



Does challenging superstition or faith protect people?  
Is it mistaken to support organised religion in membership or donations?

If people do good because they are human, not because God prompts them, is it right to risk giving God any credit when they alone own their good?



## BARBARA THIERING'S JESUS THE MAN

In 1992, Doubleday published one of the most bizarre Jesus books ever. Well maybe except for the gospels! But the story of the life of Jesus in the book is actually sane compared to what we read in the gospels. Called Jesus the Man, it was written by Professor Barbara Thiering of the University of Sidney.

Thiering researched the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran and claimed she used the codes in them to unlock the real story of Jesus from the gospels and Acts. She maintained that the gospel stories about Jesus are false and were never meant to be taken literally. The literal story is hidden in jargon and words that mean something different from what they seem to mean.

So she claimed that the stories about Jesus are false and were never meant to be taken literally. For example, the gospels mention the Mount of Olives. Thiering says that this is not a mountain at all but a monastery at Qumran that bore this nickname.

Thiering cannot give a single convincing reason or even a semi-reason why Jesus should be connected to the Qumran community or the Essenes or whatever. Who says that all the scrolls were Essene ones anyway? Surely their library was not that narrow! Even if there were a connection it does not mean it is relevant to what the New Testament says about him. Jesus had overlaps with the Essenes but he did with a hundred other schools of thoughts too. The differences mean he cannot be slotted into any of them specifically.

Regardless, the true story of Jesus according to her is this. He was not born of a virgin. He did not do miracles. He was not nailed on the cross outside of the city of Jerusalem. He was nailed at Qumran. Though crucified, he did not die on the cross. He did not supernaturally rise again. He did not go up into Heaven. He married Mary Magdalene and divorced her. He did not die until after 64 AD.

If the gospels really had been a code then why did nobody near to the time they appeared say they were? Why didn't the Jews invent a code for it that showed Jesus up in a very bad light?

Why didn't the Jews say the gospels were a code?

Why hide information in codes when it is not inflammatory and especially when it isn't a big secret or even very important? Thiering expects us to believe that the parable of the Prodigal Son (Chapter 11) is not a parable under the surface but gives real history. The story was told by Jesus about a father who lost his son who went astray and who came back and was welcomed despite how he treated his father. She says father was Simon the Essene who was the Angel Gabriel who instructed Mary before her betrothal. This is sheer nonsense. If the gospels are myth as she says, then there is something wrong if myths about Jesus teaching parables that had no hidden meaning couldn't be told. She speaks as if no parable could be told without stupidly hiding a story that didn't need to be hidden.

Incredibly, Simon Magus who never appears in the gospel at all but briefly in the book of Acts is turned into a character who is talked about as much as Jesus in the coded version. Why would the gospels hide such an important figure in codes? Why would they not hide Jesus as much?

The gospels cannot mention Jews at all. She takes Jews to mean a person who heads circumcised Gentiles who live like ordinary Jews (page 540, Corgi Edition). You can make anything mean what you wish with nonsense like that. Why hide that person?

Thiering expects us to believe that events like the death of Joseph (page 89, Corgi Edition) needed to be hidden. And the marriage of Jesus to Mary Magdalene!

Why hide the story of Jesus letting the uncircumcised non-Jews in a tale that seems to say he turned water into wine (page 122)? Why hide the story of people having to walk through water in some kind of religious rite in the tale of Jesus causing a catch of fish (page 124)? Why hide the story of Jesus going up to a high platform to pray in the story of the ascension?

She kids herself that the story of Jesus on the surface reading of the gospels which ascribes supernatural feats to him was created to satisfy the need for myth. They could have used a simpler code but they did not which makes it all so absurd. Jesus could have told his real story and so could the gossellers and they could have satisfied the myth crave another way. Besides, they couldn't have had that great of a need for myth that they would engineer so many myths about Jesus. Why him? The story she has of a Jesus who isn't that interesting would certainly not inspire a taste for fervent myth making.

