioritized by Crossan, the darkness at midday (see above), Brown himself attributes a key role to the Bible. Amos 8.9, he says, ‘may have given rise to the symbolism in Mark’.<sup>22</sup>

A further difficulty with Crossan’s presentation of alternatives is the degree of polarization. While it is sometimes useful to have academic theories set up in opposition to one another, Crossan’s framing of the debate characterizes the alternatives in too stark a manner. The reader is presented with a choice between scripture and event, between prophecy and history. But ‘history remembered’ and ‘prophecy historicized’ are not the only options.<sup>23</sup> A more nuanced model is available. It might be explained like this. The multiple echoes of biblical themes and the varied allusions to scriptural precedent are plausibly explained on the hypothesis that from the beginning there was an intimate interaction between historical event and scriptural reflection, so that the tradition developed in the light of Old Testament languages and models. Events generated scriptural reflection, which in turn influenced the way the events were remembered and retold. The process of casting the narrative in this language might be described, to utilize an illuminating term from Hebrew Bible scholarship, as *scripturalization*.

### **Scripturalization**

Judith Newman uses this term in relation to Jewish prayers in the Second Temple Period, which increasingly used scriptural models, precedents

22. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, vol. 2, p. 1037. He argues that the wording in the *Gospel of Peter* is closer to Amos 8.9 than is Mark, and comments: ‘Characteristically *GPet* makes scriptural motifs found in the canonical Gospels more explicit’. This is the reverse of the process imagined by Crossan, who agrees that the scriptural motif is explicit in Peter but attributes it to the greater primitivity of the Cross Gospel on which it is dependent. The three hour darkness in Mark in fact requires further explanation; see my ‘Scripturalization in Mark’s Crucifixion Narrative’, pp. 42–45, for the possible liturgical origins of the Passion Narrative.

23. Some effectively accept the terms in which the debate is set up and then argue against Crossan from the opposing side, e.g. Ben Witherington III, *The New Testament Story* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. 42–43. Contrast Arthur J. Dewey, ‘The Locus for Death: Social Memory and the Passion Narratives’, in Alan Kirk and Tom Thatcher (eds.), *Memory, Tradition, and Text: Uses of the Past in Early Christianity* (Society of Biblical Literature Semeia Studies; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005), pp. 119–28: ‘Of course, the critical response has not been so stark. Most scholars would conclude that there is a mixture of report and editorial revision. Yet the battle lines are very much formed...’ (p. 120).

and language.<sup>24</sup> The thesis of Newman's book is that increasing devotion to developing Jewish Scriptures, in a liturgical context in which such Scriptures were getting used more and more, led inexorably to the intermingling of those Scriptures with Jewish prayers. It is a view that could shed light on the Passion Narratives in the Gospels.

Again following Crossan, the best form of explanation is illustration. To see the phenomenon of *scripturalizing* at work, ideally we require an element in the Passion Narrative that is generally regarded as history, one that is clearly not derived from the Old Testament, so that there will be no danger of begging the question. One of the very few details in the Passion Narrative that Crossan regards as historical is the note in Mark 15.40-41, that certain named women were watching the crucifixion from a distance.<sup>25</sup> Crossan attempts to disentangle tradition from Marcan redaction and writes:

Their existence and names in 15.40-41 are pre-Markan tradition, but their criticism in 15.47-16.8 is Markan redaction. In other words, the inclusion of women observing the burial and visiting the tomb is no earlier than Mark, but the inclusion of women watching the crucifixion is received tradition. But is the latter historical fact? My best answer is yes, because

24. Judith H. Newman, *Praying by the Book: The Scripturalization of Prayer in Second Temple Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999). Newman herself derives the term from her teacher James L. Kugel, but Kugel uses it differently, with reference to the increasing perception of the Psalms as Scripture. See his 'Topics in the History of the Spirituality of the Psalms', in *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), pp. 113-44. In earlier versions of this paper given at the SBL Annual Meeting in Denver, Colorado in 2001, and subsequently at the New Testament Seminar in Oxford in 2003, I used the term 'scripturize', which was my own (cf. James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered: Christianity in the Making*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 778-79n. 83). I came across Newman's use of the term 'scripturalize' subsequently. Since she is describing the same essential phenomenon occurring in the Hebrew Bible that I am describing here, I decided to adopt her term, first in my 'Scripturalization in Mark's Crucifixion Narrative' and now here. A similar term, 'passoverize' is used by Enrico Mazza, *The Celebration of the Eucharist: The Origin of the Rite and the Development of its Interpretation* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), pp. 24-26.

