

CHRISTOLOGY AS RECONSTRUCTED ADAMOLOGY

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The thesis of this article is that the Gospels were constructed in midrashically parallel continuity and contrast to the biblical history of Israel. In order to prove the thesis the author follows certain hypothetical assumptions, the first of which is that the biblical canonically recorded history of Israel is clearly divisible into seven stages, corresponding to the week-long pattern of God's creation and rest according to the Priestly code found in Gen 1:3 – 2:4. The opinion of the author is that the Adamic myth, which had ended the history of Israel on a more pessimistic note, needed its happy-ending corrective from the Christological gospels of the reconciling and reconciled God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ as also the Father of all who believed in Jesus as the son of God. Jesudasan argues that theological metaphors were intended ethically to transform socio-political and economic history.

In this article, I formulate and try to demonstrate the thesis that the title of this article signifies. The thesis is that the Gospels were constructed in midrashically parallel continuity and contrast to the biblical history of Israel. The surprising twist of the thesis is that Adam and Eve are an implicit allegorically paraphrased parable of the biblically recorded history of Israel. Since this thesis goes against the grain of the traditionally accepted literal interpretation of the myth, I have to answer on what authority I base my stand. I base myself on Paul's letters to the Romans and Corinthians,¹ where he repeats his comparative contrast between Christ of the Gospel and biblical Adam. I argue my thesis from the parallel midrashic structure of the relevant texts. I have done this already in my book, titled: *Genesis Myth of Manifold Meanings*.² This article is a shortened paraphrase of my arguments in that book. It implicates a departure from the traditional treatment of Genesis 2:7-3:24 as the literal history of humanity's first parents,³ together with its trans-historically derived belief regarding original sin,⁴ and its predestined necessity to be destroyed by the death of Christ.⁵ Instead, I treat the Adamic myth as the Israeli prophets' allegorized parabolic recapitulation of their own ethnic history between its Egyptian and Babylonian slaveries, under the generic name, Adam.⁶ And so I trust that this will serve as a significant contribution towards an Asian hermeneutic of biblical theology and historiography.

Proving my thesis involves demonstrating the following hypothetical assumptions. 1. The biblical canonically recorded history of Israel is clearly divisible into seven stages, corresponding to the week-long pattern of God's creation and rest according to its Priestly code.⁷ Gen 1:3 – 2:4. 2. The Adamic

myth, narrated in Gen 2:7-3:24, is the same history literarily transformed into an allegorically paraphrased Midrash or parable. 3. But this allegorically mythologized version reflected Israeli history only up to its sixth phase, because the composition of the myth was completed before the history it signified was itself completed. 4. While the Gospels of Matthew and Luke constructed the life of Jesus in midrashic or allegorical correspondence to the whole of the seven-staged history of Israel, Mark and John represented that life as parallel to only the last five stages of Israeli history. In other words, Mark and John left out the correspondence to the first two stages of Israeli history. 5. While every evangelist must have had his own reason for including or excluding the first two stages of Israeli history in his life of Jesus, it is remarkable that all evangelists are agreed in including in their gospels the seventh stage of Israeli history, which the Adamic myth had left out.

The article argues that, because the gospels were composed long after biblical history was completed, the evangelists could ironically contrast their Christology to the history of Israel, which Gen 2: 7-3:24 had recapitulated under Adam. Here again I infer that, given the midrashic base and method of their writings, the New Testament authors could not have been wholly original in what they wrote. Instead, they were most probably only using and conforming advantageously to a familiar literary convention, which was already in successful biblical vogue.⁸ I interpret the Adamic myth itself as a haggadic Midrash illustrating Deut 30:15-20. In this sense, I differ from Ricoeur,⁹ and read the evangelists as midrashically producing what the postmodernists have called meta-books, which cannibalized other books.¹⁰

The Seven-phased Biblical Israeli History

Let us first list the seven phases in the biblical history of Israel, into which the two major synoptic gospels imitatively patterned their life of Jesus. Each phase will justify itself as a unit through its distinctness from the one which preceded and/or followed it. Thus the first phase was the exit of Abraham from his native Ur in Chaldea for the land that God promised to give him. The second phase was God's promise of a great posterity to Abraham, only to be followed by a test of his faith. The third phase was Israel's going into a four-centuries-long enslavement in Egypt, ending with their Exodus-crossing at the Red Sea. The fourth phase was their forty-year-long trials in the desert terrain of Sinai Peninsula. The fifth was the period of the Judges, kings, priests and prophets in the Promised Land. The sixth was the fifty-year period of the Babylonian exile as God's judgment on the unfaithfully sinful nation. Finally, the seventh was the return of the exiles from their Babylonian captivity.

