

JESUS BARABBAS
BY
P. - L COUCHOUD AND R. STAHL

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Translated by Jake Jones IV

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The death sentence of Jesus is presented in the Gospels in the oddest way.

After Jesus appeared before the procurator, one expects that he would be condemned or acquitted. However Jesus properly neither is condemned nor discharged. His fate is suddenly related to that of another prisoner, not judged, about whom we have heard nothing. The question is not any more: Will Jesus be condemned or acquitted? It becomes abruptly: who will be crucified, Jesus or the other prisoner? And the decision will not be made by the judge but by the crowd.

Stranger still is not this strange procedure. It is the name of the other prisoner. He is called Bar-Abbas which means "son of the father" ¹. However "Son of the Father" is the title which belongs to Jesus in a completely special and transcendental way.

¹. Jerome (in Matt 28:16) supposed the form Bar-Rabban, filius magistri eorum, son of the Master of the Jews, i.e. of Satan. That is a late alteration, which aims at to give the robber Barabbas a name that is a better than son of the father.. "Bar-Rabban is a form much less probable, the more so as Rabban does not seem to be employed like proper name. Bar-Rabba would be possible, but was not indicated by the Barabbas form." - Lagrange, *l'Evangile selon s. Marc.* Paris, 1911, p. 387.

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One Gospel, the fourth, has the aim of showing that Jesus is the only son of the only father, or, in an absolute way, the Son of the Father. It is Jesus who should be called Bar-Abbas. But the other one is called in such a way! That is not yet everything. The other one, as we will see, is called also Jesus, Jesus Bar-Abbas. The crowd decides between two characters who are called both Jesus and who are both Bar-Abbas, one by the name, the other actually.

Why this imbroglio? The baroque episode of Barabbas offers to the commentators an exegetical headache. It is not less embarrassing for those who make the death of Jesus a myth than for those which take it for a historical fact. Among the difficulties which the Gospels raise, this is one of the most conspicuous. If one managed to solve it, one would certainly advance in the understanding of these ambiguous books.

Let us first review the texts.

Luke 24

13. Pilate, having called together the high priests, the rulers and the people,
14. said to them: "You brought this man to me as corrupting the people. I examined him in front of you and I found this man guilty of nothing of that of which you allege against him.
15. Neither did Herod, because he returned him to us. Here: Nothing which deserves death was done by him.
16. Therefore, after having him flogged, I will release him."
17. *[Couchoud omits here verse 17 because it is an interpolation]*
18. But they shouted all together: "Make him die and release to us Barabbas" -
19. who had been thrown in prison for a riot in the city and for murder.
20. Again Pilate spoke to them, wanting to release Jesus. But they shouted: "Crucify, crucify him!"
21. For the third time he says to them: "What evil did he do? I did not find anything in him which deserves death. Therefore, after a flogging, I will release him.
22. But they insisted with great cries, asking that for him to be crucified and their cries dominated.
23. Pilate pronounced that what they asked would take place.
24. He released the man thrown in prison for riot and murder, which they requested, and delivered Jesus to their will.

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Mark 15:6-15, (Latin).

6. With each festival there was a custom to release a prisoner to them they petitioned for.
7. However there was one named Barabbas, in prison with rioters, who had had committed a murder in the rebellion.
8. And the crowd began to ask for him [Pilate] to do what he did for them at each festival, to release a prisoner.
9. Pilate answered them: "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews? "
10. Because he knew that the high priests had delivered him wrongfully.
11. The priests and the scribes persuaded with the people to rather say: Release to us Barabbas!
12. Pilate answered them: "What then am I to do with the one you call the king Jews? "
13. They shouted again: "Crucify him!"
14. Pilate said to them: "What evil did he do?" They shouted more; "Crucify Him! "
15. Pilate, released Barabbas to them and delivered Jesus, after being scourged, to be crucified.

Matthew 27:15-26.

15. With each festival the governor had a custom to release to the crowd any single prisoner whom they asked.
16. There was then a notorious prisoner named [Jesus] Barabbas.
17. When they were gathered, Pilate says to them: "Whom do you want you that I release to you; Jesus Barabbas or Jesus called the Christ? "
18. Because he knew they had delivered him up out of envy.
19. While he sat on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him: "Have nothing to do between you and this righteous man! I suffered many things today in a dream because of him."
20. The high priests and the elders persuaded with crowd to ask for Barabbas and to destroy Jesus.
21. The governor began again: "Which of the two do you want me to release to you? " They said: "Barabbas!"
22. Pilate is addressed to them: "What am I to do with Jesus called the Christ? "
23. All say: "Have him crucified!" But he said: "What evil did he do?" They shouted more; "Have him crucified!"
24. Pilate seeing that it did not gain anything but that the tumult increased, took water and washed his hands in front of crowd while saying: "I am not responsible for this blood. Have it your way! "
25. Everyone answered: "May his blood be on us and on our children!"
26. Then he released Barabbas to them and after having whipped Jesus, Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified.

