

JAMES AT THE CENTRE
A Jerusalem Perspective on the New Testament

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My colleague in Divinity, Professor Richard Roberts, began his inaugural earlier this term by setting out a daunting list of what is expected in an inaugural lecture. Since I rather foolishly set the date for mine on 17 March, people have been adding yet another requirement to the list. It is, they point out, St Patrick's Day, and I must say something appropriate. I doubt if I will meet all the other requirements, but I shall have a go at meeting this one straightaway.

The name Seamus (or James, if you prefer, or Ya'akov, as we should properly say) was one of the commonest Jewish names in the New Testament period. At least four early Christian leaders were called James, and so ways of distinguishing one James from another became necessary. We shall be considering later some of the terms which were used to refer to the James who is the subject of this lecture: James the brother of Jesus and leader of the Jerusalem church. But you may be interested to know that the early Irish church, which had a rich tradition of Christian apocryphal literature, translated into Irish or adapted in Irish from older sources, had its own distinctive way of referring to our James. It called him James of the Knees. As far as I can tell this epithet is never explained, but it must derive from the account of James in the second-century writer Hegesippus. According to Hegesippus, James spent so much time kneeling in prayer for his people that his knees became hard like a camel's. Sadly, I think this story is probably based on nothing more historical than a word-play in Hebrew. I have no doubt that James was a man of prayer, but I guess he usually prayed, like other Jews and Christians of his time, standing, and there was probably nothing remarkable about his knees.

Legends about James, of course, have an interest of their own, but in this lecture I am concerned with the historical James, who, along with Peter and Paul, was one of the three most important figures in the crucial first three decades of early Christianity. The image of *James at the centre* is intended to suggest a readjustment of our customary mental impressions of early Christianity, which have been formed by accounts that in a variety of ways marginalize both James himself and the New Testament writing that bears his name, the letter of James. The centrality of James will take more than one form in this lecture, but essentially we may say that, of those three towering apostolic figures, while Peter and Paul, the great missionary apostles, represent the centrifugal movement of Christianity out from the centre, James, the widely revered head of the mother church in Jerusalem, represents the still centre and centripetal attraction of the early Christian movement.

I shall begin and end with the place of the letter of James in the canon of the New Testament, and in between we shall relate the letter of James to the historical role of James the man in the early church. I should say that for the purpose of this lecture I am taking for granted that this James, the brother of Jesus, leader of the Jerusalem

church, wrote the New Testament letter of James. The old arguments against the authenticity of the letter have really almost died of their own accord, starved of nourishment by scholarly advances in all other relevant fields. In another context it might be appropriate to put them finally out of their misery. But this afternoon I think there are more interesting things to do.

It would be easy to get the impression that the New Testament canon itself marginalizes James. For most readers of the New Testament the order in which the books of the New Testament appear in every edition they have seen operates rather like the outline of a familiar map. It gives the New Testament a shape as unquestioned as the cartographic conventions which place North at the top of a map or Orkney and Shetland in little boxes at the top right-hand corner. We shall return to the way maps influence our perception of the world, even the New Testament world. But, like a map, the shape given to the contents of the New Testament by the order in which they are printed can easily seem the only possible shape. This conventional order moves so reasonably from the four Gospels (the story of Jesus) to the Acts of the Apostles (the story of the early church) and then to the writings of the great apostle who dominates the second half of that story: Paul. After the Gospels, Acts and the Pauline epistles, the rest of the New Testament - a few short letters by other apostles and the book of Revelation - seems almost an appendix which ordinary readers and New Testament scholars for once concur in neglecting.

