

BARBARA THIERING'S INTERPRETATION OF JESUS' LIFE

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Die doel van die artikel is om argumente aan te bied om Thiering se bewering te falsifiseer dat die Nuwe Testament, die Dooie See-rolle, die geskryfte van Josephus, ens. die werklike geskiedenis van die historiese Jesus openbaar. Haar gebruik van pesher tegniek word ook krities bespreek. Dit word aangetoon dat Thiering se pesher metode 'n miskonsepsie is van die pesher wat in die Qumran kommentare gebruik is en dat sy die belangrikheid van pesher as 'n metode van teksinterpretasie oorskakel. Vervolgens word Thiering se poging om Christendom en Essenisme gelyk te stel, sowel as die sogenaamde ooreenkomste tussen die Qumrangemeenskap en vroeë Christendom, evalueer.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to present arguments to disprove Thiering's claim that documents like the New Testament, Dead Sea Scrolls, the writings of Josephus, etc. might reveal the actual historical Jesus. Her use of the pesher technique is also discussed critically. It is shown that Thiering's pesher method is a misconception of the pesher used in the Qumran commentaries and that she overestimated the importance of pesher as a method of text interpretation. The evaluation of Thiering's attempt to equate Christianity and Essenism, as well as the so-called similarities between the Qumran community and early Christianity, will follow logically.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

For twenty years Barbara Thiering, a full-time author, researcher and former member of the University of Sydney's School of Divinity, researched the Dead Sea Scrolls and related sources in order to reconstruct in three books a new historical interpretation of the life of Jesus (Thiering 1979, 1981, 1983). This research remained unnoticed. During 1987 a group of Thiering's former students

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decided that the only way to bring her hypothesis to the notice of a wide range of people would be to produce a television documentary (Star 1991:9). Supported by the Australian ABC this work was undertaken by the Beyond International Group, producers of the popular television series *Beyond 2000*. The broadcast of the television documentary *The Riddle of the Dead Sea Scrolls* on Palm Sunday 1990 roused considerable interest. A summary of responses on the screening of the documentary was published by Star (1991) along similar lines to the collection of letters and articles in the book *The Honest to God Debate* after John Robinson presented his views during 1963. The reaction fluctuates from *an academic mumbo-jumbo which, regrettably, might easily take in the uneducated to a Jesus which emerges from her investigations as greater than he appeared before*. The documentary was followed up by two bestsellers (Thiering 1992, 1996). In South Africa the documentary was screened twice by the SABC since October 1993. The public prominence of the debate was also stimulated by the work of Eisenman (1983, 1985, 1996) and the popularisation of and expansion on these ideas by Baigent and Leigh (1991) (cf. Berger 1993:20-39; Laubscher & Naudé 1994:263-265).

1.2 Thiering's Hypothesis

Thiering (1992, 1996) formulated her hypothesis of Christian origins along the following lines (See also her communication in Star 1991:2-3):

- * Thiering emphasises so-called similarities between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament. (*What is the reason for these two communities to resemble each other so closely?* Thiering 1992:2). Both the Qumran community, which existed adjacent to the caves where the scrolls were found, and the early Christians had a daily sacred meal of bread and wine, held property in common, performed baptisms, valued celibacy, expected a messianic age, etc. (cf Thiering 1992:9). The viewpoint of Thiering is that most of these beliefs and practices were quite alien to those held by other groups of Jews at that time. A mass of scholarly literature, produced in the first few years after the discovery of scrolls in 1947, dealt with these points. Some writers proclaimed that the scrolls disproved the very idea that Christianity was a new

revelation by revealing the fact that it was by no means a unique religion (Allegro 1970, 1979; Wilson 1969). On the other side of the spectrum there are those scholars who welcome the scrolls as a means to fill in the background to Christianity (Braun 1966; Stendahl 1957, 1992; Murphy O'Connor 1968; Charlesworth 1972). But afterwards the interest in the Christian connection flagged. The scholarly verdict arrived at was that the scrolls which dealt with the history of the Qumran community were written more than a century before the rise of Christianity, and the links between these two were extremely tenuous. The figures named in these scrolls, the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest, lived before 100 BCE and lack every vestige of historical importance.

- * Thiering challenged these views with her hypothesis that the Qumran community represented the form of Judaism out of which Christianity came. There was a split: the Christians reacting against some aspects of Qumran practice, while retaining basic organisation and some doctrines (Thiering 1992:11). This hypothesis depends on her demonstration that the scrolls belonged to the Christian Period. Thiering (1992:14-18) holds the opinion that the dating before 100 BCE depends on a series of errors, the abuse of methods used to date ancient writings and the disregard of parts of the texts (Thiering 1979:34-59). When treated consistently, the texts provide a date for the Teacher of Righteousness, namely 26 CE. Reading the scrolls in this way provides ample reason to identify the Teacher with John the Baptist, and the Wicked Priest (referred to by a number of other names, including Man of a Lie) with Jesus (Thiering 1992:14-18). Thiering's interpretation suggests that the scrolls were produced by Jesus's enemies as polemical arguments against him.
- * But there is yet another insight Thiering gauged from the scrolls: Thiering has the opinion that a technique of interpretation suggested by the Dead Sea Scrolls fits the New Testament in a way that the writers themselves contemplated. Accordingly the New Testament is two dimensional: The New Testament is a kind of parable, a narrative with a surface meaning

and a latent meaning — a subtext concealed by the wording of the text. This underlying sense, deliberately created by the authors, portrays the actual history of Jesus and can be arrived at only by applying the peshet technique, a device suggested by the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves and is not subjectively discoverable. The gospel student, using the same rigorous, logical methods, must of necessity arrive at the same answer. In this way a wealth of new information concerning the historical Jesus is gleaned from the New Testament. Jesus appears as a true human being and a reformer of religion. The supernatural elements of Christianity are shorn away by providing new explanations for matters like the virgin birth, the miracles and the crucifixion-resurrection. Thiering is of the opinion that Christianity stands aloof from the actual historicity of these events which are neither historical nor myths nor legends. Something certainly did happen, and what happened opens up a whole new understanding of historical Christianity (Thiering 1992:4). Thiering (1996) argues that Jesus was no solitary preacher appearing suddenly on the shores of Lake Galilee: he was a central figure in a major political movement aimed at the overthrow of the pagan Roman Empire. Although crucified, he survived the cross, so that he, and subsequently his sons, played a predominant role in the evolution of the new clandestine religion that was developing out of Judaism from 1 CE to 114 CE. Thiering (1992:3) is of the opinion that Jesus and his followers intended that he should become known in this way: They had the concept of infants in Christ, those who are in need of the supernatural as an element of their faith, and also those more mature/critical minds whose faith allows for writing in a form that provides simple miracle stories with an underlying historical realistic interpretation.

Irrespective of the extent of the relationship between the Dead Sea Scrolls and the New Testament, Thiering demonstrates that other documents from the same period, including the gnostic literature found at Nag Hammadi, Clementine Recognitions and Homilies of the latter part of the first century CE, are relevant to a proper understanding of the historical Jesus (Thiering 1992:x).

It remains a question, however, whether all these sources as well as the pesher technique can be used to write history in the way Thiering has done.

1.3 Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate Thiering's use of these sources as well as the pesher technique. The evaluation of Thiering's attempt to equate Christianity and Essenism as well as the so-called similarities between the Qumran community and early Christianity will follow logically. The rest of the paper is structured as follows: In Section 2 arguments are presented to disprove Thiering's claim that the documents from this period (for example the works of Josephus) might reveal the actual historical Jesus. In Section 3 the use of the pesher technique is discussed critically. Section 4 will devote attention to similarities and differences between the Qumran community and early Christianity. The conclusion follows in Section 5.