This seven-stage parallelism most probably corresponds to the Priestly writer's seven-day pattern of creation and God's Sabbath rest,¹¹ which at once conserves and transforms everything which was made in the six so-called *days* into a concrete sacred space in which one can contemplate and worship the invisible creator. It is as pointing to a divinely willed

participation in God's own Sabbath that the actual history of Israel seems to complete the in-itself incomplete myth of Adam, whose tragic author pessimistically narrates the history only up to its sixth phase of the exile. Let us now see the six phases in that myth.

The Six Phases in the Adamic Myth

In patterning the life of Jesus on the biblical narratively completed history of Israel, Matthew and Luke sought to round off the in-itself incomplete Adamic myth as well as the image or revelation of God implied in it. But to be able to convince my possibly sceptical readers, I must make explicit the six phases within the myth of Adam and Eve, which correspond up to the tragic sixth phase of the history of Israel. For the already Bible-familiar reader, one would not need to labour the points, but only and simply to list them in their logical narrative sequence. And I shall proceed straight to do it. 1. The making of the garden and of Adam and bringing him into it.¹² 2. The giving of the law, prohibiting the touch or taste of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the drawing of Eve out of the bosom of Adam.¹³ 3. The temptation of Eve through the alien serpent and Eve's succumbing to the serpent in seducing Adam also to partake of her own act.¹⁴ 4. The gardener-God's calling of the tenants and the serpent to account for what they have done versus and in spite of his prohibition.¹⁵ 5. On hearing Adam and Eve, God's pronouncement of the curses on the serpent, the earth, the woman and the man to hard labour, subjection and death.¹⁶ And finally 6, in which the sentence is carried out through a metaphorical cherub angel expelling the couple out of the garden and guarding its entrance, lest they should forcefully break into it again.¹⁷

The Seven-Phased Gospel Narrations

It should be clear from the first list above that there are seven distinctly recognizable phases in the biblical history of Israel. Yet, because the Adamic myth allegorized that history up to its sixth stage only, it seems fair to ask ourselves before listing the phases in the gospels, why Matthew and Luke paralleled their life of Jesus to the seven-staged biblical history, when Mark and John chose to cut off the first two stages of Israel's history from their life of Jesus. The readership and time of writing of the different gospels may adequately account for the inclusion or exclusion of the first two stages of Israel's history in the respective gospels. The intended readers of Matthew and Luke included Jews and Gentiles,¹⁸ while those of Mark were Gentiles.¹⁹ It was important for the Jewish readership of Matthew and Luke to see Jesus as a son of Abraham, even though ironically his own people and nation had plotted and carried out his death. Mark and John surely knew Jesus to be a son of Abraham, and the other Jews also as Abraham's descendants. But as writing to a Gentile or alienated Jewish audience which directed its anger on mainstream Judaism for putting Jesus to death, they were unwilling to own those Jews as the faithful children of Abraham.²⁰ Besides, it was under the Law of Moses rather than the faith of Abraham, that his fellow Jews had Jesus condemned to his death.²¹ The Law marked a different phase in the history of Israel than what the faith of Abraham had initiated. The new

phase began with Israel's Exodus crossing of the Red Sea from Egypt to Sinai. Hence Mark and John opened their life of Jesus with the Exodus, recalling the baptism of Jesus.

Now we may go on descriptively to enumerate the seven stages in the life of Jesus corresponding to those in the biblical history of Israel. The first parallelism is that of Joseph moving with his pregnant wife Mary from Nazareth to Bethlehem in Luke 2: 1-6. It allusively corresponds to Abraham moving with his barren wife Sarah into the Promised Land.²² The angel who appeared to Joseph in dream in Matthew 1: 19-21 parallels the three guest-visitors that Abraham and Sarah had entertained in their tent,²³ before the former imparted the blessing of a son through whom the Promised Land was to be the heritage of all his descendants. Matthew probably turned the thrice repeated promise of progeny to Abraham²⁴ and the three guests of the patriarch into the three angelic dream apparitions to Joseph.