JOHN 18:38-40. On these words he went out again to the Jews and says to them: "For me, I do not find in him any crime. But it is a custom for me to release to you someone

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at Passover. Do you thus want that I release to you the king of the Jews?" On top they shouted again: "Not him, but Barabbas!" Barabbas was a brigand.

The episode of Barabbas appears in all four Gospels. But one recognizes easily that in the Fourth Gospel it is a later addition, as well as the scene of insults which follows it. The secondary character is apparent. The Jews shouted according to John 18:40, whereas with Mark they did not yet shout. Before the enclave Pilate declares to the Jews: "I do not find in him any crime," (18:38). At the end of the enclave Pilate repeats the same thing in the same terms: "I do not find in him any crime", so as to bring the answer which, in the original text [John 19:7], came immediately: "He must die because he made himself the Son of God." The interpolation with reprise ¹ is hardly contestable; it is recognized by Schwartz, Wellhausen, Loisy, Delafosse. It is one of these many final improvements which harmonized the Gospels and complicated the task of criticism. Originally the episode of Barabbas belonged only to the Synoptic Gospels.

The simplest form appears to be that of Luke. Pilate after the examination made by him and Herod, delivers the sentence in front of the Sanhedrin and the people. Jesus is not guilty of a capital crime. He will be freed, after being punished, i.e. flogged. But the public protests against the judgment. They demand that Jesus be crucified and that Barabbas be freed. This Barabbas is a prisoner accused of a capital crime: rebellion and murder, intended consequently for execution. Pilate yields to the cries. Pilate pronounces a second sentence which cancels the first. Barabbas will be freed. Jesus will be delivered as the Jews want.

This account shows a Roman magistrate so much intimidated by

¹. See page 192.

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the public that he speaks two contradicting judgements in the shortest time. It is difficult to believe.

Moreover it is not clear what Barabbas has to do with any of this. If the public wants the execution of Jesus, Pilate has authority to condemn Jesus and to likewise condemn the murderer Barabbas at the same time. If the public wants the pardon of the murderer, Pilate can pardon Barabbas and also discharge Jesus. One does not see why the business of Barabbas is involved in that with Jesus ¹. In Mark these two errors in the account of Luke do not appear. Mark does not speak about an official sentence delivered by Pilate. And to justify the intervention of the crowd and the appearance in the scene of Barabbas, he calls upon a certain custom, with each festival, to free a prisoner designated by crowd. Pilate proposes to release Jesus. The crowd, exercising the right which it holds from the custom, designates another prisoner, the Barabbas murderer, arrested with a gang during a riot.

Barabbas will thus be released. Jesus remains prisoner. It is not maintained that the crowd had the additional right to send a prisoner to execution. This happens however. Pilate asks, one does not know why, the crowd what he must do with Jesus. The crowd answers: "Crucify him!" Pilate is persuaded and Jesus is sent to death, not under the terms of a judgment, but to give satisfaction to the crowd.

This account has the advantage, from the point of view of the Christian apologists, to show that a Roman magistrate did not condemn Jesus. The alleged custom to free a prisoner with each festival makes it possible for Pilate to also avoid a formal acquittal. It opens an extraordinary way to him to propose

¹. Verse 17, extracted from Mark (he, with each festival, was obliged to release somebody to them) is missing in the best manuscripts. It is, of the opinion of everyone, an addition with the text. Cf Lagrange, Gospel according to S. Luc. Paris, 1921, p.p. 581-2.

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the release of Jesus and to submit the decision to the crowd. This explains why, disappointed in his calculation, Pilate is obliged to release Barabbas which the crowd prefers over Jesus. But it does not explain why, as a side effect, he is obliged to crucify Jesus. The bizarre connection which binds Barabbas to Jesus and which makes that if one is released, the other must be crucified is an unexplained postulate which is presupposed in the account of Mark as well as that of Luke.

Matthew follows Mark of which he accentuates the tendencies and keeps the postulate. The fact that Pilate is not responsible is materialized by a Jewish ritual. Informed by his wife who had a warning dream, Pilate washes his hands, to remove any share which he could have in what will occur. Indeed the sentence counters Jesus: He is crucified by the pronouncement of the crowd. Here Pilate puts out the choice of Jesus named Barabbas and Jesus called the Christ. It is necessary to choose between the two. The crowd chooses Jesus Barabbas. Under the terms of the implicitly admitted postulate, Jesus called the Christ is sent to execution and Jesus Barabbas released.