2. HISTORICAL SOURCES

2.1 The spectrum of sources

Thiering treats the Qumran texts and the New Testament as her primary texts, but uses other available religious and historical sources as well (cf. Thiering 1992:405-429). Historical sources quoted by her include the writings of Josephus and Philo's essays on the Essenes and the Therapeutae (a group of diaspora Essenes originally from Egypt) as well as the Gnostic literature found at Nag Hammadi. She also examines the Clementine Homilies (recounting Clement of Rome's journey to join Peter and his conflict with Simon Machus) of the latter part of the second century CE and the Clementine Recognitions, the third century version and expansion of the Clementine Homilies. Thiering treats them as reliable documents providing a useful early history. Star (1991:18) says that it is inaccurate to state that Thiering supposedly assigns greater integrity and acceptability to material such as the Gospel of Philip (one of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts) than to those texts accepted by the church. However, when Thiering's academic detractors point out that there is no historical basis for her claims, she counters by

accusing them of not taking into account religious literature that has been branded by the church as heretical and therefore worthless, despite the valuable material that might be contained therein. This applies to books containing ideas running contrary to those in the canon. However, these sources originated at different times, within different communities and with different purposes. It is thus strange to treat these dissimilar sources as if they are homogenous and appropriate to reconstruct the history of Jesus/early Christianity.

For Thiering the starting point of her understanding of the historical interpretation of Jesus is given in Josephus and other sources like Philo. How reliable are these sources for the historical interpretation of Jesus?

2.2 Philo

During the Throsby interview on Australian radio, Thiering and Forbes crossed swords on the reliability of the historical sources, in particular the works of Philo (Star 1991:4-6). Forbes took the view that Philo was an idiosyncratic thinker and consequently his works are not representative of any view other than his own. Thiering called him an exponent of Alexandrian Judaism. Thiering explained that she based her hypothesis directly on the evidence provided by the scrolls and from related literature, which she pointed out to Forbes enjoyed familiarity and wide acceptance among other scholars. Her view is that the scholars referred to by him have narrowed their field of reading to such an extent that they themselves are out of touch with worldwide scholarship.

2.3 Josephus

Thiering uses texts from the works of Josephus and Qumran with uncritical abandon and at random in her efforts to describe the Essenes (cf. the marriage tradition at the virgin birth). She assumes without questioning that the Qumran community as well as the Early Christianity can be identified as Essenes (Thiering 1992:9-13). Flavius Josephus (37/38 — ca 100), Thiering points out, describes the Essenes under that name as one of the major Jewish sects living next to the Dead Sea from 104 BCE. According to Thiering this first

occupation of Qumran was terminated by the earthquake of 31 BCE. The site was reoccupied in about 7 BCE, which marks the beginning of a phase lasting well into the first century CE, and during which a noticeable change in the nature of the community took place. She chooses to refer to the inhabitants of the site as the Qumran community in order to stress the fact that they had ceased to be classical Essenes (Star 1991:86). They retained certain of the characteristic Essene practises such as the sacred meal, common ownership of property and baptism, but there was an additional factor. Centered in Qumran were different groups with divergent religious and political agenda, and vying with each other for dominance. It is this second period, one stage removed from classical Essenism, on which Thiering bases her hypothesis.

Three salient issues come to mind. Firstly, Thiering, unhesitatingly and without reserve applies characteristics and customs of classical Essenism as described by Josephus's description to Christianity, which is at least one stage removed from classical Essenism. Secondly, Thiering shows a facile disregard for the discrepancies revealed by the passages on the Essenes in *The Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Wars of the Jews* on the one hand and the image of the Essenes as portrayed by the Qumran documents on the other. Josephus, supposedly born from a priestly dynasty in Jerusalem, has in mind a gentile reading public. He introduced the Jewish community to the hellenistic world as an ideal society. The Josephus passages on the Essenes add information on lifestyle, which is wanting in the Qumran texts. In turn, the presentation of themes like the covenant, the last days and the Teacher of Righteousness in the Qumran texts are lacking in Josephus' passages on the Essenes. Thirdly, Josephus' qualities that could render his writings adequate for historical reconstruction are prone to severe debate. Bergmeier (1993) shows that the Josephus passages on the Essenes are based primarily on written sources/documents rather than on the authentic reports of eyewitnesses and insiders, i.e. first hand knowledge. Bergmeier (1993) identifies the sources/documents used by Josephus and defines the intentions which influenced the sources and

Josephus's use of them. In this respect Bergmeier identifies four sources/documents:

- (i) *The Essaios* anecdotes from the work of Nicolaus of Damascus. This source originated in the climate of a pagan background. Seeing that this source characterizes the *Essaioi* as mantic practitioners, Josephus' view of the Essenes as priestly visionaries may well have originated from it.
- (ii) The source of the three schools. From this source Josephus gleaned the fixed scheme: Pharisee — Sadducee — Essene. The description of a fourth group, the Zealots, is not part and parcel of this source. Bergmeier finds support for such an inference in the use of aspect/tense by Josephus.
- (iii) The Hellenistic-Jewish *Essaios* source. This source, which used Alexandrian-Jewish terminology, originated in Hellenistic-Jewish circles and depended on scripture in dealing with aspects such as the observance of the sabbath. The *Essaioi* were portrayed as persecuted pious people of the Maccabean era. This source was used by Josephus and Philo. Bergmeier, assumes the point of view that Josephus never used Philo as a source, and that the similarities between these two can be explained on their use of the same source. Their picture of the Essenes' ascetic way of life was also influenced by this source.
- (iv) The Pythagorean Essene source. This is the most important source used by Josephus. It was also used by Philo for his account of the Therapeutae, and by Pliny for his sketch on the Essenes. According to Bergmeier this explains why Josephus' passages on the Essenes show parallels in content and language to Philo's account of the Therapeutae, and Pliny's sketch of the Essenes. The Pythagorean Essene source pictures the Essenes as a congregation of Jewish ascetics living at a holy centre founded by them — similar to a Pythagorean order. Josephus's description of aspects such as the holy centre, the ban, the prayer facing the sun, the joint community chest, and the division of the members in four orders classes, was influenced by this source.

These sources/documents — mostly of non-Jewish origin — were written to suit the literary intentions of each particular author.

Neither Josephus nor any other historiographers present an exception to this rule. This might easily lead to distorted image of the Essenes as portrayed in the Qumran documents.

A disquieting aspect of Thiering's explanation is her too ready acceptance of the Qumran community as being Essenes. The publication of the Temple Scroll marked the beginning of a new agenda for the identification of the Qumran community. The standard hypothesis of Qumran origins comes under attack and is refuted by some (e.g. García Martínez (1989, 1990, 1995), Golb (1980, 1985, 1995), Murphy-O'Connor (1974, 1977) Schiffman (1990, 1992, 1993), Stegemann (1992)) or is gradually being displaced (though not entirely removed) by far more refined theories, such as the Groningen hypothesis (García Martínez 1989, 1990, 1995). These theories place the origins of the Qumran community within the framework of the Palestinian apocalyptic tradition and draw a clear distinction between the origins of the Essene movement and those of the Qumran group. The result is that a picture of Essenes at Qumran as advocated by Thiering can no longer be entertained.

In the next section Thiering's method to draw so-called historical information from the New Testament is investigated.