She says that the gospels code shows that Jesus survived the cross and did not rise again. Jesus passed into a coma on the cross and didn't die and was revived later. She says Paul was aware of that but for the sake of myth he started going on about a Jesus who died and rose again. If Jesus had not died on the cross then Thiering is wrong to say that Paul knew that. Paul having clearly said Jesus died is taken to indicate he didn't have a literal meaning in mind. His epistles preach about the death of the Lord and the epistles are older than the gospels or her speculations. She thinks that the Book of Acts secretly records lots of meetings between Paul and the unresurrected for never dead Jesus his boss. The surface account says these were visions of a man who rose from the dead. No matter what she says, Paul is a witness that there was no coded story-telling that became the gospels. She pretends that the evidence against her such as Paul's testimony is not meant literally but is symbolism too. You can make anything mean anything you want if you write off evidence like that. Thiering says that "Jews" is a single person, the head of circumcised Gentiles (page 540).

Joseph of Arimathea is James the brother of Jesus.

Thunder is Jonathan Annas after he became pope. He was the Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable which disguised history as a parable. In the New Testament he is the true High Priest and appears only in John 18:13 where he questions Jesus who had been arrested by those who hoped to get him crucified. So when Jesus called James and John sons of thunder (Mark 13:17) it is supposed to mean that they became associates of Annas (page 411). If she could she would claim that he was their father but she cannot do that for history is against her so she turns sons into a figurative thing. Anybody could find codes by making some words figurative. She must have used some words in their literal sense to be able to work out the code so she is arbitrary. In John 12:29 Jesus prays to God who spoke to him and some people hearing the voice said that it was thunder. Thiering contends that Jesus was praying to Jonathan Annas who had spoken to him. But if Thiering has the code broken right, John would have written, "Jesus spoke to the thunder". The way John wrote shows that Thiering's authority is really imagination. So God must stand for Jonathan Annas. Could you imagine Jesus saying: "You shall love God with all your heart and soul and mind", if it did? When Annas is one of the most minor of the New Testament characters it is impossible to see how she could have worked out that he was thunder even if the Dead Sea Scrolls use thunder as a code word for pope or High Priest. Jesus was believed to have been a High Priest so thunder could be about him or anyone. And how was the author supposed to write about literal thunder with a system like that? If there had been a code the author would have mentioned Jonathan Annas by name before calling him thunder and then given some hint that thunder was his nickname. That is the way intelligible codes are made. He could have written that, "Annas was High Priest and he was called the man of thunder." But the references to thunder come before Annas is even mentioned so it is probably literal thunder!

If thunder or God is a code word then we would not know when a gospel meant real thunder or God. Thiering says that when Jesus prayed to God. God's voice not God thundered. Yet she says thunder means Annas. How could it when the surface narrative says that the voice was thunder? On page 115, we read that Simon Magus inherited the Baptist's title the Voice. So why does Thiering deny that Simon Magus and the Baptist were really one person, Jonathan Annas?

Thiering claims that the gospels are mainly about two men: Jesus and Simon Magus who we don't meet until we come to the book of Acts. This is ludicrous. She says the Christians did not like him so why didn't they give his name all the time instead of creating pseudonyms such as the Leper and Lazarus?

It is true that codes were used in the Dead Sea Scrolls. However, they were used by the sect of the scrolls to apply ancient writings to their own times. Today, Catholics do the same. They say that Moses parting the waters to let Israel go through to safety pictures Jesus saving his people through the sacrament of water baptism. But never were the codes used to hide information in a book. They worked on old books but to try and hide what Thiering says the gossellers tried would only lead to confusion and a code that could not be interpreted. For example, if lightning was a person in the New Testament then who was said in the phrase Jesus said or who was represented by the word parable? Thiering has not thought of this.

She even makes a fool of herself to the degree that she says that the word crowds referred to King Agrippa I! (page 565).

Who would want to hide the everyday, mundane, and needless information she thinks she sees in Acts 10 (page 353)? Who would even want to record it?

If the gospels were written to fit a code then why are they readable? To fit the code everything in them would have to be made to measure with the result that there would be senseless sentences in it everywhere.

In John 1, we read that Jesus was the word and the word was God since he became flesh. Why does Thiering then not argue

that God is Jesus and not Jonathan Annas or that Jesus is Jonathan Annas? At least she would have a little evidence from the text behind her then.

There is not a shred of evidence that the codes of Qumran apply to the gospels. Why didn't they tell us to study them in order to understand them?

Thiering claims that a passage in the Damascus Document which speaks of a controversy about polygamists tells us that Lydia, who her Jesus wed after divorcing Mary, was a virgin though it does no such thing. This woman is a crank. She even says that Jesus appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls though there is no reason to believe that. Nearly all good scholars have no time for her ultra-thin arguments.