There are only six extant Greek manuscripts, two Syrian versions, an Armenian version and some scholiums which give the reading Jesus Barabbas. But at the time of Origien one counted on the contrary the specimens which removed Jesus in front of Barabbas. Origien approves this suppression because, he says, "the name of Jesus is not appropriate for an irreligious person" (Com. in Matt., 121). He thus gives a very clear reason why, in a great number of specimens, the name Jesus was removed from association with Barabbas. It would be inconceivable, on the contrary, that this name had been added and "one cannot claim, as known very well by Lagrange, that such a characterization could be the result of an error by a copyist. 1"

It is necessary

1. Gospel according to S. Matthew, Paris, 1923, p. 520.

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thus to recognize, with Burkitt, MacNeile, and Klostermann that the text of Matthew originally read "Jesus Barabbas." It is probable that the manuscripts of Mark and Luke were emended like the greatest number of those of Matthew.

Thus the mysterious correspondence which binds Barabbas to Jesus is strengthened by the name Jesus which is common for them and by the title of "son of the father" who seems to be common for them.

Such is the incident of Barabbas in the Gospels. How can it be explained?

Can one claim with Renan that the episode is historical? Renan ¹ preferably follows Mark to Luke and uses Matthew with caution. He declares without hesitating that it was indeed a custom, in connection with the festival of Passover, to release to the people a prisoner. He says of the prisoner delivered "By a singular coincidence he was also called Jesus." He does not make any remark on the meaning of the word Bar-Abbas.

The opinion of Renan is not easily bearable. The Passover custom cited by Mark is not attested anywhere. However the Jewish literature on the festival of Passover is immense. H. - L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, which drew from the Talmud and Midrash 1055 dense pages of comments on the Gospel of Matthew, could not discover anything on the alleged custom ². It appears to be invented by Mark.

The whole episode does not give the impression of history. Alfred Loisy said extremely well:

¹. Life of Jesus, 13th ed., pp. 418-9.

². Kommentar zum NR. T. aus Talmud U. Midrasch, I. München, 1922, p. 1031.

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"That the people, in front of captive Jesus, passed suddenly from admiration to hatred and that, to not contentedly to prefer Barabbas to him, they asked with rage that Pilate crucify him; that Pilate lent himself at once to this furious whim. Those are all details, which fit better the category of legendary fiction than history and which would rather resemble for a purpose of theater in a melodrama or a childish tale rather than with reality ¹.

Finally the coincidence of two Jesus, both "son of the father," is too singular to be true. One can conclude firmly with Loisy that, from the point of view of the history, the incident of Barabbas is an "improbable fiction. ²"

An attempt was tried to save it however, by transforming it completely. A subtle, engaging and bold theory was proposed in 1898 by Paul Wendland and received a good reception.

Wendland wondered whether Jesus had not been executed as a king of Saturnalias ³. One knows from Franz Cumont ⁴ that as late as the beginning of the fourth century C.E., in Mesie, the Roman soldiers celebrated Saturnalias by drawing lots for a king who, dressed in royal vestments, had any privilege for one month and then had his throat cut on the altar of Saturn. However Jesus was garbed by the Roman soldiers in a crown, a sceptre, and a scarlet mantle. He seems to have portrayed a mock royalty.

Wendland drew also attention to a passage in Philo (Adv. Flaccum) ⁵ where it is told that the rabble of Alexandria, to make fun of Jewish king Agrippa, took an inoffensive demented person

¹. Les Evangiles synoptiques, II. Cefonds, 1908, p. 644.

². Les livres du Nouveau Testament. Paris, 1922, p. 276.

³. Jesus als Saturnalien-Konig dans Hermes. 1898, pp. 175 9.

⁴. Les Actes de s.Dasius dans Analecta Bollandiana, 1797, pp. 5-16. Le roi des Saturnales (avec Parmentier) dans Revue de Philologie. 1897. pp. 143-53.

⁵. Adv. Flaccum, ed. Mangey. Londres, 1751, ii , pp. 520-3.

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named Karabas, attired him in a crown of papyrus, a broken reed and a plait and gave honors to him as to a king. Couldn't Karabas be brought closer to Barabbas?

James G. Frazer collected these suggestions and in 1900 formed an assumption. With the imitation not of Roman Saturnalias, but of the Babylonian festival of the Sacaea where one condemned to death was treated as a king and finally whipped and crucified, the Jews could, in their festival of Purim, treat a criminal as a king, to give him the role of Aman of the history of Esther, finally to hang or crucify him. [Esther Chapter 6]

Jesus would have died like the annual Aman. And Barabbas (Karabas) could have been a popular name for the character of Mardoch, the acclaimed new king.