3. THE PESHER METHOD

3.1 The nature of the peshet method at Qumran as understood by Thiering

The peshet on Habakkuk (1QpHab), found among the scrolls, served as encouragement for Thiering to use the peshet method as a means of interpreting the New Testament (Thiering 1992:20). The book of *Habakkuk* describes the armies of Nebuchadnezzar marching on Jerusalem. The Qumran pesharist believed that the text in actual fact dealt with his own time, which for Thiering meant the time when the Romans were presenting an equally formidable threat. For the original author of the book, according to Thiering, it meant nothing contemporary, it was a picture of things to come at the time of the

advent of the Teacher of Righteousness. For example, when the prophet Habakkuk wrote:

O traitors, why do you look and stay silent when the wicked one swallows up one who is more righteous than he? (Hab 1:13)

its meaning to those who knew how to read it was:

Its pesher (interpretation) concerns the House of Absalom and the men of its council, who were silent at the chastisement of the Teacher of Righteousness. They did not help him against the man of a Lie, who flouted the Law in the midst of their whole congregation.

According to Thiering the Qumran community considered the Old Testament as having been written on two levels of meaning (Thiering 1992:20). On the surface the prophets and Psalms provide general edifying statements, such as *the righteous will prosper and the wicked be punished*, but pesharists of the scrolls were convinced that there was an additional message. By way of a special technique of interpretation, these were revealed as factual historical statements about the Teacher of Righteousness and the Wicked Priest. This method entailed the change of universals into particulars. Where the term *the righteous* is mentioned in the text, it has the additional meaning of *the Teacher of Righteousness*. Likewise mention of *the wicked* has the concomitant meaning of *the Wicked Priest*. Consequently the words used namely *the righteous shall prosper and the wicked be punished* by necessary inferences means that the Teacher of Righteousness will prosper and the Wicked Priest will be punished. According to Thiering, this was worthwhile knowledge for anybody to have at the time of the commentator, because at that very time the Teacher experienced hardship while the Wicked Priest seemed to thrive.

Thiering calls this technique of interpretation the pesher method/technique. The scripture is a *mystery* which means that there are certain things - riddles, puzzles, dreams - which can only be understood by somebody with specialist knowledge (Thiering 1992:20-25). At Qumran, it was the scribes who wrote the interpretations called pesharim or commentaries, which provided the community with what was considered to be the actual meaning of the scripture. The word *pesher* is related to the word for the interpretation of dreams. A pesharist, according to Thiering was just

another Joseph, or Daniel, with a unique gift for finding meanings not normally vouchsafed to the uninitiated. Thiering admits that there can be no doubt that the Qumran pesharists treated the Old Testament in a very arbitrary fashion, because it was not originally conceived with this kind of approach in mind. For Thiering, however, the fact that in scripture a latent history can be found albeit available only to the adept, was a novel idea. This supplied Thiering with the clue she needed.

3.2 Thiering's methodology for reading the New Testament

In an explanation prepared specifically for Star (1991:40-41), she writes that one has to accept that the evangelists/Christians wrote scripture in the light of their own definition of scripture. According to the scrolls this implies two levels of scripture: the surface level containing general religious matter, suitable for ordinary readers and beneath it a concealed level containing specific historical matter meant for certain privileged people only. The evangelists/Christians who approached their task with this definition of scripture in mind set it up as a kind of puzzle requiring a solution. Thiering derived her evidence from the fact that they used the Old Testament in exactly the same way and even using the identical verses as the Qumran pesharists. Paul quoted the words *the righteous shall live by his fidelity* appearing in Habakkuk 2:4 in his Epistle to the Romans 1:17 so as to mean that the followers of Jesus would be saved by faith in their Saviour. This verse was used to convey a similar meaning in the scrolls.

Thiering then turns to the gospels of the New Testament and points out that they contain material which is confusing and self-contradictory and therefore requires explanation (Star 1991:42-44): Geographical details and the dating of events are confusing. There are clear discrepancies between the various gospels and some incidents involving Jesus are unedifying and very hard to believe. Jesus' cursing a barren fig tree which failed to bear fruit wherewith he could satisfy his hunger. The improbability of the entire event is underscored by a blunt assertion on the part of the Evangelist that it was six months too early for the fig season to have come. But the fig tree nevertheless withered and died and Jesus delivered a sermon in

which he mentioned that faith could move mountains. The gospels are replete with the miraculous which tries the faith of the believer but strangely enough, the theological parts of the New Testament, the epistles of Paul and others, while treating the questions of faith thoroughly, omit mentioning of the miracles completely. Thiering refuses to accept the explanations offered by biblical scholars for these apparent contradictions and suggest that the miracle stories serve a dual purpose.

Thiering explained the need for concealment on the grounds of her hypothesis that Jesus was not the champion of a new movement but the reformer of a previous one. However, Jesus had to be presented to prospective believers as the founder of something unique, a new revelation, while the actual process of reform had to be preserved in the interests of history and for the enlightenment of leaders. This underlying sense, which has been inserted with premeditation, portrays the actual history of Jesus and is traceable only by applying the peshar technique (Thiering 1992:2). It cannot be discovered subjectively. Thiering claims (in a very positivistic way) that everyone working on the gospels, using the same rigorous, logical methods, must of necessity arrive at the same answer (Thiering 1992:3). If the term *Fig Tree* refers to a party of people, for instance, then it must always have this reference. There are built-in tests of consistency so that if the gospels were a puzzle, then that puzzle is meant to be solved, in much the same way as any jigsaw or crossword puzzle can be solved to yield the same results for each and everyone. When the new scripture was thought of, it was not intended to be a pesharim on the Old Testament, with the text arbitrarily treated in order to find the meanings contained therein. These writers had the advantage of being able to start afresh, relying on their definition of what scripture should be. All four gospels, the Acts of the Apostles and The Apocalypse yield to this kind of treatment.

The relevant tests of consistency which are to be applied are set out by Thiering (1981:20). The special meaning of each word, drawn from either the public sense of the gospels and the rest of the New Testament or from historical material, is subject to several controls.

- (i) Every occurrence must have the same meaning.

- (ii) A meaningful context must be established both within each episode, and also the book as a whole.
- (iii) Concerning chronology: there has to be a mathematically consistent time scheme into which all occurrences of words concerned with time fit.

Thiering (1992:378-383) adds the following rules for pesharists:

- (i) No words are to be assumed.
- (ii) Conversely, all words must be accounted for; nothing may be omitted.
- (iii) All events in narrative are consecutive. There are no flashbacks.
- (iv) The pesharist is intended to assume a system. If one or two items appear that would naturally form part of a larger system, then the larger system is to be assumed to be in operation.
- (v) The pesharist must not be selective; nothing can be overlooked or set aside.
- (vi) The pesharist's main task is to look for special meanings of words.

Some of them are quite ridiculous, for instance reading *ou me* as two negatives, thus as a positive (Thiering 1992:379). Because people are called sheep in John 10:2, all references to animals are references to classes of people and Mark 5's pigs into whom the evil spirits had gone, are also a class of men.

Thiering (1996:144) states that the pesharist derive knowledge by using the assumption of organisational systems as a working hypothesis. Once it is realised that systems are in operation, and their essential contents are known, a rigorous application of logic makes it possible to see the unstated parts of the system, and to test their existence and use by the criteria of consistency. In this regard a chronological system, a system for locations and hierarchy is worked out by Thiering (1981:47-53; 1992:161-377). In Thiering (1996:249-507) a list of special meanings and a continuous peshar are added. Thiering fits everything into this very rigid, rigorous scheme. Abraham is Hillel the Great, Barababbas is the son of Annas. The beloved disciple is a code for John Mark, Jesus' wife, a man standing in for the wife of a dynastic celibate (Thiering 1992:387).

Satan is a pseudonym for Judas Iscariot who tempted and tested Jesus. Everywhere one of these words appears, she reads her concealed meaning into the text. In the same way she gives words referring to time and distance new meanings. So she also develops a whole theory that the names of places given in the gospels actually refer to places at Qumran (Thiering 1992:34-42). Thiering's hermeneutics thus rest on allegory.

