

# PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

As was the case with the two previous versions of this volume, which I worked with the late David L. Dungan to produce, it is my hope in this third edition to stretch the context in which readers of the New Testament Gospels often view the early church's portrayal of Jesus of Nazareth. We reject the well-known concept that the early church's literature arose against a "background" of Jewish and Greco-Roman literature. On the contrary, the nascent Christian movement was fully part of the cultural ebb and flow that marks what we call the Hellenistic period of the greater Mediterranean culture. Further, it is our purpose to present documents illustrating that the early church was more diverse than even the variety shown by the four canonical Gospels, the New Testament epistles, and the Apocalypse of John.

Further, we would argue that the early Christian movement's writings demonstrate that the nascent Church's beliefs were not only "something new" in the first centuries, but that they also participated in the cultural upheavals that permeated the so-called Greco-Roman world. It was this that allowed the church not only to exist in that culture, but eventually to prevail. The church was a Greco-Roman phenomenon, accompanied by unique and powerful elements within the Christian movement. These factors allowed the faith to grow and eventually to create a Holy Roman Empire.

Although David Dungan and I translated many of the texts in our collection, we have had great help and support from colleagues: the Rev. Dr. Boyd L. Daniels, for his translation of the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, which he made on the basis of a fresh collation of the most important manuscripts; Professor Elaine Pagels, Princeton University, for her very helpful introduction and commentary on the Gospel of Philip and her insights on the Gospels of Judas and Mary Magdalene; Professor Thomas B.

Curtis, Princeton University, for his translation of Cicero's "Dream of Scipio"; Professor Ed Sanders, Duke University, for translating the rabbinic parables and writing an introduction for them; and Mr. David Peabody, Wesleyan University, Lincoln, Nebraska, for his textcritical notes and translations of portions of the *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus* 1381. We also wish to thank the editors of Judaica Press, New York, for their kind permission to include Philip Blackman's translation and notes of *Mishnah Sotah* 9.15.

In this third edition, I have added two newly discovered ancient gospels: The Gospel of Mary Magdala and, perhaps in a most surprising recent discovery, The Gospel of Judas Iscariot. For these additions we must thank Professor Karen King of Harvard University (Gospel of Mary Magdalene) and Professor April de Conick of Rice University (Gospel of Judas Iscariot).

I have recast the introduction to this volume, and attempted to correct several of the sins of commission and omission that we made in the earlier editions. I reiterate our thanks to those who kindly pointed out many of the infelicities that appeared in our first effort. Our indebtedness to our other friends and colleagues for their encouragement and helpful suggestions is very real to me, as it was to David, even if I cannot mention all their names here. But in particular I again single out Professor Helmut Koester, to whom we both owed the inspiration for this collection, received during our graduate school days at Harvard Divinity School, and Professor F. Stanley Lusby of the Department of Religious Studies, University of Tennessee at Knoxville, who assisted and nurtured our labors through the years.

As a third edition must be built upon the labors of the first two, I continue to be grateful for our sensitive and affectionate friends, Norman Hjelm and Ingallil Hjelm, who were our original editorial guides. They directed us through the maze of an ungainly pile of texts to the production of an actual book.

It must be emphasized that this third edition is as much the work of David Dungan as were the first two. The first person plural in the above paragraphs is not an "editorial *we*." David's efforts on this collection were only a small portion of the great contributions he made to our understanding of the early church and its literature. His study on the history of the canon of the New Testament, on the biblical materials in the time of the emperor Constantine, and the insights in his many published technical papers and presentations to professional gatherings are there for all to see. What is most painful to me is the loss of his life-long friendship, his constant (albeit often delightfully acerbic) attitude toward the study of the New Testament and its environs, and his support of my work and that of his other friends and colleagues—these are deeply and lovingly missed.

One important format change has been made in this new edition. Portions of the primary texts presented here are summarized, rather than translated. These are marked off in brackets, and preceded by the tag, *Summary*.

The third edition of this work remains dedicated to Anne Dungan and to my late wife, Florence Macleod Cartlidge (who succumbed to a decades-long struggle with

renal disease in May, 2002). Florie somehow found the loving strength to type for us, to devote herself to her family, and to delight in the initial publication of this book, all through years of her struggles with renal dialysis and two renal transplants. Florie taught her family about the inseparability of love and courage.