However, the eastern Orthodox churches arrange the same New Testament canon in a different order which is certainly at least as old as ours. In Greek and Russian Bibles the order goes: Gospels, Acts, James and the six other catholic epistles, Pauline epistles, Revelation. In fact the pioneers of modern critical editions of the Greek Testament - Tischendorf, and Westcott and Hort - restored this ancient, eastern canonical order in their editions, but failed to establish it in the western scholarly tradition, so appropriately does our western order confirm the canonical centrality of Paul in modern New Testament scholarship. But the eastern order has its own logic, no less compelling than the western. After Acts, the story of the apostles, it gives priority to those who were apostles before Paul. It even has its own appropriateness to the story of the early church as told by Luke in Acts. In the early chapters of Acts, Peter is the leading figure, both at the centre, in the mother church in Jerusalem, and in taking the Gospel out from the centre and pioneering the Gentile mission. In chapters 12-13, James and Paul succeed respectively to these two roles of Peter: Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles, embodying the Gospel's movement out from the centre, James as the leader who remains at the centre. Luke does not describe a movement out from Jerusalem which deprives Jerusalem of its centrality and creates a new centre. Jerusalem remains the centre, to which even Paul's story returns, and James' leadership at the centre is as important as Paul's mission out from the centre.

Neither the western nor the eastern canonical order is superior. Each has its own validity. But remembering the eastern order usefully subverts the apparently self-evident character of the western, and gives us the opportunity for once to shift our perspective. If for once we displace Paul from the central position he occupies not only in our New Testament contents page but also in our perceptions of early Christian history, and instead replace James at the centre, the exercise will not diminish Paul's stature but it will expand our horizons. But for this we need more than canonical order. For a start we need maps.

Readers and students of the New Testament tend to operate with a Mediterranean-centred view of the world, because this is what maps in Bibles and biblical reference works offer them. Such maps, when they move outside Palestine, are mainly designed to represent Paul's missionary travels, moving north and west from Jerusalem, eventually to Rome and, in Paul's intention, Spain. Jerusalem stands at the eastern edge of such maps. Early Christianity, we too easily and unthinkingly suppose, happened, like the Roman Empire, around the Mediterranean. But the Mediterranean was not the first-century world, not even from the perspective of Rome. Even though Roman politicians and propagandists contrived to represent Rome as ruling the entire inhabited world (the *oikoumene*), they did not pretend that the world ended at the Euphrates. The great world map constructed by Marcus Agrippa and erected in public in Rome in the reign of Augustus, precisely to illustrate Augustus's conquest of the world, offered a fairly conventional view of the extent of the *oikoumene*. On the west-east axis, the Roman empire extends from the west (Spain) only about as far as the centre; half the distance from the extreme west of the *oikoumene* to the extreme east lies to the east of the empire's limits. This, if anything, was the world as first-century inhabitants of Rome and visitors to Rome would know it.

More relevant to early Christianity, however, is the Jewish view of the world. A Jewish tradition already very old in New Testament times called Jerusalem the navel of the earth and located the Temple on mount Zion at the very centre of the inhabited world. This mythical geography is incorporated, for example, the detailed account of the world - for its time quite well-informed factually, but mythical as well as factual - which is provided by the book of Jubilees, a Jewish work of the second century BCE. A map representing this account would portray the *oikoumene* as a circular disc, described by radii centred at Jerusalem. By New Testament times educated Jews would no doubt have found such a map old-fashioned, but knowledge of the best Greek and Roman geography need not have displaced Jerusalem from the centre. Geographers and map-makers of the early Roman period - Eratosthenes, Agrippa and Strabo - all place Jerusalem somewhat to the west of centre, but everyone knew the eastern limits of the *oikoumene* were uncertain. To imagine Jerusalem in the centre - on both a west-east and a north-south axis - as Jews continued to do, was not difficult in ancient geographical terms.

Perhaps even more important was the rather realistic sense that Jerusalem stood at the centre of the Jewish diaspora. Again the Mediterranean-centred perspective of the average modern reader of the New Testament is a distorted one, emphasizing the western diaspora at the expense of the equally important, in Jewish eyes, eastern diaspora. This Mediterranean-centredness cannot be blamed on Luke, who rather carefully at the beginning of Acts provides us with a Jewish, Jerusalem-centred view of the world. In Acts 2:9-11 there is an extensive list of the countries from which Jews attending the feast of Pentecost in Jerusalem had come. The order of the list has puzzled the commentators, who have discussed in particular a very unlikely theory that Luke is following an astrological geographical list. Not only does the theory not work, it also offers no explanation of the function of the list in Luke's work. As is not unparalleled in New Testament studies, an obvious explanation seems to have gone unnoticed. It is that Luke provides a fairly accurate account of the extent of the Jewish diaspora, so arranged as to place Jerusalem at the centre. To illustrate this for you (*see the illustration*), I have used not a modern map but a reconstructed ancient map (something biblical scholars seem never to do, but which we should do if we