Thiering stresses that what she hopes to achieve by interpreting the gospels in accordance with the *peshet* method is a kind of translation, albeit not in the sense that this word is customarily used. Some of the symbolism Thiering solved with ease. In Mark 1:17, where it is stated that Peter the fisherman become an angler for men, it can be supposed that *fish* could mean *Christians*. This is supported by drawings in the catacombs of Rome, where Christians were depicted as fish. Other symbols are much more difficult to understand and initially a certain amount of guesswork went into finding their meaning. What is important for Thiering is that the overall pattern which emerge is consistent with what we know about Christianity — it is quite obvious that no valid *peshet* can be construed from meanings which are entirely divergent (Star 1991:25-28).

Another example of symbolism Thiering suggests, comes from the range of meanings derived from the notion that initiation meant *life* at Qumran, as set out in IQS III:

For it is through the spirit of true counsel concerning the ways of man that all of his sins shall be expiated that he may contemplate the light of life.

With support from the Gospel of Philip, Thiering gave the concept of excommunication the meaning of death. (There is a parallel in contemporary terms: excommunication from their religious framework is, to many people, the equivalent of spiritual death). Consequently in the story where Jesus supposedly raises Lazarus from the dead, Jesus is actually lifting the ban of excommunication imposed on Lazarus as a punishment for his political affiliations (Thiering 1992:97-100). According to Thiering (1992:98) this symbolism was taken so seriously in monastic practice

(until as late as medieval times) that a dead (excommunicated) man was ritually *buried*, dressed in a shroud and placed in a tomb.

Sickness is associated with death, and the various types of disease and disability mentioned in the gospels represent various types of erroneous doctrine. The meanings correspond with strict gradations in the Qumran community (Thiering 1992:350-351). A *blind* man is inadequately equipped with knowledge or illumination and is no better than a novice, since the scrolls specify that novices see the light only on initiation. The words *crippled* and *lame*, and words signifying other degrees of sickness or disability, indicate members who are of lesser than the highest grade within the community and have not achieved full knowledge of the doctrine. A further level of complexity is introduced by the fact that proper names are never given; instead, pseudonyms with which the pesharists' contemporaries were familiar, are used. According to Thiering the name *Kittim* was used by the pesharist to indicate the Romans.

The application of the technique is explicated in detail in the discussions of the virgin birth, the miracles and the resurrection which follow.

3.2.1 Doctrine of the virgin birth

One of the miracle stories in the gospels is that of Jesus' birth from a virgin. Thiering remarks that the Essene Jews believed virginity was the holiest state and that sex was degrading (Star 1991: 50-53, Thiering 1992:43-49). The Temple Scroll states that those who have recently had sexual intercourse are excluded from the temple precincts, their presence being offensive to God. Essenes held that the highest way of life was to live a life of celibacy without private property, in a secluded monastic existence with the proviso, however, that if everyone lived like that, the human race would soon become extinct. Moreover, they had cogent reasons for continuing two great dynasties, the Davidic and the Zadokite, the lineages of respectively the former kings and former high priests of Israel. The Essenes came into existence in order to preserve these two lines. In order to do so they developed a second order, which the historian Josephus briefly describes. The men who were required to continue these dynasties lived most of the time as celibates. But, Josephus relates, from time

to time they left their celibate communities in order to cohabit with their wives. Sex was strictly for the purpose of having children, and there were elaborate rules to ensure that this principle was observed. This required them to have two weddings of which the first one led to a trial marriage of up to three years in duration and then a second one described by Josephus which takes place three months after the woman had fallen pregnant, or as he puts it after *three periods of purification*, which according to the Jewish way of thinking meant three months after cessation of menstruation or three months after pregnancy. The second wedding was permanent; divorce was forbidden. As intercourse during pregnancy was forbidden, there could be no intercourse after the second wedding. Before her first wedding she was still a virgin, and this could have entailed the taking of a vow of dedication as a virgin, similar to the institution of vestal virgins in the Greek world. The woman Anna, in Luke 2:36-38, had such a history. Before this wedding there was a long period of betrothal, when the couple could meet but not have sex. The long betrothal period put strain on both parties. Paul discusses the practice of Christians in respect of a similar custom, saying in 1 Corinthians 7:36

If anyone thinks that he is not behaving properly towards his virgin (parthenos), if his passions are strong, and it has to be, let him do as he wishes: let them marry — it is no sin.

If it so happened that during the betrothal, prior to the first wedding, passions became too strong and a child was conceived, then it was said using a play upon words that a virgin had conceived. It would be similar to the case of a couple producing a child during the period of their engagement. If that happened, the strict Essene rule would require that the child be classed as illegitimate and brought up as one of the *other men's children* whom, Josephus tells us, the Essenes brought up as *their own*. Mary was a virgin in the Essene sense of this term, in other words a dedicated woman. Prior to her first wedding a child was conceived, Joseph, her betrothed, being the father. Having committed a breach of discipline by having intercourse during the betrothal period, he planned to separate from Mary, but changed his mind. He was a descendant of King David and the child, if a boy, would continue the Davidic line of descent.

Consequently, he went ahead with the first wedding as though it were the second, when the woman was normally pregnant any way. *He knew her not* after the wedding because of the rule forbidding intercourse during pregnancy. In that case it could be said that Jesus was a descendant of King David through his father Joseph and that *a virgin had conceived*, as long as the institutional sense of the word was understood. The above is a good example of Thiering's pesher hypothesis.

There were no women within Judaism with the status of nuns, and there is no evidence whatsoever from the scrolls to back up any such assertion. What evidence there is from outside Judaism is extremely controversial and the evidence gleaned from the New Testament itself does not assist Thiering in any way whatsoever. Her methodology is erroneous in that she quotes evidence concerning nuns provided by the post New Testament Roman Catholic Church to prove the existence of nuns at Qumran. This Thiering could only do if there was proof at hand to substantiate a claim that the Roman Catholic Church has its roots in Qumran. Only then would she have been in a position to explain Qumran practices from evidence provided by the Roman Catholic Church.

Thiering's response is that the evidence of the marriage customs of the Essenes is provided by Josephus. If there were celibate Essene men, there must also have been celibate Essene women. (The celibates were mostly drawn from illegitimate children, of whom presumably half more or less were female.) From this, and taking into account the frailties of human nature, she inferred that the women necessary to serve as marriage partners for the second order of Essenes, and who were required to stay faithful to their husbands who lived in celibate communities for most of time, certainly must have had the status of nuns or dedicated women (Star 1991:57). She regards the New Testament evidence, *if a man has a virgin and his passions become strong let them marry*, as supporting evidence from a related community, not as primary evidence. In this way Thiering tenders a mere inference, containing far too many ifs for it to be classified as a reasonable alternative, as proof. Thiering seems to believe that it is permissible to go from proof via inference to a feasible theory. In actual fact proof is required at every step.