"Pilate tried to persuade the Jews to let Jesus fulfill the role of Barabbas, which would have been a way of saving his life. But Pilate's generous attempt failed and Jesus perished on the cross in the role of Aman."

Frazer has since relegated his assumption to an appendix of the third edition of the *Golden Bough* while declaring: "It was not confirmed by our later investigations and remains to a considerable degree speculative and uncertain" 1.

Solomon Reinach, in 1905, took again and corrected the assumption of Frazer. He supposed that Barabbas (Karabas) was the name of a Mock King whom one killed in a ceremony similar to the festival of Sacaea. Jesus would be not in place of the Barabbas, but executed in his Barabbas characteristic, even as Barabbas was 2.

Edouard Dujardin, in 1925, defended in front of the Societe Ernest Renan, the thesis that the death of Jesus was a sacrifice

1. Le bouc Émissaire [Scapegoat], tr. P. Sayn. Paris, 1925. p. 373 et n., p. 917.

2. Cultes, mythes et religions, i. 1905, pp. 332-41. Orpheus, nouv., Orpheus, nouv. ed. 19? 4, p. 338.

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for a ritual office, made up later in judicial condemnation ¹.

In its various forms this theory encounters a formidable objection. An annual human sacrifice could hardly exist in Jerusalem in the 1st century of our era, without either Josephus, or the Jewish literature, or the anti-Jewish literature making mention of it. It is necessary to give up such a questionable assumption.

As for the bringing together of Barabbas-Karabas, when one examines it closely, it does not lead to anything. Karabas appears to be a regularly formed Semitic name; it was found in Palmyra in the form Qeraba ². And Barabbas does not share anything of the role of the insane Alexandrian. It is too much to add to the Gospels to imagine with Frazer that after being released, he was gone from there by the streets "dressed in bright and loud tinsels, a foil crown on his head and a mock sceptre in his hand; followed by all the rabble of the city which howled, laughed, launched force gibes while some, by derision, addressed honorings to his false majesty and that others whipped with turn of arm the ass on which he was seated. ³" The passage is pretty, but it comes from Frazer and we have enough with the fictions from the evangelists.

It is among these fictions that it is definitely necessary to place the history of Barabbas. But precisely because it does not have anything of history and that it is invented, it needs necessarily an explanation.

One thought of making a mythological feature of it. In 1918, Heinrich Zimmern published a text coming from the excavations

¹. Il a développé cette idée dans son livre *Le Dieu Jésus*, (Paris, 1927).

². Vogüé, 105, cité par Lagrange. *Quelques remarques sur l'Orpheus*. Paris, 1910, p. 48.

³. *Le bouc émissaire [The Scape Goat in The Golden Bough]*, tr. P. Sayn, p. 371.

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of Assur, unfortunately very mutilated, which tells the passion of Bel-Marduk ¹. It is a myth in connection with the Babylonian rites of the new year which it transposes in the divine plan.

The god is arrested, led to a mountain, questioned, wounded, and killed. Another character, called the son of Assur, was accused of a crime, acquitted, released, and appointed to the guard of the dead god. One seeks Marduk while saying: "Where is he a prisoner?" The gods maintain him in prison far from the sun and the light. His disappearance causes revolution and combat in Babylon. The goddess Ishtar goes to the mountain and weeps while shouting: "My brother, my brother!"

She carries the clothing of Marduk. The death of the god is evoked by reciting the poem of Creation. Marduk himself beseeches the return to life. Finally Ishtar is invited to withdraw the implement which pierced the heart of her husband and to wipe blood. And Marduk returns to life.

In this very curious document Marduk is a god who dies and resurrects, the made-to-order of Tammuz and Osiris. Zimmern pointed out that the passion of Marduk, much more than that of Tammuz or that of Osiris, has a certain resemblance to that of Jesus. In particular the acquitted and released character makes one think of Barabbas.

It is clear that one may envision a myth of divine passion moving into Palestine more easily than the complex and bloody rites that gave rise to the myth.

Loisy recognized that the invention of several features of the passion of Jesus could "be facilitated or suggested in manner in other words from surrounding mythologies" ².

¹. Zum babylonischen Neujahrsfest, II., in Berichte üb. D. Verband, D. Sächs Ges. D. Wiss. Leipzig, 1918, 5. Heft.

². La Passion de Marduk dans Rev. d'hist. et de litt, relig., 1922, p. 298. [The Passion of Marduk in rev. of hist. and litt, relig., 1922, p. 298.]

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As regards Barabbas, the cominging together [of Barabbas and Jesus] remains rather vague. The Babylonian myth does not explain the most embarrassing feature: the similarity of name and title between Barabbas and Jesus.