wish to envisage the world as ancient people did). The map in this case is a reconstruction of the world as mapped in Strabo's *Geography*. The places in Acts 2:9-11 are listed in four groups, corresponding to the points of the compass, starting in the far east, moving in to Jerusalem (and only this understanding of the list explains why it includes Judea), and then moving out from and back to Jerusalem in each direction. Notice that Jerusalem is central, more or less equidistant between Parthia in the far east and Rome in the far west. This is the Jewish world centred on Jerusalem, and Luke places it at the beginning of his story of how the Christian Gospel spread from Jerusalem in order to provide us with the Jewish geographical perspective appropriate to that story. It is a perspective that reveals quite clearly that Paul's missionary travels, on which Luke's account focuses once he moves outside Palestine, carried the Gospel to only one part, the north-western part of this world defined by the Jewish diaspora, and not at all to the ends of the earth that lie beyond the extent of the diaspora in each direction. Luke knew that Christianity spread in all directions from Jerusalem. He had his reasons for telling only part of the story, but he makes no pretence that it was more than part of the story.

The centrality of Jerusalem for the Jewish diaspora, of course, meant more than its mere geographical location. It was the centre from which Jews had been dispersed (the meaning of 'diaspora') and to which they confidently expected to be regathered in the messianic age. It was the place where the God of Israel made himself accessible to his people in his temple, and to which therefore those who could travelled on pilgrimage for the major festivals.

Pilgrimage to festivals is a significant fact. To live in Jerusalem, as James did for thirty years, when for several weeks each year the city was packed with Jews and even Gentile sympathizers from all over the known world, must have given people a remarkably realistic sense of living at the centre of the world and in communication very nearly with the ends of the earth. Communication between the diaspora and the centre was constant. It had long been customary for Jewish authorities and leaders at the centre to address circular letters to the diaspora. The Temple authorities, for example, might write about the dates and observance of festivals. We have a letter from the great Pharisaic rabbi Gamaliel, James's older contemporary and former teacher of Paul, on matters of sacrifice and the calendar, addressed to 'our brothers, people of the exile of Babylonia and people of the exile of Media and people of the exile of Greece and the rest of all the exiles of Israel.' Presumably Gamaliel writes as an acknowledged Pharisaic leader at the centre to Jews of Pharisaic sympathies throughout the diaspora. Not unnaturally, then, the custom of letters from the centre to the diaspora was continued in early Christianity.

The letter of James begins: 'James, servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Messiah, to the twelve tribes in the diaspora.' Although early Christians did sometimes, not frequently, apply terms such as Israel to Gentile Christians, as the new people of God, there is no example of the use of 'the twelve tribes' in this way and it is a phrase inherently unsuitable for such use. The twelve tribes in the diaspora whom James addresses must be Jewish Christians throughout the Jewish diaspora. He writes to them as head of the mother church, at the centre from which God's people Israel is being reconstituted the messianic people of God in the last days. Almost certainly, like Gamaliel, he addresses both the eastern and the western diaspora, since, more explicitly than Gamaliel, he addresses all twelve tribes. Few exiles of the ten northern tribes would be expected to be found in the western diaspora, but large

numbers still lived in the areas to which their ancestors had been deported eight centuries before. In James's time there was no mystery of the lost ten tribes. Just as in the New Testament period one of the two main areas of Jewish settlement in the east was in Babylonia, where the exiles of the two southern tribes had been settled, so the other was in the area of northern Mesopotamia called Adiabene, which, along with Media, further east, was the area where the exiles of the ten northern tribes had originally been settled. Contact between Jerusalem and these areas was just as close as Jerusalem's connexions with the Jewish communities of the western diaspora. Rabbi Nahum the Mede was a well-known Pharisaic leader in Jerusalem. The Gentile royal house of the kingdom of Adiabene converted to Judaism at about the same time that Paul converted to Christianity, and Queen Helena of Adiabene settled in Jerusalem and was a celebrated citizen, known for her philanthropy and her building projects, during precisely the period that James exercised sole leadership of the Christian community in Jerusalem.