3.2.2 The miracles

Thiering discusses the miracles that yield to the *peshet* technique, and present a history of events that had really happened (Star 1991: 58-62). The miracles trace those steps by which the Essene exclusivism was abolished. According to John's gospel, Jesus was at a wedding feast, and the supply of wine became exhausted. There were six water jars there, *for the Jewish purifications*. He ordered them to be filled with water, and when the water was poured out it had turned into wine. The man in charge of the feast failed to comment on the miracle but complained paradoxically about the fact that whereas it was customary to serve the good wine first, Jesus had left it till last. According to Thiering (1979:90-103; 1992:9,24) the Qumran community had two stages of initiation: baptism, and the sacred meal of bread and wine. The modern church still has two stages, administering baptism to infants and giving communion to adults, but at Qumran the sacred meal was available to celibate male Jews only. These members were the only people who had undergone full initiation, its main sacrament being the wine, *the drink of the community*. Everyone else — married men, all women, gentiles — were allowed only baptism by water. They were classed as unclean and not allowed to approach the holy table where God was present. The scrolls place such people in the same category as the blind and the lepers, who likewise were excluded from the presence of God. But Jesus taught that the blind and the lepers were to be invited in, and this applied equally to the unclean persons. They were in no way offensive to God. Consequently, when people who had access to the water only came to be baptised, Jesus *turned the water into wine*. He gave them the communion meal, bringing them into the presence of God. The story is of the utmost significance: it explains the first step in Jesus' reform of the Qumran doctrine. By way of this miracle, he broke down the exclusiveness and the rejection of others that had characterised the community up till then and opened up its religion to the rest of world. John's gospel gives great prominence to the story of turning water into wine, saying that it was the *first* of seven signs; the gospel itself is built around the seven miracle stories. In the *second* miracle, Jesus healed the centurion's servant from afar. The servant, an uncircumcised gentile, was thus promoted into some form of

ministry, although it is significant that Jesus never touched him, as according to strict Essene doctrine the man was impure (Thiering 1992:90). The class to which he belonged was later given full ministry. In the *third* miracle, Jesus healed a man who had been waiting at the pool of Bethesda to be healed through immersion. Jesus' healing demonstrated that the ritual washings of the Essenes were not necessary for spiritual wholeness. The *fourth* miracle is that of Jesus feeding 5000 people using five loaves and two fish. After admitting ordinary people into membership by allowing them to partake of the communion meal, he then proceeded to admit ordinary men to the ministry (Thiering 1992:90-91). Previously, all priests had to have been born into the priestly tribe of Levi; they enjoyed many privileges, such as the right of maintenance from the tithes of working men. Jesus stipulated that the priesthood should be attained, not by birth, but by ordination. Taking five *loaves*, (that is, levites, called loaves because they distributed the bread from the holy table) he let the 5000 ordinary men, represented by their leaders, eat them, that is, assume their powers. From now on, they too would be able to distribute the holy bread. Two *fish* were also used: *fish* represented gentile celibates who had to be baptised in seawater because of their uncleanness. These newly ordained ministers were also given their identity as servants of God. Twelve *baskets of crumbs* were left over; a presbyteral structure was set up in which there would always be twelve lay ministers. *Fifthly*, Jesus walked on the water of the lake. The disciples had left in a boat, leaving him where he was, but when they reached their destination they saw him coming towards them, walking on the sea. The explanation offered is that in order to baptise the gentile fish, a ceremony based on the story of Noah's ark was used. A boat stood offshore and the gentiles were made to wade through the sea. After their embarkation the boat would set sail for the dry land of salvation. A Jewish priest, standing on the boat, took part in the ceremony, but while the baptisers, men like Peter, waded through the water with the initiates, the priest refrained from doing so, partly because he wore heavy ceremonial vestments. For his convenience, a jetty was built, and when he walked across it to the boat, it would be said by those who made antipriestly jokes that priests walk on water. On this occasion, Jesus

had taken the land route to where the disciples were (not on the sea of Galilee — there is also a peshet of places). They were in the baptismal boat and Jesus joined them, using the 'priests' jetty (Thiering 1992:92-93). He was making it clear that, just as ordinary men could aspire to the priesthood, he could be a high priest. The miracle was the overthrow of the Qumran community priesthood based on birth, with its rigid rule that only those born into the tribe of Levi could attain this high priesthood and its being made accessible to the laymen. It was because of these as yet unheard of claims that his enemies came to call Jesus the Wicked Priest. In the *sixth* miracle, Jesus healed the man who had been blind — that is, he gave ministry to a man who was deprived of illumination of monastic education. In raising Lazarus from the dead, the *seventh* miracle and the only raising from the dead recorded in John's gospel, Jesus demonstrated that excommunication (death in Essene terms, just as accepting the doctrine meant life) could be lifted and was not final (Thiering 1992:97-100). Each of these miracles records what Jesus said to actual people of flesh and blood. But as each person is also a representative of a particular class, they tell in a universal way how Jesus broke down the restrictive and exclusivistic rules of the Qumran community. The writers of the gospels did not believe in miracles and nor were they mere compilers of legends. Writing much earlier than has been supposed, they deliberately and carefully composed stories like these in order to keep the greatest number of ordinary people in the Greek world as adherents, while at the same time to preserve the actual facts about the schism led by Jesus for those who were able to appreciate it.

The one salient point of the miracle stories is that they contain a symbolic meaning intimately connected with the wider meaning of the gospels. An example is provided by the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, where gospel narrative has the specific objective of portraying Jesus as the giver of life. Thiering has stripped the miracle of its context. Her version is poverty-stricken in that it ignores the marvellously rich theology of John's gospel, presenting instead a simple story of a person being received back into a religious movement.

3.2.3 The resurrection

Thiering (1992:116-120; Star 1991:69-72) points out that the New Testament evidence for the resurrection is not as strong as one would expect to prove such a momentous event. Certainly evidence is provided by an empty tomb, but that only goes to prove that the tomb was empty. The excitement of the disciples on the Day of Pentecost serves as mere proof of their faith in the resurrection story, and not in its factual veracity. Mark's gospel in its original form, ended with the woman running away from the empty tomb, and failed completely to mention later appearances. The appearances mentioned in other gospels strongly emphasise that Jesus was physically present, that he ate fish, that his wounds were visible which fact, incidentally also supports the theory that he survived the crucifixion. Paul's sole extended treatment of it in his epistle to the Corinthians depends at its acme on an argument from consequences — if it is not true, then your faith is vain — rather than an argument supported by known facts. Belief in the resurrection draws its strength not so much from the evidence, but from the religious impact of the idea of victory over death, celebrated every year at one of the church's major festivals. The peshet method however offers a new insight: the gospels tell us what actually happened, and why the idea spread. Jesus was a member of an existing Jewish movement, some of the members of which held that the only way to overcome the pagan Romans was by physical force. Those were the zealots, who eventually brought about the calamitous destruction of Jerusalem by instigating an uprising against the Roman colonial government in 70 CE. By contrast, Jesus taught that the Romans should be loved, not hated. Some of his associates interpreted this as rank disloyalty and furthered their decision to eliminate him. When a few zealot extremists rounded up and condemned to death by crucifixion, some of the leaders managed to have Jesus exchanged for Barabbas. They provided Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judaea with evidence of Jesus' association with the zealots and persuaded him that Jesus was a would-be king (seeing that this party had as an objective a scion of the Davidic dynasty to the throne). When Jesus was at the point of being crucified he was offered a draught of poison as a means of ending his suffering, but he refused it. At 3 pm, however, when

the pain was becoming intolerable, he accepted a drink of wine laced with poison. Jesus lost consciousness — *gave up the spirit*. But he was not dead yet. The writer of John's gospel stresses in a fact that blood flowed from a wound inflicted in his side: this would suggest the possibility that he was not yet dead. The Jews informed Pilate that it was contrary to the tenets of their law to allow a body to stay on the cross overnight whereupon Pilate agreed to change the method of execution to one of live entombment. The three crucified men were placed in a burial cave. Jesus was presumed dead but the shin bones of the other two were fractured so as to prevent their escape. Suspecting that he was still alive, some of Jesus' friends wrapped 100 pounds of myrrh and aloes in the shroud. Aloes may serve as a purgative which, if administered in large quantities, will precipitate poison being expelled from the body. One of the zealots placed in the cave with him, and squatting on the floor beside his head, squeezed the juice into his mouth which caused Jesus to recover. Mary Magdalene approached the cave and saw that the men had opened a chink by shifting the stone a little. She ran to fetch help and the friends of Jesus arrived on the scene to carry him to safety. After his recovery, he *appeared* to them, in the sense of rejoining their meetings. This he did over a period of many years, speaking to Peter and Paul and guiding their movements until his party finally reached Rome. This was the genuine Jesus, who lived in seclusion in the monasteries established by the movement. It was *the young man* in the tomb who told the women, *he has risen* and gave the impression that there had been a resurrection. The zealot who had assisted Jesus' recovery, assisted in spreading this version of the events for political reasons and in order to further his own career. One of the reasons for the Christians to turn to gospel writing was to make the truth known, but they were quite aware of the fact that the vast majority of ordinary believers were prepared to accept the resurrection and build religious values into it. That prevailed upon them to let the surface story remain in circulation. From one point of view it was a conspiracy; from another, it was a necessity, the creation of myth, demanded by the masses as a language or a means to express religious ideas. The leaders of the new religion showed themselves aware of and sympathetic to this need.