One sought to explain it by the mythical transposition of a purely Jewish rite, the rite of the two goats, practiced on the Day of Atonement [1](#).

The two goats were to be similar (Leviticus 16:7). The sins of the people were offered on one; chased from the city, representing Jesus (according to the Epistle of Barnabas, Justin and Tertullien), covered in insults and spittle. Notice, says pseudo-Barnabas, how Jesus is expressed here in figure: spit upon and goaded, and scarlet wool placed about his head, and so cast into the wilderness. [2](#) "One of the two goats, according to Tertullien, was dressed in scarlet, cursed, covered in spittle, torn, was cast away by the people outside the city unto death, thus carrying the manifest tokens of the passion of the Lord who, after being attired in scarlet, covered with spittle and afflicted with all insults, was crucified outside of city [3](#). "

One can believe that the pseudo-Barnabas, Justin, Tertullien, could interpret the Gospels. It is thus probable that the scenes of derision and insults were introduced into Mark and Matthew to give to Jesus the character of scapegoat which one felt the major relationship with that of Mock King. The Epistle to the Hebrews [4](#) shows

[1](#). Arthur Drews, Das Markusevangelium, Jena, 1921, p. 284, taking up an idea of Volkmar (Die Evangelien, 1870).

[2](#). Epistle of Barnabas 7:8, transl. Oger. Paris, 1907. , p. 57. Justin, Dialogue, xi.,

[3](#). Adv. Jud., xiv. Adv. Marc, III., vii

[4](#). Vii., 26; ix, 12, 28; X., 20.

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clearly that the Christian festival whose Passion is the ritual topic was intended to replace not only Jewish Passover, but also the Day of Atonement. Jesus is not only the Paschal lamb. He is also the Scapegoat of Yom Kippur.

Is other goat perfectly similar? One would be tempted to find there Barabbas, similar to Jesus by name and the title. It is necessary to give up this idea. Barnabas, Justin and Tertullien in agreement that it still represents Jesus, Jesus at his second coming, when he appears in Jerusalem, identical to that which was driven out of the city. The goats, according to Barnabas, must be similar and beautiful and of the same size, so that the day when one will see Jesus coming one is struck with stupor because of the resemblance of the goat. ¹

The second goat, according to Tertullien, offered for sins, given as food only to the priests of the Temple, marked the features of the second appearance when, purified of all sins, the priests of the spiritual temple, that is the Church, will enjoy the Lord's grace like meat and which the others will starve for salvation ²."

The second goat is thus not Barabbas. This one, moreover, simply is released and not at all offered.

For which explanation is it thus necessary to stop?

It is not seen that the incident of Barabbas is an achievement of prophecy like so many of other incidents of Passion: thirty pieces of silver, the escape of the naked young man, the silence of Jesus in front of his judges, crucified between two robbers, the division of clothing, etc

¹. Vii, 10. Cf Justin, Dialogue, xi., 4-5. The same idea is at the bottom from Hebr., ix, 28.

². Adv. Jud., xiv.

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Loisy brought closer other features, many also, which work towards an end practiced by defending a thesis useful for the Christians. For example the guard of the tomb was imagined to prove the physical resurrection. It was, during persecutions, of a vital interest for the Christians to deny that Jesus had been legally condemned by an imperial magistrate. This is why the later insertion of Pilate washing his hands was invented. According to Loisy, the episode of Barabbas also tends "to discharge Pilate, while putting forward the innocence of Jesus". It would be an apologetic fiction ¹.

Admittedly, the episode comes at the right moment to reverse the decision of Pilate and the substitution initiated by the Jews. But, the apologetic intention determined the place of the episode rather than its ultimate cause. It is not enough to explain what is unique about the substitution of a Jesus for another. He does not account for the very strange name of Jesus Bar-Abbas.

We will propose a new explanation of the disconcerting episode. What suggested it to us is on the one hand the explanation which Solomon Reinach presented of a nearby episode, and on the other hand there is recent research of Henri Delafosse on the Fourth Gospel.

Solomon Reinach in 1912 interpreted in a very new way the episode of Simon of Cyrene ². This Simon of Cyrene is a character who appears in the Synoptic gospels a little after Barabbas. It is he who is charged with carrying the cross of Jesus, contrary to the Roman custom, according to which condemned himself had to carry.

This episode has an unimportant air. However it is of one

¹. Les livres du Nouveau Testament. Paris, 1922, p. 276. Rev. of hist. and litt, relig., 1922, p. 297.

². Simon, of Cyrène in rev. of Univ. of Brussels 1912, pp.712-728; Worships, myths and religions, iv., 1912, pp. 181-188.

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great polemical importance. It is there to fight, by way of account, the belief, accredited in certain Christian groups, that Jesus was not crucified, but that Simon of Cyrene was [crucified] in his place.