That there were already Christians among the Jewish communities of Adiabene and Babylonia when James wrote his circular letter to the diaspora, perhaps as early as the late 40s, we can take as virtually certain. Already by the time of Paul's conversion there was a Christian church in Damascus, first stop on the routes north-east to Edessa and Nisibis, and east to Babylonia. The constant Jewish contact between the centre and the diaspora would have taken Christian faith east as inevitably as it took it west to Rome, though in neither case do we know the story. But for James's connexion with the mission to the eastern diaspora, we do have one remarkable piece of evidence. The *Gospel of Thomas*, a second-century work which reflects the Gospel tradition of Christianity in the area of Edessa and Nisibis, the east Syrian or north Mesopotamian area, contains this dialogue (saying 12):

The disciples said to Jesus: We know that you will depart from us. Who is to be great over us?

Jesus said to them: Wherever you shall have come, you are to go to James the Righteous, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.

The extraordinary hyperbole of that statement about James we shall return to in a moment, but it is a thoroughly Jewish expression which makes it clear that here we have a tradition from the Jewish Christian origins of north Mesopotamian Christianity. Jesus' alleged saying presupposes the mission of the apostles and gives James the position of authority at the centre to which they are to look: 'Wherever you shall have come, you are to go to James.' Though very unlikely to be an authentic saying of Jesus, the saying probably goes back to James's lifetime, in which it makes sense as an expression of the role attributed to James, as the leader of the mother church which claimed central authority over the mission to the diaspora.

That central authority was probably widely acknowledged, not only in north Mesopotamia to the east of Jerusalem, but also, for example, in Rome to the west. It has sometimes been argued that the dominant position of James in the world-wide church which later Jewish Christian sources suggest is an exaggeration, since the New Testament evidence does not support it. But we must remember the distinct limitations of the New Testament evidence. James died in 62 CE, and not long after, in 70 CE, the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. The Jerusalem church largely lost its centrality for the world-wide church as a result, and so we should not expect most Christian literature written after 70 to refer to it. It is a mark of Luke's faithfulness to history in the Acts of the Apostles that he does in fact, in his account of the Jerusalem conference in Acts 15, portray a state of affairs, anachronistic when he wrote, in

which the Jerusalem church claimed and exercised authority over other churches in matters of major principle. Almost the only New Testament writings from the lifetime of James are the letters of Paul, whose sense of independence from the Jerusalem church was exceptional, not typical. In the crisis at Antioch which he reports in Galatians 2, when Paul thought that James and Peter were undermining his mission to the Gentiles, he gained a distinctive sense of his apostolate as answerable only to God. But even Paul retained such a sense of the centrality of Jerusalem that he devised a substitute for acknowledging Jerusalem's authority over his churches. His collection for the poor in the Jerusalem church, to which he devoted great attention, was intended to return the debt his Gentile churches owed the centre from which they derived and to maintain their fellowship with the centre. To cut loose from the centre was unthinkable even to Paul, even more so, we may suppose, in the many non-Pauline areas of the Christian mission.

But it is time to ask how the centrality of Jerusalem and James's role in it were conceived in early Christianity. For Jews the centrality of Jerusalem was axiomatic because Jerusalem was the site of the Temple. The centrality of Jerusalem was really the centrality of God's presence with his people in the Temple. Early Christians took over this position, but not unthinkingly or without modification. They lived in the sense that the prophecies of the messianic age were being fulfilled in their movement. As the Christian mission to the Jewish diaspora developed spontaneously into the Gentile mission, the Christian movement acquired an exceptionally universalistic character, but it was the universalism of the Old Testament prophecies, that is, a Jerusalem-centred universalism. The word of the Lord was going out from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, as the prophets had predicted, and all the nations were turning to the God of Israel. In fact the prophets had predicted that God's presence in his temple in Jerusalem was to be the light by which the nations of the world would walk, and all peoples would become his peoples, worshipping him in his temple. More precisely, then, the universalism of the early church's vision, in which James and Paul, despite some differences, fully shared, was a Temple-centred universalism. Its Old Testament sources required this.