A serious aspect of practical criticism may be levelled at these reconstructions of the events surrounding the crucifixion and its aftermath. In the hypothesis under consideration there is a complete failure to take into account the presence of the guards (Matthew 27:62-6). Thiering tries to explain this omission away by saying that the leaders of the party prevailed upon Pilate to grant permission for the stationing of their own guards at the entrances to the tomb. Everything was changed by the young man's claim that a resurrection had occurred. In an extremely volatile political situation the guards abandoned their previous allegiance and supported what to them appeared to be a new divinely approved leader.

According to Thiering the fracturing of the shinbones of the brigands was to prevent their escape. It has generally been thought that the practice of breaking the shinbones of the crucified served as a means to accelerate death. Thiering pointed out that the gospel accounts do not suggest another explanation (Starr 1991:80-81). As stated above it was contrary to Jewish law to leave a body on the cross over the Sabbath and seeing that it was the evening before the Sabbath, Pilate agreed on live entombment as an alternative way of execution. The two culprits, who were crucified with Jesus, had their legs broken in order to prevent their escape. Certainly a more effective way of killing could easily have been devised than the breaking of the shinbones.

Concerning Thiering's point that modern Christianity concentrates on the virgin birth and the resurrection from a point of departure which is both historically and theologically inaccurate. The teaching of Jesus and his hopes for mankind are singularly lacking in authority unless Jesus rose from the dead as the focal point of Christian belief. Jesus died for our salvation. He rose and appeared to reassure us and if that version is not acceptable the entire matter amounts to nothing more than a deliberate preposterous fraud. However, Starr (1991:74) quotes the response of a TV viewer:

I was appalled by the general viewpoint that the crux of Christianity depended on a risen Lord and I'm probably not the only one:
1. Does Jesus have to be dead before you believe in him — do his sayings and teachings mean otherwise?

2. If Jesus were still alive among us, would you not need believe in him because he was not dead? The disciples believed in him as the Son of God as a living man...
3. If you need Jesus to be risen Lord in order to be Christian are you saying, as his executioners said — Prove you are the Son of God, do miracles for us?

Another possible alternative is that the gospels in dealing with the resurrection were making a statement of faith about Jesus. The resurrection means that Jesus had renewed life, a statement to which Thiering's account of this type of half-death cannot measure up to.

Thiering has to admit that her version is only tenable if the resurrection was a conspiracy to encourage the mystique of Jesus. Assuming that the gospel writers met and consulted each other, even the most gullible of gospel students would hesitate to accept the idea of a conspiracy between the gospel writers with the leaders of Christianity like Peter and Paul being kept completely in the dark. Thiering, however, suggests a sham resurrection. With the young man in the tomb, a *deus ex machina* sending the ball rolling in order to further his own interests. Thiering believes that all the gospel writers were aware of the true facts and wrote their own versions with the connivance of both of Peter and Paul, who are desirous of attracting people to the new religion. They found that the resurrection theory was enormously effective in gaining the support and adherence to their party of a great majority in the diaspora. Thiering is convinced that both Peter and Paul were aware of the fact that the contacts they had with the risen Jesus were contacts with a flesh-and-blood alive human being, but they turned a blind eye to the actual situation in order to attract believers among the uneducated classes. Thiering claims that the concept of resurrection was widely held among the Jews, while the Hellenistic world readily accepted miracles; Apollonius of Tyana travelled around performing acts that were regarded as miracles. Thus, the resurrection story was seen by Peter and Paul as a powerful political tool which they were in effect forced to use, while the peshet technique allowed the truth to be known to those capable of understanding its implications.

On the other hand one may gauge from Paul's speech to the Athenians and in 1 and 2 Corinthians, that Jews in the Diaspora were not over-receptive to the idea of a resurrection story. The idea of

bodily resurrection was a pharisaic doctrine, completely alien to the Jewish way of thinking and not widely held in the Greek world. Either it was a difficult subject for a sermon or requiring a fair amount of clarification as Paul learned through experience.

3.3 Evaluation of Thiering's peshet method

3.3.1 The development of scripture interpretation

The first traces of scripture exegesis is found in the Old Testament itself, where a reinterpretation of earlier documents is found in subsequent documents (Fishbane 1985). Typical of this is the retelling of Samuel and Kings by the Chronicler (Deist 1983:28-29). Sometimes an explanation is added by later generations. To keep the Sabbath is motivated by two explicit motivations: firstly on the strength of the exodus (Deuteronomy 5:12-15) and secondly in the light of the creation narrative (Exodus 20:11) (Zimmerli 1978:126). Later events are viewed as the repetition of earlier events and interpreted as such. The restoration of Israel in Isa 40-55 is interpreted as a creation *de novo* (Zimmerli 1978:33-38). Evidence is available of an exegetical midrash which seeks to make a text of scripture understandable, useful, and relevant for a later generation. It is the text of scripture which is the point of departure, for example Hosea 12:2-5 explains Genesis 32:26. A peshet which is closely related to exegetical midrash can be found in Daniel 9 which provides an explanation of the seventy weeks of Jeremiah. Since only one biblical phrase is interpreted there, the parallel with Qumran pesharim is limited, but the analogy in the style of interpretation cannot be overlooked (Collins 1984:10). Considering the abovementioned evidence, Thiering's claim (1981:12-23; 1992:20-25; 1996:12-18) that her work on the historical Jesus emanates from the application of a newly discovered peshet technique, suggested by the Dead Sea Scrolls, is prone to serious doubt. The process of (re)interpretation was essentially part of the origins of scripture.

3.3.2 Scripture interpretation in the Qumran literature

It is important to note that not the entire Qumran literature is peshet literature. The pesharim or Commentaries (written probably about the middle of the first century BCE) are systematic interpretations of

written prophetic texts, or rather interpretations of symbols of prophetic messages (cf. Bruce 1959: 7-17; Fröhlich 1986:383-398; Horgan 1977). The following scrolls and fragments from Qumran are usually associated with pesher: 1QpMic, 1QpHab, 1QpZeph, 1QpPs, 3QpIsa, 4QpIsa^{a, b, c, d, e}, 4QpHos^{a, b}, 4QpMic, 4QpNah, 4QpZeph, 4QpPs^{a, b} (cf. Tov 1993:20-55). Pesher was not a universal form of interpretation in first century Judaism. In addition there are the *florilegia* (e.g. 4QFlor, 4QTest, 4QCaf) consisting of thematic interpretations of various quotations; paraphrases (e.g. 1QapGen — a midrashic paraphrase/rewritten story (Evans 1988:153-165), 11QT — a halakhic paraphrase/rewritten law); reproductions (1QH); etc. To use the existence of *pesher* at Qumran as a universal to interpret early Christian literature, seems quite odd.