Irenaeus reports that Basilides, who lived in Alexandria in first half of the 2nd century and wrote a Gospel, professed this: "Jesus did not suffer, but a certain Simon of Cyrene was obliged to carry the cross in his place. It was he whom, by ignorance and error, was crucified, having been transfigured by Jesus, in order to take the place of Jesus. As for Jesus, he took the shape of Simon and stood aside and laughed at them" ¹.

The little which we know of the doctrines of Basilides explains this belief very well. Basilide believed that any suffering, without exception, supposes a former sin. ² If one wants a Jesus without sin, it is necessary, in these doctrines, to remove him from the cross.

The belief of Basilides is not an isolated fact. It seems to have been wide spread. It had in any case a long duration. We already find it in the curious ghostly life of Jesus who is inserted in the Acts of John ³. At the time of the crucifixion John flees to the Mount of Olives and cries in a cave. Jesus appears to him, illuminating the cave and says to him: "John, for the crowd which is over there in Jerusalem I am crucified, I am pierced by lances and reeds, I am watered of vinegar and gall. But with you I speak..."

In the seventh century, Mohammed collected the tradition that Jesus

1. Adv. Haer.. i., 2i, 4.

2. Clement d'Alex., iv., Strom., xii., 81-83. Cf. E. de Paye, Gnostiques et gnosticisme, 2e Édition, Paris, 1925, pp. 41-42.

3. M. R. James, Apocrypha anecdota, ii. : Cambridge, 1897, pp. 1-25. M. Bonnet, Acta apostolorum apocrypha, ii. : Leipzig, 1898, pp. 193-203.

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had not been crucified. He inserted it in Qu'ran [1](#), and it is still of faith today for all the Muslims. In the 9th century one imposed to the Manicheans a formula abjuration which contained these words: "I anathematise those which say that Our Lord Jesus-Christ suffered seemingly and that there was another man on the cross and which stood aside and laughed, while the other suffered in his place [2](#)."

This ancient and firm belief that Jesus was not nailed to the cross, but that another was [crucified] in his place, identified by Basilides as Simon of Cyrene, is the major reason why the seemingly unimportant anecdote of Simon of Cyrene was introduced into the account of the Passion.

Some finish the story with Simon of Cyrene being crucified. If one grants that Simon of Cyrene carried the cross as if he were to be crucified himself, that could mislead some. But it is affirmed that he carried it for another and that it was certainly Jesus, Jesus in person, who was crucified and who suffered.

The episode of Simon of Cyrene thus explained, can one find an explanation similar for to which precedes it, the inclusion of Barabbas?

It would be necessary to leave the idea that the purpose of the synoptics, by telling us that certain Barabbas had been released, was to certainly establish that he had not been crucified. He strongly comes out from their account that it is Jesus called the Christ who was put on the cross and not Jesus called Barabbas. That one is not mistaken there! Confusion could be done, since both have the same name. But only one is crucified. It is Jesus called the Christ. It is not Jesus Barabbas, no more than it is not

[1](#). Sour, iv., v., 154 sq.

[2](#). Migne, Patr. gr., I., 4464.

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Simon of Cyrene. The account would be polemical. It would aim at enough bold people to support that it is Jesus called Barabbas who was crucified. It would counteract to them that this one was indeed imprisoned, but that he was released.

But can any support for the idea that it was Barabbas whom was crucified? One would find some nowadays. A man of great eruridation and scholarship, Arthur Heulhard, wrote under the title *The Christian Lie* about fifteen volumes whose essential thesis is that the one crucified by Pilate is Barabbas. He made a disciple: Mr. Daniel Masse, who in a book published recently, *the Enigma of Jesus-Christ*, defends the same thesis. They cannot be useful to us. It is not against Heulhard nor against Mr. Masse whom the Synoptic gospels polemize.

At the time when they wrote, they knew people of which they could say that their Crucified was not Dear little one, Jesus the authentic Messiah, but another Jesus, a false Jesus, a Jesus Bar-Abbas?

It is here that research of Mr. Henri Delafosse can guide us on the Fourth gospel [1](#).

The idea of Jesus Son of the Father and that of Jesus Messiah of Israel are so well amalgamated, synthesized today, that it is difficult for us to see that they do not have the same origin and that they could conflict before joining.

Jesus the Son of the Father, it is a design characteristic of the Fourth Gospel. According to John, Jesus is not Son of God in the same way where the scriptures says it of Israel or the Christ of Israel, but in a new direction, blasphemous to Jewish eyes, since he implies identity with God. Jesus is the ONLY son, monogenes, the unique Son, the Son whom we should distinguish nothing from the Father. "I and my Father

[1](#). *Le Quatri me Evangile (The Fourth Gospel)*. Paris, Rieder, 1925.