But in interpreting this Temple-centredness, the Jerusalem church in the earliest period took a step of decisive importance. Though they continued to worship in the Jerusalem Temple, they held the Temple of the messianic age, the new, eschatological place of God's presence, the Temple constructed by the Messiah Jesus, to be not a building, but their own community. This almost unique use of Temple imagery for the community had one striking precedent, which it is instructive to consider for a moment. Only one Jewish group before the early church had thought of itself as a temple. This was the Qumran community, the group which produced the Dead Sea Scrolls, and when all the fog of sensational nonsense about the relevance of the Dead Sea Scrolls to the study of early Christianity has cleared, this is one point at which they prove genuinely illuminating. The Qumran community's reasons for thinking of itself as a temple, a substitute for the Temple building in Jerusalem, were different from the early church's, but the way they developed the imagery is parallel. They thought of the members of the community and the various roles which leaders played in the community as specific parts of the building. For example, the Teacher of Righteousness, who founded the community, is called a pillar, established by God as the pillar around which the rest of the building was constructed, supporting the rest of the building. Moreover, they interpreted Old Testament prophecies which describe the Temple of the messianic age in this way. For example, Isaiah 54:11-12 describes

the glorious Zion of the future (Jerusalem, but I guess the Qumran commentator understood it as the Temple rather than the city). The text describes its stones, its foundations, its pinnacles, its gates, its rampart, and the Qumran commentary on the text takes the stones, which compose the building, to be all the members of the community, the pinnacles to be ruling council of twelve, the gates to be the heads of the twelve tribes.

The early church used similar imagery. Peter was the rock, the foundation stone on which Jesus constructed his church, the new Temple. Jesus himself was the chief cornerstone. The apostles and the early Christian prophets were the foundations, according to Ephesians 2:20. The imagery was used in a relatively flexible way, but two particular instances show us how James' role in the new temple was conceived. In Galatians 2:9 Paul, referring to his consultation with the leaders of the Jerusalem church around 48 CE, lists them as James, Peter and John, in that order, and says that they were regarded as 'pillars.' Instead of some title of office, such as apostle or elder, they were evidently distinguished by their metaphorical place in the new Temple, as the pillars supporting the whole building. Discussions of this passage always seem to assume that there were only these three pillars. I think that is unlikely. The Old Testament text which was taken to refer to the pillars of the messianic Temple (Proverbs 9:1) refers to seven pillars. I suspect that the seven may have been: Peter, John and James the sons of Zebedee, the inner circle of the twelve, along with the four brothers of Jesus, including James the Lord's brother. By the time of Galatians 2:9 James the son of Zebedee was dead, and the other three brothers of Jesus had become travelling missionaries, no longer prominent in the Jerusalem church. Peter, too, was already increasingly absent from Jerusalem; hence, probably, the preeminence of James in Paul's list of three pillars. In the following years, Peter moved out of the Jerusalem church leadership altogether, and it is likely that John suffered martyrdom. Of the originally seven pillars, only James remained.

For this subsequently unique role of James, the Jerusalem church found another application of the Temple metaphor. The Palestinian Jewish Christian traditions preserved by the second-century writer Hegesippus contain, amidst much legend, this one reliable tradition. He reports that James was called *Oblias*, which means (he says) 'Rampart of the people,' as the prophets make clear. The Greek word *Oblias* is evidently a corruption of some Hebrew word, but what the Hebrew was is one of those little historical puzzles which have fuelled enormous scholarly ingenuity. I think the answer is that the Hebrew was *g^ebul-'am*. *G^ebûl* is the word used in Isaiah 54:12, that passage about the new Jerusalem which the Qumran community applied to its various members and officials. There it refers to the rampart, the surrounding wall of the city or the Temple. It was selected as a reference to James for an obvious reason. The other components of the building: stones, foundations, pinnacles, gates are all plural; only the wall is singular. It suits the pre-eminent role in the Jerusalem church - and hence in the world-wide church - which James attained in the last decade or so of his life. Only one other figure, Peter, was given a singular place in the architecture of the new Temple. The role claimed for James was not in competition with Peter's, but it was similarly unique.