25. In favour of the historicity of this detail, Gerd Theissen points out that the names given here appear to presume the reader's knowledge of their identity, *The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition* (ET, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1992), pp. 177-78. See Chapter 4 of this book for Theissen's seminal discussion of the origins of the Passion Narrative. For Crossan's discussion of Theissen, see *Birth of Christianity*, pp. 504-5.

the male disciples had fled; if the women had not been watching, we would not know even the brute fact of crucifixion (as distinct, for example, from Jesus being summarily speared or beheaded in prison).<sup>26</sup>

The verses that Crossan attributes to ‘pre-Markan tradition’ read as follows:

Ἦσαν δὲ καὶ γυναῖκες ἀπὸ μακρόθεν θεωροῦσαι, ἐν αἷς καὶ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ Μαρία ἡ Ἰακώβου τοῦ μικροῦ καὶ Ἰωσήτος μήτηρ καὶ Σαλώμη, αἱ ὅτε ἦν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ ἠκολούθουν αὐτῷ καὶ διηκόνουν αὐτῷ, καὶ ἄλλαι πολλαὶ αἱ συναναβάσαι αὐτῷ εἰς Ἱεροσόλυμα.

There were also women looking on *from a distance*; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem. (Mark 15.40-41; cf. Matt. 27.55-56 and Luke 23.49)

The detail that they were watching ἀπὸ μακρόθεν<sup>27</sup> echoes the wording of Ps. 38.11 LXX, ‘My friends and companions stand aloof from my affliction, and my relatives stand afar off’, ἀπὸ μακρόθεν. It is a detail that commentators frequently mention, and critical editions list it as an Old Testament parallel.<sup>28</sup> This is an element with a strong claim to be historical getting expressed in language derived from the psalms. It is not as if the women’s witness has been created on the basis of Ps. 38.11,

26. Crossan, *Birth of Christianity*, p. 559. See also *Who Killed Jesus?*, pp. 181–85 for reflections on the role played by the women in the story. In *The Historical Jesus*, p. 415, Crossan suggests that the first version of Mark originally ended just before these verses, at 15.39, the Centurion’s Confession.

27. Contrast John 19.25-27 where the Beloved Disciple and Jesus’ mother are close enough to hold a conversation with Jesus. Joel Marcus, ‘The Role of Scripture in the Gospel Passion Narratives’, in John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green (eds.), *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), pp. 205–33, speculates that the Johannine account ‘may be more accurate historically than the Synoptics’ in view of the fact that ‘Romans often allowed friends of crucified criminals to stand by them until they died’ (p. 212). On this point contrast Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, vol. 2, pp. 1029, 1194, ‘it would be unusual for the Romans to permit family and sympathizers such proximity’.

28. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, vol. 2, p. 1158, is one of many who hear an echo of the Psalm. Kathleen E. Corley, ‘Women and the Crucifixion and Burial of Jesus’, *Forum* NS 1.1 (1998), pp. 181–226 (212 n. 211) notes that ‘Luke reinforces this connection with Psalm 38.11 by the addition of οἱ γνωστοί (Luke 23.49)’. This is a good example of scripturalization – Luke enhances the Scriptural content of the language of the tradition he receives from Mark. Corley’s full discussion of the passage, with some useful bibliography, is on pp. 209–17.



which does not refer solely to women, let alone to those particular named women. Rather, the traditional element is being retold in the light of the passage that they saw it fulfilling. In other words, in this verse we see the exact opposite of the process of ‘prophecy historicized’. A verse taken to be historical has been expressed using the terminology of the scriptures. Tradition was scripturalized.

The example highlights a further difficulty with Crossan’s thesis. His basis for affirming the presence of the women at the cross is that ‘the male disciples had fled’,<sup>29</sup> but there is no way that Crossan can know this. The flight of the disciples is narrated in Mark 14.50 but prophesied in Mark 14.27 on the basis of a quotation of Zech. 13.7, ‘Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered’. Crossan’s theory dictates that where a scriptural motif like this appears, it is the motif itself that has provided the story – that is the whole point of ‘prophecy historicized’. If the detail about the fleeing disciples is something that Mark or his sources inferred on the basis of Zech. 13.7, then there should be no grounds, on Crossan’s model, for regarding it as historical. There is, in another words, a contradiction at the heart of the argument. He presupposes that an explicitly scriptural element in Mark’s story is historical.<sup>30</sup>