But the message-content relevant to the Christian interpretative context is that, in his continuing analogy with Isaac as a son of the Promise, Jesus was the consummate fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham. In citing Isaiah 7:14, Matthew reinterpreted the divine promise about Abraham's progeny becoming kings²⁵ as a promise made to the dynastic household of David. The Lukan apparition of Gabriel to Mary parallels the promise as made to Sarah in Gen 17: 15-16 and 18: 13-15. But Matthew focuses the promise on Joseph, as the son of David,²⁶ allusively reminding the reader about the promise of a son made to the aged Abraham. Joseph then becomes a son of Abraham, being justified through the Abraham-like obedience of faith²⁷ rather than obedience to the diverse penalty-threatening Mosaic Laws. In making mention of circumcision on the eighth day, Luke 2:21 points to Jesus as Abraham's son,²⁸ through whom both the royal messianic promise made and the sacrifice demanded of Abraham would find their fresh realization. This was how Bethlehem was prophetically symbolic in significance for both Luke and Matthew in pointing to Jesus as the messianic son of Abraham and successor to King David.

Transgression of chronological sequence is inevitable to every synoptic parallelization of history and its fictionalization. We might be justified in identifying this transgression of chronology and context too with what Bultmann felt obliged to rename as mythologization,²⁹ which the postmodernists describe as fictionalisation.³⁰ Matthew enjoyed employing this mytho-poetic licence more than Luke did with his chronologically more orderly history. Unlike Luke, then, Matthew contrived allusively to fuse his contemporary church history not only into his infancy narrative about Jesus,³¹ he also succeeded in connecting both to Israel's inevitable entry into Egypt, leading to the subsequent slavery and the likewise inevitable theology of liberation from that bondage. This was how Matthew rendered patriarch Joseph and the liberating prophet Moses the typologically pre-cursive role-models of Jesus' infancy and adult life alike.³² In the same process, he could consciously insinuate Jesus and his church as posing a threat to the

sovereignty of all other ruling powers such as the Jewish priesthood, Herod the tyrant and the ruthless imperial Roman Caesars. Thus sending the holy family into Egypt through the message of a dream-angel was Matthew's allusively midrashic device for his second step in paralleling Jesus' life to Jewish history under Moses as law-giver and subject to the laws.

The second parallelism was Matthew's introduction of the dream angel of Joseph the second and third time in 2: 13 and 19. Its significance for Matthew was in allusively paralleling the life of Jesus and of his persecuted church to that of Israel as liberated from its bondage to the Egyptian Pharaoh. This device helped Matthew to throw on Moses and his laws the ironic light and colour of the tyrannical laws of the Egyptian Pharaoh himself.³³

The third phase of the parallelism was the even more ingenious scene of the temptation, in which the synoptic authors introduced both the devil and angels.³⁴ They were the synoptic authors' additional allusive device to compare and contrast the life of Jesus and of his early church as subservient to rather than rebellious against the Mosaic Laws even unto his death on the cross.³⁵ But Israel had broken with Egyptian slavery when it could no longer tolerate its tyranny. In the same way, it was with the Jewish authorities putting Jesus to death, while disowning blame for it, and continuing to persecute the disciples also for their subjectively justified accusation, that the followers of Jesus began to declare themselves free from the Law of Moses.³⁶ They did so by metaphorically declaring Jesus to be the new Moses and giver of the law of loving mercy³⁷ and grace³⁸ rather than of freedom-negating coercive threats of death.³⁹

The fourth phase of the parallelism consisted in the synoptic Luke and Matthew organically reconstructing the public life of Jesus as corresponding to that of Israel's post-settlement independent history in the Promised Land.⁴⁰ The latter was the period of the rule of prophetic judges or warriors such as Joshua, Elijah, Elisha and Samuel, followed by the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon. All of them were persons representatively occupying positions governed under the laws of Moses. But even while listing Jesus as the linear successor to Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Samuel, David and Solomon, the synoptic authors deliberately represented him as greater than Moses, Elijah, Samuel, David⁴¹ and Solomon,⁴² because they saw him as more than and different from any Israeli prophet, king or priest. He was namely the son of God,⁴³ affirming all who experientially understood it also as equal sons and daughters of God.⁴⁴ This was a claim of high stake and risk in its socio-political and religio-historical context. But Jesus was prepared to take the risk as being in accord with God's will. This would bring us to the synoptic narration of Jesus' life to the fifth phase of Israel's history.