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are one" (John 10:30). "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (14:11). "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). It is necessary to return to the Son the same worship that to the Father (v. 23). This design is completely foreign with Judaism. One finds to him parallels only in paganism, where Zeus, according to Chrysippe, is at the same time the Father and Son ¹. The origin had to be odious not only to the Jews themselves, but with the orthodox Christians, i.e. at those which wanted to preserve the religion of the Old Testament.

Mr. Delafosse, with insight, pointed out that, in its earliest core, the Fourth Gospel is violently hostile with the Judaism and the Old Testament. Far from merging with the Christ of Israel, the Son formally states not to have anything in common with him: "God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world," what was the function of the Christ (3:17). He denies the famous Last Jugement expected by the apocalypses: "Whoever believes in him is not judged, but whoever does not believe is condemned already" (3.18).

If the Son does not have anything in common with the Christ of Israel, the Father does not have anything common with God of Israel. The Son made known clearly with the Jews: "He who sent me, you do not know him" (7:29) "You never heard his voice, you did not see his face" (v. 27). It is a very new, amazing, foreign God in the world, that the Son reveals: "No one has ever seen God: the only begotten Son who is in the bosom of the Father has made him known" (1:18). This is a denial of all the theophanies mentioned in the Old Testament. Denied, the ascent into heaven of the Elijah prophet and all the others: "No one has ascended into heaven" (John 3:13). Denied, the mission of all the prophets of Israel: "All those which came

¹. Dans Philodème, De la cite (ed. Gomperz, p. 80), cite par W. Bauer, Das Johannesevangelium, Tübingen, 1912, p. 106..

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before me are robbers and brigands" (10:8). The violently anti-judaic character of the Fourth Gospel is dissimulated today because, by way of interpolations and glosses, the ideas most opposed to the primitive spirit of the book were added in the last redaction.

The duality of redactions is loud and clear. It was denounced, before Delafosse, by Schwartz, Wellhausen and Loisy. What Delafosse detected, it is the relationship of the fundamental doctrines of the Fourth Gospel with that of a sect which, by the action which it exerted and the reaction that it caused, took a dominating role in the evolution of primitive Christianity. It is about the Marcionite sect. Marcion proposes to the Christians to reject all that is Jewish: the Christ of Israel, God of Israel, the Old Testament, and to adore a God foreign to the world, revealed for the first time by Jesus. Its doctrines were spread in Asia and penetrated in Rome. Condemned on his extreme theses in 144 CE, Marcion exerted nevertheless a decisive influence on Christian theology. Thanks to skilful preparings, many writings of Marcionite tendency, to start with the Fourth Gospel, contributed to form the New Testament. It is in a Marcionite medium, or premarcionite, that is best understood the development of a Jesus Son of the Father, opposed to the Jesus Messiah of Israel.

Contrary to Basilides, Marcion professed that his Jesus *had* been crucified. It was the base of the mystery. By his death the Son had ransomed men from the Creator god and had given them to the Father. Although not having a body himself, but only an ethereal envelope, Jesus had certainly undergone on the cross an apparent death. Tertullien, by which we know the doctrines of the Marcionites, is very affirmative on this point ¹

1. Adv. Marc, i., 11, 25; iii., 8, 9, 23; iv., etc. Cite par H. Delafosse, Le Quatrième evangile, p. 35.

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It is easy to understand with what indignation, what anger, the Christians attached to Messianic waiting and Jewish prophecies, the Christians who's Apocalypse reveals us their state of mind, had to initially consider these people, enemies of the Christ of Israel and God of Israel, who forged a crucified Jesus, to which they allotted the strange name, of Son of the Father. One ridiculed this name in the Aramaic form of Bar-Abbas. This son-of-Father who treats the old prophets as robbers and brigands, himself is treated as a brigand. The polemic against Jesus Bar-Abbas took the most popular and most effective form, that of the account. It was a question of showing that only crucified, the only redeemer of the men, was as well the Christ of Israel, that even as announced the prophets. The Synoptic gospels, mainly Luke and Matthew, stuck to this demonstration. As of the birth of Jesus, an inspired prophet, Simeon, took Jesus in his arms and recognized in him the Christ, the salvation of God [Luke 2:20), light of the nations, glory of the people of Israel.

Matthew underlines of a feature supported twenty achievements of prophecies. In front of Pilate Jesus is formally accused of saying is Christ, a King (Luke 23:2), and when Pilate asks to him whether he is it, he does not contradict. Thus there is no doubt. The one crucified in truth is well Jesus the Christ. As for Jesus Bar-Abbas, the brigand, he was not at all crucified. He was released. Here are where it is necessary to answer those which tell another thing of him. As for the circumstances of the release, they were invented and skilfully arranged in the account so as to still prove another useful thing: the lack of responsibility by Pilate. Thus the episodes of Barabbas and Simon of Cyrene are of the same own way.