3.3.3 The Qumran pesharim

The term *pesher* may refer either to a literary work of scripture interpretation or the nonliteral interpretation of a text.

The origin of the *pesher* genre is clearly germane to dream interpretation, where the component parts of the dream are repeated to be followed by an interpretation, e.g. the interpretation of the dream in Daniel 2. The Qumran *pesharim* have their own literary structure. The text is treated piecemeal with progress made systematically from one textual unit to another. The *pesher* is introduced by formulas. The commentary is direct and explicit (cf. Brooke 1981:483-503).

Concerning the non-literal interpretation of a text, it is necessary to distinguish between hermeneutical principles or presuppositions and exegetical techniques (Brooke 1985:283). (These are not necessarily restricted to the literary genre *pesher*) For the Qumran authors, there is a complete account of history dealing with the events of the last days (which they considered to be their own time) hidden in the mysteries of the Biblical prophecy. To ensure proper understanding these mysteries had to be interpreted in a sound way. In order to make the secrets known, God revealed them to the Teacher of Righteousness as the only legitimate interpreter, endowed by God with the ability to interpret correctly the mysteries which

had baffled Habakkuk and all the subsequent generations (1QpHab 7:1-5) (cf. Bruce 1959: 18-27).

Fitzmyer (1960:305) examined the way in which the writers made use of quotations and in particular to determine the extent to which the Qumran author respects the meaning and original intention of the passage which is quoted by him. He found the following categories:

- (i) The literal or historical class, in which the Old Testament is actually quoted in the same sense in which it was intended by the original writers; ♣
- (ii) the class of modernisation, in which the Old Testament text which originally had a reference to a contemporaneous event is applied to a new event;
- (iii) the class of accommodation, in which the Old Testament text was detached from its original context and modified to adapt to a new situation or purpose;
- (iv) the eschatological class, in which the relevant Old Testament text is cited to be accomplished in the new eschaton of which he wrote.

The following exegetical techniques are identified by Horgan (1977:483-484):

- (i) The peshet may follow the action, ideas, and words of the lemma closely, developing a similar description in a different context.
- (ii) The peshet may grow out of one or more key words, roots, or ideas, developing the interpretation from these isolated elements distinct from the action or description of the lemma.
- (iii) The peshet may consist of allegorical identification of figures or things named in the lemma, with or without a description or elaboration of action.
- (iv) There are instances in which the peshet seems to be only loosely related to the lemma; use of synonyms for words in the lemma; use of the same roots as in the lemma, appearing in the same or different grammatical forms; instances of a play on the words in the lemma; changing the order of letters or words in the lemma;

use of a different textual tradition; and referring back to an earlier lemma or anticipating a subsequent lemma.

Out of the foregoing, it is clear that the Qumran pesharist does not view the original text as a riddle, jigsaw or crossword puzzle or a dream which could only be solved by a rigid chronological scheme, a scheme of locations and a scheme of hierarchy. The interpretations in the pesher are never rigorous, logical methods are never applied and interpretations of the same lemma in different pesharim do not arrive at the same answer (cf Amos 9:11 in 4QFlor and CD). By doing this, Thiering's pesher method is a complete misconception of the pesher used in Qumran and completely overestimated the importance of pesher as a contributory method of text interpretation. Rabinowitz (1973:225) believes like Horgan that pesher is not utilised in the Qumran texts as the transmission to others of an intellectual understanding of something. Therefore, it comes as a surprise that Thiering at all attempted to use a method that leads to such arbitrary results.

In Qumran the pesher follows a set pattern. In the first instance an Old Testament text is quoted whereupon it is applied in the form of an actualisation. Granted that the Qumran author by making the quotation from the Old Testament relevant to his time actually gave new meanings to certain concepts, but that is a far cry from the method applied by Thiering. Her method entails the ascription of meanings on two levels to simple narratives.

For the original author of for example the book Habakkuk the prophecy was a prophecy of the near future. The Qumran pesharist believed that this message must be applied to his own circumstances. For each reader the text thus presents itself on only one level of meaning. Thiering has it thus wrong on the one hand that the book Habakkuk meant nothing contemporary for the original author of the book and on the other hand has two levels of meaning for the Qumran pesharist.

The difference between Thiering's pesher and that of Qumran can be presented as follows: A certain historical situation before the exile prompted an author to compile a certain literary work, namely the Biblical Book of Habakkuk. The Qumran community considered Habakkuk to be a mystery, a prophecy of their contemporary time

and the principles of peshet interpretation were used to decode the secret prophecy in terms of their own situation, and a new literary work, the peshet commentary on Habakkuk resulted which was the revealed peshet of the mystery. The process aimed to reinterpret the literature to be a prophecy of their contemporary world. Thiering reverses this process: She aims to reinterpret the New Testament to reveal the contemporary history of the characters in the gospel narratives (Sammelink 1993:7-17).

3.3.4 Peshet exegesis in the New Testament

New Testament exegesis of the Old Testament reflects the same assumptions (cf. 1 Pet 1:10-12) and develops the full spectrum of methods of interpretation known in Qumran texts (Betz 1989:82-85; Trebelle Barrera 1995: 99-122; VanderKam 1994:180-182). In 1 Peter 1:10-12 the idea that the prophets recorded the mysteries of God, and in the end of times the interpretation has been revealed by means of an interpreter, the Holy Spirit, is shared with Qumran. Thiering (1992:22 note 5) quotes Mark 4:9 and Clement of Alexandria to prove that the words of Jesus were spoken as mystery so that only an inner circle would understand. She does not consider that Mark and the other gospels reveal this mystery.

The following categories are of importance in this regard (cf. also Naudé 1983:14,64-66):

(i) Modernisation of the original meaning

Like the writers of the Qumran texts, the authors of the New Testament saw their history as the outcome of God's guidance. They believed that the prophecies of the Old Testament were being realised in the new events and situations of the Qumran community or those of the early Christian history notwithstanding the fact that the quotations usually have a specific (literal) meaning in their Old Testament context (cf. Psalm 2:1-2 in 4QFlorilegium and Acts 4:25-26).

(ii) Expansion of the original meaning

The Old Testament citations in the Qumran literature and the New Testament sometimes result in an expansion of the meaning that exceeds the scope thereof in its original context. Such quotations

may not invariably be adduced as proof in the Qumran literature and in the New Testament, but more often than not they are cited in order to illustrate (cf. Amos 9:11 in 4QFlorilegium and Acts 13:26).

(iii) Allegorisation of the original meaning

Like the Christians who chose to regard themselves as the true Israel, that is to say the true spiritual heirs of Israel, and interpreted the Old Testament in the light of this particular stance, the Qumran community believed that the history, institutions and promises of the Old Testament had, as it were, come to fruition in them as the true community.

Thiering insists that she uses the Qumran's peshar method of text interpretation in her reading of the New Testament to detect the deeper meaning of the text. But the principles and methods of the peshar method occur already in the New Testament where authors used for example quotations of Old Testament texts and interpreted them in a new context. Thiering thus misused the method by applying it to texts that were never meant to be peshar texts.

3.3.5 The contemporary history in the Qumran pesharim and the New Testament

Contrary to Thiering's view that the Qumran pesharim revealed factual historical statements, contemporary history is rarely named in the Qumran pesharim. Only one of them, the Nahum peshar, uses proper names: Demetrius and Antiochus. In the rest of the texts, the protagonists are concealed under titles such as Teacher of Righteousness, the Wicked Priest, the Liar, the Angry Lion, the seekers of easy interpretations, the simple, Ephraim and Manasseh, the house of abomination, etc. These titles, which to the Qumran community must have been transparent, have in the course of time become opaque and obscure. The same hermeneutical principle is applied in the New Testament by means of which the words of the prophets are related to the present reality of Jesus. Unlike the pesharim, though, in the New Testament this reality is not concealed under symbolic titles but is completely transparent. The explanation proposed by Thiering violates the plain meaning of both types of text. Thiering shows scant respect for the fact that the events to

which both series of texts allude are different realities and are separated in time by almost two centuries. Both the Qumran texts and the New Testament offer little for historiography.