### **Prophecy Historicized or Tradition Scripturalized?**

Since, in cases like this, ‘tradition scripturalized’ provides a better explanation for the phenomena than ‘prophecy historicized’, it is worth asking whether there are other places where Crossan’s model falls short as an explanation for the origin of the Passion Narrative. It may be that the kind of uni-directional model, from scripture to history, is overall less effective than a model in which there is an interaction between tradition and scripture. I would like to suggest two further ways in which an interactive model is more plausible than the ‘prophecy historicized’ model. First, elements that have no scriptural precedent are juxtaposed with those that have; and second, the narrative is framed by the names of apparent witnesses about whom we know little else (Mark 15.21 and 15.40-41).

29. Crossan, *Birth of Christianity*, p. 559.

30. Crossan does not discuss the quotation of Zech. 13.7 in Mark 14.27 in any of his writing on this topic. This is a serious problem for a thesis that takes for granted that the male disciples had fled.

### **1. Events without Scriptural Precedent Are Juxtaposed with Those That Have Scriptural Precedent**

To read Mark's account is to read a story in which elements with allusions to the Old Testament are interlaced with elements that fail to remind even the most erudite readers of anything there. Mark 15.21-30 provides a case in point:

21. A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. 22. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). 23. *Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh* [Ps. 69.22] but he did not take it. 24. And they crucified him. *Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get* [Ps. 22.19] 25. It was the third hour when they crucified him. 26. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. 27. *They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.* [Isa. 53.12] 28. *Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads* [Pss. 22.8; 109.25] and saying, 'So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30. *come down from the cross and save yourself!* [Ps. 22.9]'.

Motifs that might reasonably be regarded as echoing the Old Testament are placed in italics. It is consensus that the Passion Narratives were composed with at least the intention to evoke memories of such scriptures, but what is striking here is the number of important elements that clearly cannot have been derived from the Old Testament: the man who carried Jesus' cross, Simon of Cyrene; the place of Jesus' crucifixion, Golgotha; the time of Jesus' crucifixion, the third hour; the written charge against him, 'King of the Jews'. This kind of mixture is exactly what we would expect if the earliest Passion Narrative was told with both tradition and the scriptures in mind. Certain events were simply not conducive to getting retold in the light of the Old Testament – there was nothing there about Simon of Cyrene, Golgotha, the third hour or the titulus.

This situation is not what we would expect on the 'prophecy historicized' model. It is a key point for Crossan that when we remove 'prophetic fulfilment', we are left with 'nothing but the barest facts, almost as in Josephus or Tacitus'.<sup>31</sup> But Josephus and Tacitus do not tell us about the time and place of Jesus' crucifixion, the titulus or the man who carried his cross, and this is, of course, only a small section of the Passion Narrative overall. In other words, the admittedly crude removal

31. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 11, but also often elsewhere.

of what Crossan characterizes as ‘prophetic fulfilment’ leaves us with much more traditional material in need of explanation. It may be that this material also turns out to be unhistorical but if so, its lack of historicity is clearly not explained by prophecy historicized. Substantial amounts of traditional material are left unaccounted for on Crossan’s model.

## **2. The Narrative Is Framed By the Names of Apparent Witnesses about Whom We Know Little Else (Mark 15.21 and 15.40-41)**

If Crossan is wrong about the origin of the Passion Narrative, and if it is possible for the historian to discover a little more than just a handful of brute facts akin to those reported by Josephus and Tacitus, is it worth asking whether the narrative provides any indication of eye witnesses from whom some of the traditions might ultimately have derived?<sup>32</sup> It is worth noticing that the story of the crucifixion, from Jesus’ being led out to be crucified (15.20b) to the moments immediately after his death (15.40-41), is framed by references to named witnesses. First, Simon of Cyrene, the man who carried Jesus’ cross, is introduced. In itself, this reference to an otherwise unknown figure might be telling, but the appended detail, only in Mark, that he was ‘the father of Alexander and Rufus’ (15.21) is even more revealing. It is rare in the New Testament, and just as rare in antiquity generally, for characters to be identified by means of their children. The reverse is the norm. James and John are sons of Zebedee (1.19 and 3.17); Levi (2.14) and James (3.18) are sons of Alphaeus; and Bartimaeus is son of Timaeus (10.46). The mention of a key character’s sons is striking. The implied reader of Mark’s story finds the mention of Alexander and Rufus telling. Perhaps they were known to the readers of Mark’s Gospel. Perhaps certain elements in the story originated in their stories.<sup>33</sup>

This intriguing possibility is extended by the appearance of the women at the other end of the crucifixion narrative. These women are said to have been watching (θεωροῦσαι) the events and once again, the specificity in naming them is revealing. Among these women are Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνή καὶ Μαρία ἡ Ἰακώβου τοῦ μικροῦ καὶ Ἰωσήτος μήτηρ καὶ

32. Cf. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, p. 182, ‘We must take notice of the fact that *eyewitnesses* of the Passion story appear to be mentioned’ (italics original), citing Mark 14.51 and 15.21.