The image of the messianic Temple as people, not building, gave it an important potential independence of geography. While the loss of the Temple building in 70 CE was traumatic for most Jews and the symbolic centrality of Jerusalem remained a permanent feature even of developing rabbinic Judaism, the sense of a geographical

centre easily faded for post-70 Christians. Yet in James' lifetime, it was still natural that the Temple image, even if in principle no longer localized, retained the geographically central location of its essential structures.

Of those essential structures, it was perhaps only James himself who finally mattered, and his own towering personal stature was attested in yet another epithet: James the Righteous. This title, which we met in the *Gospel of Thomas*, is so widespread in early Christian references to James, though not found in the New Testament, that it must surely have been used already before his death. It is much more than a tribute to James's personal piety. In a culture without formal surnames, quasi-surnames of this sort were common, but not this one. Only a few great biblical figures (Enoch, Noah and especially Abraham) were commonly accorded this epithet 'the Righteous,' and only one post-biblical figure seems ever to have been given it: the high priest Simeon the Righteous, high priest at the end of the third century BCE, legendary in Jewish memory as the last truly righteous high priest whose ministry had been fully blessed with the constant evidence of divine favour. To call James 'the Righteous' was to give him a central role in salvation history, as the man whose exemplary righteousness models the life of the messianic people of God. And as Jewish theology could say that the world was created for the righteous and therefore that it was created for the sake of *the* righteous person, the representative righteous person, Abraham, so the saying in the *Gospel of Thomas* can call James: 'James the Righteous, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.' James, it seems, was esteemed in his later years, not merely for his authority over the church, but more for his exemplification of the life of service to God and humanity to which the messianic people of God were called. As Abraham the righteous person par excellence modelled the righteousness of faith for his descendants, so James modelled the messianic righteousness of faith in Jesus the Messiah. What that righteousness entailed we can see nowhere more appropriately than in James's own letter.

One reason why the central position of James in the early church has usually attracted little interest, even when acknowledged, is that it has been eclipsed by the perception that James was *theologically* marginal to the development of early Christianity. James is perceived as representing something called Jewish Christianity, a term which again and again has proved too slippery to be useful. All first-century Christianity was Jewish, even when believed and practised by Gentiles. James did not align himself with those Christian Jews who wished Gentiles to join the church only by becoming Jews and observing the whole of the law of Moses. Like Paul, he saw the messianic people of God as composed of both Jews and Gentiles, Jews as Jews and Gentiles as Gentiles. Like most Christian Jews he took it for granted that Christian Jews remained Jews and continued to observe the Mosaic law, but he did not require Gentile Christians to do so and endorsed even Paul's Gentile mission. His vision was a thoroughly universalistic vision which naturally required no abandoning of Jewish identity by the Jewish people of God. James's greatest difference from Paul was simply his position at the heart of the Jewish world, committed to the mission to his own people.

However, the question of the theological marginality of James recurs if we return to the place of the letter of James in the New Testament canon. To some extent through the whole western theological tradition, and certainly since Martin Luther's famous disparagement of James as 'an epistle of straw,' the centrality of Pauline theology has entailed the marginalization of James. In the modern period Luther's famous failure

to find Christ in James has often taken the form of the judgment that James is Jewish rather than really Christian. 'The most Jewish, the most undistinctively Christian document in the New Testament,' one of the foremost contemporary British New Testament scholars calls it, in the context of an argument that the Jewish Christianity James represents inevitably became a kind of dead-end in the history of religions, marginalized by Pauline Christianity because it remained too stuck in its Jewish heritage, insufficiently Christian.

Put this way, the argument about James raises the whole issue of the relationship between early Christianity and Judaism, and is put in a quite new light once we take the full force of recent recognition that, in terms of the history of religions, early Christianity - whether Pauline, Johannine, Jacobean or whatever - was a distinctive form of Judaism. Early Christianity as such was a distinctive form of Judaism. To look for features of early Christianity which were un-Jewish is to pose the question of Christianity's distinctiveness in a quite misleading way. Nothing in early Christianity was un-Jewish, and we do not estimate the extent to which James or any other New Testament document is Christian by observing how Jewish it is and supposing that the more Jewish it is, the less Christian.