The fifth phase in the parallelism was in the negation of both Israeli and Christian messianism.⁴⁵ In Israeli history, it consisted in its tragic exile into slavery to Babylon under king Nebuchadnezzar. Speaking from our standpoint in time with our own knowledge of subsequent events, we must

say that the fifth phase of that history meant the end to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. When the synoptic evangelists paralleled it to the life of Jesus, it historically turned out into both the popular level belief and the official-level mockery of the Christian claim about Jesus as Christ,⁴⁶ the anointed son of God, like and parallel to Caesar himself.⁴⁷

The sixth stage in the gospels corresponding to the mythologized Israeli history is the carrying out of the sentence of death on the messiah through his expulsion outside the walls of the national historically holy city. The evangelists represent the Jewish religious leadership denouncing Jesus before the Roman governor as a self-proclaimed king of the Jews. Though the evangelists state that Pilate, the Roman governor, did not take that accusation seriously,⁴⁸ their statement stands self-contradicted when they assert that that was the precise charge he got written on top of the stake⁴⁹ for which he ordered Jesus to be crucified. While the Jewish religious leadership meant only to mock at Jesus as the unacceptably pretentious messiah, Pilate made a mockery of the whole Jewish hope for the restoration of their own sacred kings and kingdoms.

It was theologically to refute the historically attempted frustration of Israeli and Christian messianic hope that the evangelists introduced the seventh phase of parallelism in their gospels to the completed Israeli history. Contrary to the way the Adamic myth ends, the factual history consisted in Israel's return to the gifted land from all the lands of their exile.⁵⁰ I therefore interpret the resurrection and post-resurrection narratives of the gospels as the evangelists' midrashic reconstructions made in parallelism to the biblically narrated history of this return of the exiles from their Babylonian captivity.

Since Luke speaks of the risen Jesus himself pointing to the prophets as predicting his resurrection,⁵¹ I venture to infer that the evangelists reconstructed their resurrection narratives by using biblical Midrashim as prophecies of the future. Though several texts from the Bible could be cited as generically reconstructive midrashic sources of these narratives,⁵² I see Ezek 36:16-36 and 37:1-14 in particular as more concretely specific referents respectively to the land of Israel as the lost and regained garden of Eden and the lands of their exile as the tombs rendered empty through the return of the exiles to their sacredly native land.

Ezek 36:33-35 are particularly supportive of my interpretation of the Adamic myth as the allegorized history of Israel. Hence I shall quote the text, highlighting those words which reinforce my interpretation. "The Lord Yahweh says this: On the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will repopulate the cities and cause the ruins to be rebuilt. Waste land, once desolate for every passer-by to see, will now be farmed again. Everyone will say: *This land, so recently a waste, is now like a garden of Eden, and the ruined cities once abandoned and leveled to the ground are now strongholds with people living in them.*

Since Ezek 37:1-14 have served as the midrashic biblical source of the evangelists' narrations about the empty tomb of Jesus, I shall quote at least some of those verses: "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel, they are saying, 'Our bones are dried up, our hope has gone, we are as good as dead. So prophesy, say to them, The Lord says this, "I am now going to open your graves; I mean to raise you from your graves, my people, and lead you back to the soil of Israel, and you will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and raise you from your graves, my people. And I will put my spirit in you, and you will live, and I shall resettle you on your own soil, and you will know that I, the Lord, have said and done this."

The Babylonian exile of the rulers and nobility of Judah was the abrupt end of that kingdom. But the exile or even death of one king of a realm need not annihilate all hope of that kingdom's restoration. If one person ventured to lay down one's life for a value like the territory or people that he or she believed in, many more would be prepared to believe in and commit their lives to the same value. Therefore the putting of Jesus to death because he claimed to be the Christ could not kill or root out all faith in Christhood as a universal possibility and invitation to all. It was to emphasize and reinforce this challenged hope that the Christian creed cited the midrashic Jewish scriptures themselves as the unfailing historical source of its belief that, on the third day from his death, Jesus rose again from the dead.⁵³