It is impossible to see how Thiering can be sure that the Gospels are literal where they say that Jesus was crucified and nailed on the cross by Pilate's orders. She even says that the sour wine Jesus was given was real wine with poison in it. She tells us that Jesus was condemned to death at his trial because the code in Luke 23:20,21 and John 19:8-12 tells us that no bribe was offered to get him released. The verses never mention a bribe so she is mixing the code with what the text says. It would be impossible to unravel the puzzle if the code is that badly done.

How does she know that there were not other scrolls with the code that was supposedly used in the New Testament?

Thiering's evidence that her code is right and exists is unacceptable.

John says that the notice Pilate put over Jesus crucified could be read from the city of Jerusalem. Thiering says that this proves that Jerusalem was the code word for the monastery of Qumran for it could not be read from Jerusalem but from the monastery so Jesus was nailed in the monastery grounds (page 141). But it could have been a very big notice and if Jesus was crucified just outside the city was all he could have been close enough to the little city of Jerusalem or if she is right that it can't be seen from the walls of Jerusalem then that could have been a gospel mistake. You can't use what might be mistake as evidence for some outlandish new hypothesis.

Thiering says that Acts 11:27-30 and 12:25 have Paul going from Jerusalem (sic) to Jerusalem (page 56). In her view, this means that he went from Qumran to Jerusalem. She assumes Qumran was nicknamed Jerusalem. She states that the code proves there is no contradiction. But Acts does not say that Paul did this at all. Thiering assumes that when the elders of Jerusalem gave money through and by Paul's hands that Paul must have been there.

Thiering says that Mark said that Jesus went by boat to Gerasa and when he stepped off it he was there but it was a sixty kilometres from where he would have dismounted (page 56). But Mark does not say that Jesus stepped off the boat into Gerasa. He was just in the region of it. Thiering is lying for she wants to say that it's not an error but evidence that the real Gerasa was not meant but that Gerasa was a code for something else. But there was no error. If there had been a code it would be logical to say Gerasa One for the real Gerasa and Gerasa Two for the encoded or nicknamed one. And if there had been an apparent error that could be solved by the code hypothesis that would not mean that the hypothesis was right for the error might be just a real error

Thiering thinks she sees another error when Jesus got off for a spot in the desert by boat and the crowds who have to trek around the sea to get there beat him to it (page 56). Hasn't she heard of dallying? This error is supposed to be in Mark 6:31-33. Mark says that Jesus and co were recognised on the way which started the crowds running to where they thought they were going. That explains why Jesus and the disciples would take their time in order to relax.

Thiering says the errors are not errors when the code is cracked. When the errors are not errors that says one thing only about the code. And that is that there is no code. She is wrong to say the gospels fit the geography of Qumran and not Palestine. The gospels say tremendously little about geography and what they do say is so short and sometimes value that it could fit any area at all if you want to say that the place names are not the real places at all.

Thiering says that when Jesus told his apostles in Mark that he was hiding the true interpretation of the parables from everybody but them that it proves that there was a code. But she sees codes all over the gospels and not just the parables. Mark's Jesus says he hides the stuff in case the people will understand but Matthew says that he tells parables not to hide anything because it is their own fault if they do not see what he means. Thiering is wrong again. If I wanted to create a Jesus code I would focus on Mark alone for it was the first gospel and I could suppose that the other gospels were products by those who mistook the Mark code for real history.

It is recommended that the chapter on Thiering in the wonderful, Who Was Jesus? be read.

Jesus the Man is not evidence that Jesus existed but that people are still inventing their own Jesus just like the four evangelists and Paul did.

Her latest book on Jesus which says he wrote the Book of Revelation which is really about his later life is doubly silly for

the Book of Revelation is written in a very different and fantastical and impenetrable way unlike the gospels and Acts. If there was really a code the Book of Revelation would have to be written in the same sober matter of fact way for changing the style would place the code beyond any hope of being unravelled. There is no evidence that Jesus wrote Revelation at all and she ignores the fact that it was written too late for Jesus to have had anything to do with it.

Jesus the Man tries to give us a Jesus of history. It fails. It is fantastical nonsense though sane compared to the gospels. The gospel writers never suffered for what they wrote and they never identified themselves. Thiering did. I'd rather believe in her gospel than in the four gospels.

Jesus the Man, Barbara Thiering, Corgi, London, 1993

Who Was Jesus? NT Wright, SPCK, London, 1993