33. Cf. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, p. 183, ‘What at first seems strange is explicable if we suppose that the readers knew both the unnamed young man and the sons of Simon. In this case these remarks would draw the readers’ attention to the actual eyewitness of the events.’

Σαλώμη (Mark 15.40). While Mary Magdalene and to a lesser extent Salome have left their mark on the tradition more generally, the same cannot be said with respect to Μαρία ἡ Ἰακώβου τοῦ μικροῦ καὶ Ἰωσήτος μήτηρ. It is a notorious problem to unravel the identity of this woman or these women. The problem was felt from the earliest times, for the text could be translated in six different ways. Unless Mark is being deliberately vague, we must assume, with Gerd Theissen, that the family relationships of Mary were transparent to the audience.<sup>34</sup> Again with Theissen, we might add another crucial observation, the fact that ‘the second Mary mentioned in 15.40 is described in terms of her sons (at least Joses)’.<sup>35</sup> As with Simon of Cyrene, the generational element in the identification of the character draws attention to the possibility that here too we might have one of the sources for the first traditions about the crucifixion.

### **The Lack of Independent Evidence**

If these suggestions for an approach focusing as much on ‘tradition scripturalized’ as on ‘prophecy historicized’ can attempt to do justice to the evidence, there are still two important questions that need answering. The first of these relates to Crossan’s comments about the lack of independent evidence of (what he characterizes as) the history-remembered Passion Narrative. One of his key points is that ‘Nobody outside the gospels knows this linked passion-resurrection: if it was there as history remembered from the very beginning, why is it not found all over the various strands of tradition?’<sup>36</sup>

Crossan fleshes this out by drawing special attention to the lack of any Passion Narrative in either Q or *Thomas*. ‘If the passion narrative is history remembered’, he asks, ‘why is there not a trace of it in the extant text of the Q Gospel?’<sup>37</sup> He goes on:

34. ‘They must have known which of the six possible relationships was accurate’, Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, pp. 177–78 (178).

35. Theissen, *Gospels in Context*, pp. 177–78 (178).

36. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 11. Cf. *Birth of Christianity*, p. 521, ‘If there were, from the beginning, a detailed passion-resurrection story or even just a passion narrative, I would expect more evidence of it than is currently extant. It is totally absent from the Life Tradition...’

37. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 26.

My point in mentioning Thomas is that this relatively early text shows, like the Q Gospel, not the faintest knowledge of any passion-resurrection narrative. If the passion narrative was, as alleged, the earliest and best case of history remembered, it was not so remembered in Thomas.<sup>38</sup>

But there is a difficulty with this kind of argument. An argument from silence can only be illuminating if, all things being equal, we have good reason to expect the presence of the feature under discussion. But the *Gospel of Thomas* is a sayings book, which precludes the possibility that it would have a Passion Narrative. From its incipit onwards, *Thomas* characterizes itself as ‘the sayings of the living Jesus’; it does not feature deeds. That does not mean that those who framed the book had ‘not the faintest knowledge’ of any deeds. We simply cannot, given the genre they chose, find out anything about their knowledge of traditions about the Passion.<sup>39</sup> In the same way, one would not expect to find a narrative of the Second World War in *Wisden’s Book of Cricket Quotations*. The genre precludes it, however familiar with the War the editors might be.

The problem is, if anything, even more acute in relation to Q, where it is necessary to pay attention not only to the genre-critical but also to the source-critical question. Notwithstanding Crossan’s frequent appeals to a tangible ‘Sayings Gospel Q’, there is not yet any ‘extant text’ of the hypothetical source.<sup>40</sup>

### According to the Scriptures

In conclusion, a key related question needs addressing. Helmut Koester, who shares Crossan’s scepticism of the historicity of the bulk of the Passion Narrative,<sup>41</sup> and who is cited with approval by Crossan, objects that the ‘Form, structure, and life situation of such a historical passion report and its transmission have never been clarified’.<sup>42</sup> What, then, is the context for the origin and development of the Passion Narrative? If we

38. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p. 27.