4. THE PARALLELS BETWEEN THE QUMRAN TEXTS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Qumran literature and the New Testament have a shared history and proceed from the same New Testament traditions and it is therefore to be expected that they will share certain common features. The result is that, since the discovery of the Qumran literature, numerous studies have been conducted to identify the similarities, but also the differences between these documents and the New Testament (Braun 1966; Stendahl 1957, 1992; Murphy O'Connor 1968; Charlesworth 1972).

The Qumran texts provide a new background against which the New Testament can be studied. This background is the common Jewish tradition from which both the Qumran literature and the New Testament hail (Black 1961; Betz 1989:81-82; Naudé 1996:589-97; Rudolf 1993). Any community, no matter how small, always has some things in common with the world of which it forms an integral part. Consequently the Qumran texts contain numerous ideas that were rife among the Jews, and likewise certain Jewish convictions occupy a prominent position in the New Testament. If parallels are discovered between the Qumran texts and the New Testament, this should not be construed as proof of the fact that the two communities were identical or of direct influence of the Qumran literature on the New Testament or vice versa. These are parallel developments in the same general situation (Vermes 1976:107). Furthermore the New Testament reveals its own unique train of development adopting many Jewish points of view as it went along, but filling these with a new content. In other instances the views of the New Testament are in stark contrast with those of the Jews (Judaism). This latter quality of the Qumran texts, namely the contrast it offers to the New Testament, is very pronounced. The Qumran texts not only offer supplementary material to the New Testament, but contrasting material as well. Examples of both

contrasts and similarities are not difficult to find. In both the Qumran texts and the New Testament the messiah expectation plays a prominent role; both communities regarded themselves as apocalyptic; both believed that the end of time would come in their own day and age; both cherished the idea of a spiritual temple; both employed the figure 12 prominently in the organisation of their communities; both believed that a new covenant was being concluded with them, etc. There are also essential differences: The concept "the kingdom of God", which is a central message of the New Testament, nowhere appears in the Qumran texts; baptism and the eucharist as described in the New Testament differ materially from the ritual washings and the communal meal of the Qumran community; etc. (Danielou 1958; LaSor 1972:247-254; Stegemann 1993; Vermes 1976:107-116). The contribution of Qumran to the understanding of the New Testament is in no way decisive: The Jewish background of the New Testament is elucidated and rendered easier to understand, but its meaning is not changed to any appreciable extent.

A summary of areas of elucidation is as follows:

- (i) Elucidation of the references of New Testament terms. Some of the clearest insights into the New Testament provided by the Qumran texts are to be found at the level of vocabulary. The New Testament was written in Greek, while Jesus and his disciples were Galilean Jews and probably spoke Aramaic or Hebrew. The Qumran texts provide Hebrew/Aramaic equivalents for several words and phrases that appear in the New Testament. Because the Qumran literature and the New Testament have a common Jewish background, the first-mentioned provides information in these instances which assists determining the references of New Testament terms and thus their meaning.
- (ii) Elucidation of the social and religious context of the New Testament. The Qumran texts may help to contextualise references to certain traditions which would otherwise have remained obscure e.g. Jesus' reference to a tradition that an enemy was to be hated (Matthew 5:43), the role of angels in the New Testament, the role of work on the Sabbath (Luke 14:5), the light-dark tradition (John 12:35-36; 2Cor. 6:14-15); the messiah

image of a conquering messiah, a serving/caring messiah (Luke 4:18:-19; 7:22), the son of God (Luke 1:31-33 and 4Q246).

- (iii) Contextualisation of New Testament personalities. John the Baptist performed his ministry in the vicinity of Qumran (Matt. 3:1; Luke 3:3). It is therefore well within the realms of possibility that John was acquainted with the Qumran community (Betz 1992:205-214; VanderKam 1994:168-170). What is indeed beyond doubt is the common Jewish background of John's views and this renders John's conduct much more comprehensible (cf. LaSor 1972:149-153). The 11QMelchizedek text also is invaluable as an instrument for the interpretation of the role played by the Melchizedek tradition in the New Testament (cf. VanderKam 1992:190-193).
- (iv) Elucidation of the text of the New Testament. No texts from the New Testament were found among the Qumran literature, with the possible exception of a fragment which might contain a passage from Mark 6:52-53. This fragment (7Q5) is so incomplete that no single word has been fully preserved, with the result that one cannot even state with any certainty that the passage concerned does indeed originate from Mark (Betz & Riesner 1993:139-150; Vermes 1976:115-116). There are therefore no parallel Qumran texts capable of casting more light on the text of the New Testament. One should rather seek to elucidate the text of the New Testament in the following ways:

Interpretation of different readings in parallel passages in the Gospels.

The Qumran literature may be used to elucidate the nature of the New Testament text. The Gospels contain parallel passages, for example those in which a statement made by Jesus is repeated in more than one Gospel. Some of these statements correspond to the letter, and in others differences do occur. In at least one instance it is possible to find, with the help of the Qumran texts, the reason for two texts, namely Luke 10:24 and Matthew 13:17, to differ from one another.

The origin of the quotations from the Old Testament in the New Testament. Quotations from the Old Testament are used to support certain statements in the New Testament. In many instances the

quotations deviate from the text of the Old Testament. In the past these deviations were either ascribed to slipshod quotations or were regarded as quotations from alternative textual traditions. In most cases the existence of such alternative textual traditions could not be proved empirically. Following the discovery of the Qumran texts, this has now become possible (Naudé 1983). This, for instance, applies to quotation from Amos 9:11-12 in Acts 15:15-17.

(v) Elucidation of the interpretation tradition in the New Testament

The Jewish origin of the New Testament implies that the use to which the Old Testament is put, the New Testament must correspond with the way in which contemporary Jewry made use of it. One fundamental problem is namely that of determining the early Jewish methods of interpretation used in the New Testament, can now be solved by studying the ways in which the Old Testament were quoted in the Qumran literature (Betz 1989:82-85; VanderKam 1994:180-182), a body of literature which to a large extent precedes the New Testament.

5. CONCLUDING PERSPECTIVES

Thiering claims that each part of her thesis is necessary to support the rest, but her frail craft must founder on the rocks of probability. Not one of her presuppositions or hypotheses is based on objective evidence, and as the argument develops her thesis must lose in plausibility as the cumulative case must be considered to become less and less plausible as baseless hypotheses become the foundation for baseless propositions...a ramshackle, tumble-down and tottering structure (cf. also Betz & Riesner 1993:136-138).

I conclude with the thoughts expressed by Wise, Abegg and Cook (1996:34-35). For both Christians and Jews, Palestine in the first century CE is homeland. So it is only natural that though the Qumran texts are two thousand years old, they still have much to say for both Jews and Christians. For the Jews the Qumran texts say: Your family was larger than you knew. The watchword is diversity. Modern Judaism comes from Pharisaism, but in the first centuries BCE and CE there were also other kinds of Judaism. Understanding the world of the first century CE means understanding the fact of

diversity. The Qumran texts teach that there are different ways of being authentically Jewish. Any effort to reclaim the Qumran texts for Judaism must acknowledge that fact. For Christians the Qumran texts say: You are more Jewish than you realised. All the traits of early Christian belief that scholars used to attribute to the influence of Greco-Roman culture are now attested in the Qumran texts. Early Christianity is not a hybrid of Judaism and Hellenism — it was rooted in the native soil of Palestine.

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