Conclusion

Whoever believed in the scriptures would also believe in the resurrection, and not only of Jesus, but also of all the dead.⁵⁴ The implied reason was that there was no total or absolute death to any life, since it continued to live either physically or spiritually in some other lives at the least and thus to be remembered, to influence many more lives than when it was alive in its own body. Death then was the transitory passage into a potentially ever-lasting life. Death therefore could be neither final nor ever-lasting, but life alone must be, because God lives and is graciously life-giving without end. While its form and abode are changed, life itself is never ended.⁵⁵

The Adamic myth had ended the history of Israel on a more pessimistic note than its actuality, because its author completed its narration before its actual course was complete. After all, Israel returned even from its prophetically threatened curse of exile to the directly and divinely promised land of the Garden of Eden. Hence the Adamic myth needed its happy-ending corrective from the Christological gospels of the reconciling and reconciled God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ as also the Father of all who believed in Jesus as the son of God. This was the probable theological reason why the synoptic evangelists had Jesus promising paradise the same day to the repentant thief, who had been crucified by his side.⁵⁶ Mollifying Psalms 68:18 and 110:1, it was as vicarious intercessor for sinners with God that they saw him metaphorically as ascended to and seated at God's right hand.⁵⁷

If God himself was reconciled with sinners, the ethical demand of that metaphor was that humans had to be reconciled with their fellow-humans,

who had sinned against them.⁵⁸ Theological metaphors were intended ethically to transform socio-political and economic history. But this Christian attitude would seem to have veered round and wholly changed and hardened into its own negation, when it went on to speak of Jesus as the judge to come at the end of the world.⁵⁹ Even in doing so, what it did was to fall back upon and get stuck with phases 4, 5 and 6 of the Adamic myth. But as the scope of this article ends here, we have to reserve the rest for fuller treatment in some other text and context.

Endnotes

- ¹ Rom 5:12- 20; 1 Co 15: 21-22, 45-57. It is interesting to note Paul Ricoeur's meaningful observation that Paul roused the Adamic theme from its lethargy. In contrasting between the "old man" and the "new man," he set up the figure of Adam as the inverse of that of Christ, called the second Adam. Cf. *The Symbolism of Evil* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 238
- ² Ignatius Jesudasan, *Genesis: Myth of Manifold Meanings* (New Delhi: Global Vision Publishing House, 2008).
- ³ As Luke records it, we find Paul affirming this at Athens. Cf. Acts 17: 26. It is relevant in this context to quote Paul Ricoeur when he writes, "every effort to save the letter of the story (of Adam and Eve) as a true history is vain and hopeless. What we know, as men of science, about the beginnings of humankind leaves no place for such a primordial event "as to where and when Adam ate the forbidden fruit. *The Symbolism of Evil*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p.233.
- ⁴ Ricoeur's comment on the derivation of original sin from the Adamic myth is trenchant: "The harm that has been done to souls, during the centuries of Christianity, first by the literal interpretation of the story of Adam, and then by the confusion of this myth, treated as history, with later speculations, principally Augustinian, about original sin, will never be adequately told. In asking the faithful to confess belief in this mythico-speculative mass and to accept it as a self-sufficient explanation, the theologians have unduly required a sacrificial intellectus where what was needed was to awaken believers to a symbolic superintelligence of their actual condition." *Op. cit.*, p. 239.
- ⁵ This is the theme of the solemn Easter vigil's liturgical hymn called the Exultet.
- ⁶ The first person to take up the theme of "recapitulation" and develop it was St Irenaeus of Lyons, a great second-century Father of the Church. (Against any fragmentation of salvation history, against any division of the Old and New Covenants, against any dispersion of God's revelation and action, Irenaeus extols the one Lord, Jesus Christ, who in the Incarnation sums up in himself the entire history of salvation, humanity and all creation: "He, as the eternal King, recapitulates all things in himself" (*Adversus Haereses*, III, 21, 9). Assuming this primacy in himself and giving himself as head to the Church, he draws all things to himself" (*Adversus Haereses*, III, 16, 6). This coming together of all being in Christ, the centre of time and space, gradually takes place in history, as the obstacles, the resistance of sin and the Evil One, are overcome. To illustrate this movement, Irenaeus refers to the difference, already presented by St Paul, between Christ and Adam (cf. Rom 5: 12-21)
- ⁷ Gen 1:3 – 2:4.
- ⁸ While quoting from Wright (*Literary Genre Midrash*, 74), when he says, "Rabbinic Midrash is a literature concerned with the Bible; it is a literature about a