39. Moreover, the choice of genre is influenced by the author’s theology, and the *Gospel of Thomas* is written with the kind of disdain for the Old Testament that makes a narrative approach culminating in a Scripture-fulfilling Passion Narrative quite impossible. See further my *Thomas and the Gospels: The Making of An Apocryphal Text* (London: SPCK, 2012), pp. 187–91.

40. See further my *The Case against Q: Studies in Markan Priority and the Synoptic Problem* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002).

41. See above, n. 7.

42. Koester, ‘Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels’, pp. 127–28.

are right to see it as an interaction between scripture and history, does this shed any light on the question? A hint is found in Koester's own explanation of the matter:

In the beginning there was only the belief that Jesus' suffering, death, and burial, as well as his resurrection, happened 'according to the Scriptures' (1 Cor. 15.3-4). The very first narratives about Jesus' suffering and death would not have made the attempt to remember what actually happened.<sup>43</sup>

Koester is of course right about the importance of the phrase 'according to the Scriptures', but is he right that this conviction would have ruled out the 'attempt to remember what actually happened'?

Paul's discussion of the institution of the eucharist in 1 Cor. 11.23-26 is here helpful. The passage provides us with an obvious context within which the Passion story could have been told and retold, the liturgy. At the same time, it at least hints at an answer to Crossan's question about independent evidence for an early Passion Narrative, evidence absent from texts whose genre or hypothetical status precludes our finding anything relevant. In 1 Corinthians, one of the earliest extant Christian works, Paul's ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδετο ('on the night that he was handed over', 11.23) takes for granted knowledge of Passion traditions in a context where tradition (Εγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, 'I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you', 11.23) is combined with memory (τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν, 'do this in remembrance of me', 11.24-25) and proclamation (11.26). It might be added that if the theses of Goulder and Trocmé on the Passion as liturgy are taken seriously,<sup>44</sup> memory, tradition and scriptural reflection might well have combined from the earliest times in the repeated celebrations of that Passover at (or sometime near) which Jesus was crucified.

Koester is right to comment that 'the passion of Jesus from the very beginning was probably never told without the framework of such scriptural reference'<sup>45</sup> but the problem comes with the assumption that such a framework rules out the retelling of history. Of course it is likely that, on occasions, prophecy was historicized. The Old Testament was

43. Koester, 'Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels', pp. 127-28.

44. Étienne Trocmé, *The Passion as Liturgy: A Study in the Origin of the Passion Narratives* (London: SPCK, 1975); Michael Goulder, *Luke*, Chapter 5; Mark Goodacre, *Goulder and the Gospels: An Examination of a New Paradigm* (JSNTSup, 133; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), Chapter 19.

45. Koester, 'Apocryphal and Canonical Gospels', pp. 127-28.

simply too important a resource for it not to be utilized in a thorough-going way. But while it will sometimes help, ‘prophecy historicized’ will not do as an overarching explanation of the Passion Narrative as a whole. The pervasive presence of non-Scriptural elements combined with the extensive evidence of historical events retold in the light of the Scriptures confirms that the strongest conclusion will be a balanced one.<sup>46</sup> The fact that the earliest Christians were immersed in the Old Testament simply means that history interacted with biblical reflection. The conviction that Jesus’ crucifixion was ‘according to the Scriptures’ was both generated by and subsequently retold in terms of the scriptures that the earliest Christians saw as fulfilled in their midst.

We are left with the chicken and egg question, or, we might say, the scripture and event question. Which came first? Historical event or biblical precedent? Crossan’s answer is clear: ‘In the beginning was passion prophecy, not passion narrative’.<sup>47</sup> But what if Paul gives us the best clue by placing tradition alongside the scriptures, seeing one interacting with the other, uniting event with precedent? If history and scripture were from the first in conversation with one another, perhaps the best answer to the question is to say, with a celebration of its ambiguity and an investment in its dual meaning, In the beginning was the Word.

46. Cf. Joel Marcus’s similar comments: ‘It is probably best, then, to adopt a nuanced position: the early Christians remembered certain details about Jesus’ death because they believed them to have been prophesied in the Scriptures. Once having made the connection with the Scriptures, however, they discovered other, related OT passages that, in their view, *must* have been fulfilled in his death as well – and so they created narratives in which they *were* fulfilled.’ ‘The Role of Scripture’, p. 213 (*italics original*).

47. Crossan, *Who Killed Jesus?*, p.147.