

22. Jenkins, Philip, *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (Oxford University Press 2001); and *The Next Christendom, The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford University Press 2002)

Jenkins gives a direct rebuttal to those who came before Freke and Gandy (like Pagels, Crossan and Dart among many others, see his note 3 on page 217 for one list) making similar claims for the importance of the Gnostics in the development of a lost, original Christianity. He makes a very good case for the Gnostics having been a reaction to orthodox Christianity because almost all its written records date from a time after the accepted Gospels and Pauline letters already existed and actually make use of these materials! He is not the first to point this out, but he is the first I actually read to point this out. The book cited above by Dart acknowledges this criticism of the Gnostic tradition being the basis of original Christianity based on work by another defender of the more traditional religio-historical view, and frankly dances away from the issue without making a solid case for it being wrong.

Jenkins also blasts the discovery of the so-called Secret Gospel of Mark (see # 33 by Smith) as being a probable forgery. Interesting.

I read the whole book. Found it to make interesting and insightful points, but also found it in places to be somewhat overwrought. The primary thing I learned from this book is that there is indeed good reason to read the apocryphal works with a skeptical attitude. Like some of the New Testament's later additions, these works were written as propaganda for a certain world view, or even cosmic view. To relate their ideas back to a time in which these works were not is questionable historical practice at best. Good advice.

This same Jenkins has a new book out (named in title above) which I briefly looked into but did not write many notes about since it has little to say about primitive Christianity. It suggests that contrary to beliefs expressed by certain US and European intellectuals, Christianity is not in danger of evaporating from the world unless it responds and changes in the face of new knowledge.

The book makes a convincing case, instead, for a rapid growth of Christianity in what is usually referred to as the third world. And this Christian growth is not in the progressive, liberal direction that U.S. and European churches are moving in. The growth is almost entirely in conservative, traditionalist, even fundamentalist churches. It is paralleled in some areas with growth in fundamentalist groups of the Muslim faith.

I believe this to be an ominous development for the world. When fundamentalism of any stripe becomes a dominant force it has historically not boded well for either human rights or intellectual freedom. That is my prejudice, I suppose.

At one point Jenkins does make reference to the early Christians. On pages 217 and 218 he notes that the growth of Christianity is in the countries where there is suffering, oppression and persecution. These are societies where the prospect of martyrdom is quite real. In some countries it can be martyrdom at the hands of non-Christian neighbors (Muslims, Hindus), but in others it is competing Christian groups murdering other Christians.

But it is exactly to these sorts of conditions that some of the New Testament speaks. Contrast this with how the Western world, well off and without persecution, sees the New Testament's rhetoric about martyrdom and persecution and end-times. According to Jenkins, Westerners have made

Jesus into

. . . a kind of academic gadfly, rather than the "Doomsday Jesus" of the Synoptic Gospels. From this perspective, Jesus' authentic views are reflected in mystical texts like the *Gospel of Thomas*. For radical Bible critics like the Jesus Seminary, *Thomas* has a much better claim to be included in a revised New Testament than the book of Revelation, which is seen as a pernicious distortion of Christian truth.

The point is, of course, that there is a divide that is deepening between the old Christianity of the West and the new, global, Christianity of the Third World, of the downtrodden, poor, and oppressed. That cannot be good news.