- literature," Raymond Brown points with examples to the occurrence within the Bible, of what Renee Bloch and Wright have classified as Midrash. Cf. *The Birth of the Messiah*, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1979), p. 559.
- ⁹ Ricoeur asserts that Paul retrospectively reconstructed the figure of the mythical Adam into a historical person from the historical model figure of Christ. In other words, he affirms that Christology shaped Adamology, rather than Adamology shaping Christology. *Op. cit.*, p. 238. Basing myself on Jacob Neusner, I concede that every midrashic illustration sheds its re-interpretative new light on an older text or figure. But I also postulate an older text to inspire its later illustration as the fulfillment of a parabolically couched prophecy. In other words, I demand from what source text Jesus was conceived as Christ, if Adam had not been conceived in that mould already. Cf. *What Is Midrash?* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1987), pp. 7-9.
- ¹⁰ Frederic Jameson, 'Postmodernism and the Video Text' in Derek Attridge et al. (eds.), *The Linguistics of Writing* (1987), cited in Christopher Butler, *Postmodernism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, Indian Edition, New Delhi 2007), p. 112.
- ¹¹ Gen 1:3-31
- ¹² Gen 2:7-15
- ¹³ Gen 2:16-23
- ¹⁴ Gen 3:1-6
- ¹⁵ Gen 3:8-11
- ¹⁶ Gen 3:12-19
- ¹⁷ Gen 3:22-24.
- ¹⁸ "The most plausible interpretation is that Matthew was addressed to a once strongly Jewish Christian church that had become increasingly Gentile in composition." Cf. Raymond Brown: *An Introduction to the New Testament*, (Doubleday, 1997), p. 213. It is likely that the addressees of Luke's gospel were connected with the places of Paul's proclamation of the gospel message. The way Luke's infancy gospel differs from Matthew's suggests that it could not have been written from and for the same church location. R. Brown, *Op. cit.*, pp. 269-270.
- ¹⁹ Mark's was "a Gospel addressed to Gentiles." This is concluded to from the fact that this Gospel's envisioned audience consisted of Greek-speakers who did not know Aramaic. Either the author or the audience or both lived in an area where Latin was used and had influenced Greek vocabulary. R. Brown, *Op. cit.*, p. 163.
- ²⁰ The ethical dualism of the Qumran sect reflected in the Dead Sea scrolls and the fourth Gospel point to its origin among Jewish Christians, who were being expelled from the synagogue. Cf. Delbert Burkett, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 215-216.
- ²¹ Jn 19:7.
- ²² Gen 12: 1- 9.
- ²³ Gen 18: 9-15
- ²⁴ Gen 15: 4-5; 17:15-16; 18:10.
- ²⁵ Gen 17:6

²⁶ Matt 1: 20

²⁷ Gen 15: 6

²⁸ Gen 17: 9- 14.

²⁹ Cf. Jesus Christ and Mythology and New Testament and Mythology.

³⁰ As Patricia Waugh says in *Metafiction* (1984), "Writing history is a fictional act, ranging events conceptually through language to form a world-model, but history itself is invested like fiction, with interrelating plots which appear to interact independently of human design." Cf. C. Butler, *Op. cit.* p. 72 This was partly what Bultmann meant by mythology in the Scriptures, since in such cases, fictional narrative is allowed to dominate in the belief that history is another narrative, subject to our desires and stereotypical prejudices, inevitably organized, according to the fictional stereotypes of plot current within the society from which it emanates (*Ibid* p. 73). Hence the story they tell and the characters they create never formally existed outside the mind of their authors. If they pretend to know their characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because they have assumed some of the vocabulary and voice, which was conventionally accepted at the time of the story. In this sense and style, the authors stand next to God. They may not know all, but try to pretend that they do. They are writing transposed or metaphorical autobiographies, by living in the houses they have imaginatively built into their fiction. Thus the God of the Bible and the Christ of the gospels are their respective human authors in the disguise of the divine. The resulting paradox of characters, who presume to be free, whereas authors and readers know them in retrospect to have been predetermined, generates any amount of self-conscious reflexivity, relativism and skepticism that postmodernists could want. (*Ibid* p.71)

³¹ I have tried to show elsewhere that that Matthew 2 is a Midrash on Luke's Acts 12.