They are polemical accounts. The first is directed against the Gospel of John, the second against the Gospel of Basilides.

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If our interpretation is valid, it should be proven, contrary to the current opinion, that the core of the Gospel of John is earlier than the Synoptic gospels. And to corroborate it, it would be necessary to show other cases of Synoptic polemic against John. We will make short remarks on these two points.

In a suggestive article published in 1925 on the relationships of the Fourth Gospel with the Mandaean recently discovered documents, Rudolf Bultmann wrote: "It is necessary to consider the possibility that Johannic Christianity represents a type older than Synoptic Christianity ¹. " It is the impression also that one often has by reading the very attentive study that Mr. Maurice Goguel devoted to the Fourth gospel ². Of course it is easy to see that the current picture of the Fourth Gospel, the replastered text, is later than the three Synoptic ones. It is not the same building itself. We believe that one can assemble evidence to show that the primitive core of John is earlier than the Synoptic ones. We will limit ourselves here to two presumptions. One admits rather readily, since B.W. Bacon and A. Loisy, that the Gospel of John is founded on a different Paschal ritual from the Synoptics. The first supposes a Christian Passover celebrated the 14 Nisan, i.e. the same day as Jewish Passover. The others suppose a Christian Passover detached from the Jewish Passover Jewish and attached to Sunday. John is founded over the primitive Passover. The Synoptic ones give a report on the Paschal reform. There is presumption that

¹. Zeitschr. f. d. neutestamentl. Wiss., Giessen, 1925, Heft 1-2, p. 144.

². Introduction du Nouveau, Testament, tome ii., Paris, 1924.

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The book containing the old ritual is itself older than the Books containing the newer ritual. In addition John differs from the Synoptics in that it contains neither the baptism of Jesus nor the institution of the Eucharist ¹. It is easy to understand that to have Jesus institute the two great Christian rites, these two accounts were added to a primitive text which did not contain them. On the other hand, it would be difficult to suppose that one would have cut them out, if they had belonged to the primitive text.

So the presumption of the earliness in favour of the Gospel of John remains. One is thus brought to conceive that the Synoptic Gospels could be written in sharp reaction against the tendencies of the primitive Johannic Gospel. R. Bultmann is not distant from this concept when he says synoptic tradition which it "must be perhaps understood as a phenomenon of judaizing reaction. " ² A. Loisy approaches some more still when he says of Luke: Its favour for the Old Testament... attests a reaction against those of the Gnostics who repudiated the Scriptures and God of the Jews,...

Literalization of the appearances of Christ's resurrection opposes a certain docetism. The third Gospel and the Acts, when they were made up, reflect the development of an antignostic faith; blooming varied of this faith between years 125 and year 150 [CE].

³ The gnosticism fought by Luke could be well that of the first Johannic drafting of the Gospel. It is not impossible to find in Luke instances of open polemic against John. We will quote here only the resurrection of Lazarus.

1. Le passage, John VI, 51c-58, qui fait allusion à la Cène est une interpolation avec reprise. Les mots zh,sei eivj to.n aivw/na (51) sont repris à la fin de l'enclave (58). Voir p. 192.

2. Article cite, p. 144.

3. L'Evangile selon Luc. Paris, 1924, p. 62.

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It is quite strange that the brightest miracle of Jesus, the resurrection from the dead of Lazarus after three days, is not mentioned by the Synoptic gospels. When one reads Luke attentively, one sees that this silence is voluntary. Luke knows Lazarus, but he denies that Lazarus was resurrected. After the death of Lazarus, the rich man asks that Lazarus be resurrected to convert the Jews. "But Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets. Let them listen to them.' He said, 'Oh no, father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' Then Abraham said, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone should rise from the dead.'" (Luke 16:29-31).

If one compares that to the Johannic report, the sense of this section becomes completely clear. For John the miracle alone creates the faith, not the prophets. For Luke, on the contrary, the faith rests on Moses and the prophets. Luke voluntarily deprives himself of the greatest miracle of Jesus, in order not to weaken the argument which he wants to draw from the prophets and all the Old Testament.

It is in this antijohannic current that we place the invention of the history of Bar-Abbas. It witnesses to the deep aversion initially caused by the pagan origin of Jesus Son of the Father. This aversion was to disappear. Jesus son of the Father and Jesus Messiah of Israel merged finally with one another. The Barabbas brigand is the antiquated witness of the time when this fusion appeared impossible.