One promising response to the old charge that the letter of James is scarcely Christian has been to demonstrate the extent to which James is indebted to the tradition of the teaching of Jesus, probably in pre-Synoptic, oral forms. To which it has been countered: Yes, but does James reflect what is really distinctive in the teaching of Jesus, rather than simply common Jewish themes? As a matter of fact, James does reflect some highly distinctive features of the teaching of Jesus: the singling out of the commandment to love one's neighbour as the key commandment in the law, the prohibition of oaths in favour of absolute truthfulness in all speech, the insistence that receiving mercy from God is dependent on showing mercy to others. But still this approach fails to characterize adequately either James' relationship to Judaism or James' relationship to the teaching of Jesus.

We need a subtler approach which will take account of the following striking features of James. First, not only does James make a considerable number of clear allusions to sayings of Jesus known from the Gospels. James also writes a good deal else that we would not have been at all surprised to find attributed to Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. No other early Christian writing reads so much like the Synoptic teaching of Jesus. For example, James is one of the very few early Christian writers who writes parables - not long narrative parables, but short parabolic sayings of the kind that are frequent among the sayings of Jesus. The style of the teaching resembles the teaching of Jesus, and the themes, with some exceptions, are very characteristic concerns of the teaching of Jesus. All this is true even when James is not, so far as we can tell, dependent on specific traditional sayings of Jesus. But then, secondly, if one knew nothing of Jesus' teaching, but were well acquainted with the literature of early Judaism, one would have no difficulty recognizing in James a thoroughly Jewish teacher who developed his style and his themes from mainstream Jewish religious traditions. James's letter is no less Jewish when it most resembles the teaching of Jesus, and really we should not be surprised by that.

This does not mean that Jesus and James are both indistinguishable from any other Jewish teacher of their time. Far from it. It means that what distinguishes them is not simply some points which other Jewish teachers never or rarely made, but the

characteristic focus, emphases, selection, development and configuration of traditional Jewish themes that is characteristic of Jesus and recognizable, I would suggest, also in James. In James we find a writer who continues the tradition of Jesus' teaching, not simply by echoing the sayings of Jesus, though he does that, but by having so assimilated the spirit and the style of Jesus' teaching that he develops teaching recognizably continuous with that of Jesus, all the time drawing on the same kinds of resources of Jewish tradition that informed Jesus' own teaching. In other words, James's relationship to Judaism parallels Jesus' relationship to Judaism. Though far from simply repeating the teaching of Jesus, he works creatively with the Jewish heritage he shares with Jesus in a way that is deeply informed by the way Jesus himself had worked with that heritage. At least, that is a thesis about James in search of a methodology able to test it.

If the thesis is correct, then the role of James in the canon of the New Testament, for those who read it as Christian Scripture, is important. It is a witness to the way the Synoptic teaching of Jesus should be creatively appropriated in a style of Christian living reflecting the values of Jesus. James' insistence on practical concern for the poor is well known; his equally characteristic concern for truthfulness and with the power of words to damage, destroy and divide should have just as much contemporary resonance. In general, at a time when Christianity is unlikely to make sense except as a creative way of living, free from the destructive idolatries of our time, James deserves to be heard, not just for what he says, but as a stimulus to do likewise in our time.

In the end it is not a matter of displacing Paul in favour of James, or for that matter of Peter or Hebrews or Revelation, though as a thought-experiment for an hour it is very salutary to do so. The canon should not be about centrality and marginality. Its *raison d'être* is complementarity. The point is that, just as one line of canonical continuity leads from the Gospels' story of Jesus to Paul's irreplaceable penetration of the meaning of the cross and resurrection, so another line of canonical continuity leads from the teaching of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels to James's outstandingly faithful appropriation of it.

NOTE: The lecture has been printed as it was delivered. A fuller version of much of the argument of the lecture (excluding the treatment of the letter of the James), along with full documentation, will be found in my chapter, "James and the Jerusalem Church," in R. Bauckham ed., *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting* (Carlisle:Paternoster/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). The approach to the letter of James adumbrated in the lecture will be developed in the book on James I am writing for the series *New Testament Readings*, to be published by Routledge in 1996.