³² Cf. R. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah*, p. 36.

³³ In this kind of irony, midrashic New Testament authors could be placed with Richard Rorty's postmodernist irony. Such ironists, doubting the truth of any final vocabulary, and realizing that others have a different one, do not see their vocabulary as closer to reality than others'. Such a person "is not in the business of supplying himself and his fellow ironists with a method, a platform or a rationale. He is just doing the same thing that all ironists do attempting autonomy. He is just trying to get out from under inherited contingencies and make his own contingencies, get out from under an old final vocabulary and fashion one which will be all his own. The generic trait of ironists is that they do not hope to have their doubts about their final vocabularies settled by something larger than themselves. This means that their criterion for resolving doubts, their criterion of private perfection, is autonomy rather than affiliation to a power other than themselves." Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (1989), cited by C. Butler, *Op. cit.*, pp. 118-119.

³⁴ Matt 4:1 and 4:11; Mk 1:12; Lu 4: 1- 2

³⁵ The Lord's Supper and Peter's speeches in Acts, particularly in 2: 23, 3: 13-15, and 4:10 lay the same stress as the Passion narratives in the gospels do on the violently imposed death of Jesus as marking the point of no return of the followers of Jesus to the old Jewish fold except through the repentance of that priestly nation as a whole.

³⁶ This was the implication of the decision arrived at in the council of Jerusalem according to Acts 15:28-29

³⁷ Matt 5:7.

³⁸ Jn 1:17

³⁹ Deut 30: 15-20

⁴⁰ Josh 13: 7- 20: 45

⁴¹ Matt 22: 41-45.

⁴² Lk 11:31.

⁴³ Lk 1: 31, 35; Jo 1: 1, 14.

⁴⁴ Jn 1: 12-13. Both the Lukan angel's words to Mary about the Holy Spirit and John's comment about the believers in Jesus as the son of God need not be interpreted as opposing the spiritual generation to bodily beings.

⁴⁵ This is what Luke seems to put in the prayer of the first Christians of Jerusalem after the release of Peter and John. Cf. Acts 4: 23-31.

⁴⁶ This was very likely what the evangelists meant to indicate, when they reported the priests as midrashically insulting Jesus on his cross with veiled allusion to Wisdom 2:12-24. Cf. Matt 27:41-43; Mk 15:31-32; Lk 23:35.

⁴⁷ This was the most obvious ironic meaning of Pilate's soldiers insulting Jesus with a crown of thorns in Matt 27: 27-30, Mk 15: 16- 20 and Jo 19: 2-3; and Jo 19: 15, in which the evangelist reports the chief priests telling Pilate, "The only king we have is the Emperor." Luke 23: 36-37 locates the soldiers' mockery after the crucifixion.

⁴⁸ Matthew's remark in 27: 18, that Pilate knew very well that the Jewish authorities had handed Jesus over to him because they were jealous of him, must substantiate this qualification.

⁴⁹ Matt 27: 37; Mk 15: 26; Lk 23: 38; Jn 19: 19 -22.

⁵⁰ Ezra 1: 1-11.

⁵¹ Lu 24: 25-27.

⁵² In Acts 2: 25-28, Luke cites Peter quoting Psalm 16:8-11 for this purpose.

⁵³ Words of the Nicene/Apostles' Creed.

⁵⁴ This is the midrashically typological inference, which Paul draws, in 1Cor 15: 12-16, from the primitive Christian proclamation that Christ rose from the dead. In Lu 16: 29-31, we find Jesus stressing belief in prophecy as a precondition to belief in the resurrection.

⁵⁵ These words, taken from the Preface to the Mass for the dead, are a reiteration of the Christian worldview.

⁵⁶ Lu 23: 43.

⁵⁷ Mk 16: 19-20.

⁵⁸ Cf. the Lord's Prayer in Matt 6: 12-15.

⁵⁹ We shall demonstrate this in a short but last and separate chapter in this book, as the seventh step, created by the Christian evangelists, to midrashically echo the Jewish prophetic spirit of revengeful justice, which the Adamic myth dramatically represents as the judgment of Yahweh on his disobedient human creatures. The (postmodernist) irony built into the process is that the gospels un-characteristically transfigure the meek and humble Jesus into the irascible image of the God of the Law in the Adamic myth. We shall also have to account for its causes or reasons.