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mysterious religion by some Romans when it first appeared, and early accounts of Christian worship included allegations of and cannibalism—probably because Christians called their Eucharistic meal the feast of love and talked about eating the body of Christ. Finally, it may be helpful to mention some other areas of spiritual interest that were so widespread in the New Testament world that they do not need to be connected with any particular religion. Animism There was a widespread belief in the existence of spirits, good and bad, and in the possibility that these spirits could possess people and animals. They could also dwell in rocks, trees, streams and other phenomena. The common perception was that such spirits interacted with the world of nature—for example, storms at sea were caused by sprites of water; diseases were caused by demonic possession. As a result of these beliefs, protective amulets were often used by people of all social classes, and magic potions and spells were used to influence or manipulate spirits to make their orders. The city of Ephesus seems to have been a center for these magical arts (see Acts 19:11-21). In this same sense, we should note that virtually everyone in the New Testament world believed in ghosts (spirits of the deceased); some tried to contact them. Fig. 1.6. Animism. In the Roman world it was commonly believed that trees, rocks, rivers and other natural phenomena were inhabited by spirits. (Bridgeman Images) Divination of Augury and Divination: any practice used to discern the will of divine beings and/or predict the future. There was great interest in knowing the future: dreams, visions and other omens could reveal the future, but an interpreter may be needed to know its meaning. Priests known as augurs tried to determine the will of the gods by observing flight patterns or eating habits of birds (the auspices). Professional oracles, usually women, claimed to have the ability to predict the future for those who sought them (and performed necessary services). The most famous of these was in Delphi, Greece. Astrology was also practiced, offering predictions of the future (and attendant advice for the present) based on star observation, which be disarises that affect terrestrial events. Oracle of supernaturalism: a person, usually feminine, female, of receiving messages from the gods in response to private consultations, including questions about the future. There was a common recognition among most people in the Roman world that what we could consider as supernatural events could and did occur: what we considered impossible, they considered extraordinary. Miracles were often attributed to individuals who seemed to have an especially close connection with the spiritual realm; a person believed to have such a connection was called theios anēr (divine man). Examples of such divine men include Honi, the Circle Drawer (a first-century Jewish teacher. C.) and Apolmium of Tyana (a Greek philosopher of the first century D.C.). Jesus, who lived between the lives of these two individuals, would no doubt have been regarded as an anēr weeds by Romans who heard the miraculous stories reported in the New Testament. Interestingly, while women were more likely to be regarded as oracles who could predict the future, most miracle work men. On the Horizon: Heresy of Gnosticism: false teaching, or teaching that does not meet the official standards of a religious community. One of the most significant developments for Christianity in the second century was the emergence of Gnosticism, a religious movement or perspective that attracted many Christians and became the bane of many prominent church leaders who sought to defend the Orthodox faith from what they called Gnostic heresy. Gnosticism is difficult to define because, as a religious and ideological phenomenon, it has taken many forms and had many different expressions (think, for example, how difficult it would be to define exactly what is meant by religion or the thought of the new era today). Gnosticism also demonstrated a remarkable capacity for integration with different religions and philosophies: there were Gnostic Jews, Gnostic Christians, and Gnostic pagans. Ultimately, however, the marriage of Gnosticism and Christianity proved especially effective, and over the second, third and fourth centuries Gnostic versions of Christianity constituted the main alternatives to what we normally think of as mainstream Christianity. There were hundreds of Gnostic Christian churches, complete with their own clergy, bishops, liturgies, and all other accoutrements of any organized religious system. The Gnostics also wrote their own gospels, telling stories about Jesus in ways that reflected their particular interests and then ingunndo the books, falsely attributing them to Jesus' disciples or to close acquaintances. A library of Gnostic writings was discovered in Egypt at Nag Hammadi in 1945, and the availability of this literature greatly increased our understanding of Christian diversity. Dualist: Exhibiting the tendency to separate in clearly opposite categories. All the various expressions of Gnostic thought derive from a one dualist attitude that considers the spirit as fundamentally good and matter as fundamentally bad. Thus, the physical world in general and individual human bodies in particular are understood as material prisons in which divine souls or spirits have been imprisoned. The most prevalent form of Gnosticism known to us held that the world was created by an evil or at least inferior god known as Demiurgo. Humans are basically eternal spirits who were captured by the Demiurgo and are now being confined to bodies of flesh and in a world of matter. Gnostic Christians believed that Christ had come as a spiritual redeemer (disguised as a human being) to transmit secret knowledge (Greek, gnōsis). This knowledge allows the enlightened to be freed from their material existence and perceive their true identities as spiritual beings. The implications of such a belief system for life in this world varied dramatically. Many (probably most) Gnostics argued that the release of meat involved the renunciation of bodily pleasures and material concerns: they encouraged virginity, celibacy, fasting, strict diets, and other aspects of an ascetic and austere lifestyle that would allow them to become more spiritual. But other Gnostics came to the opposite conclusion: they freely engaged in all sorts of wanton excesses, claiming that, as the spirit is all that matters, what is done with the flesh is completely irrelevant. ascetic: religiously strict or severe, especially with regard to self-denial or renunciation of worldly pleasures. We need to emphasize that Gnosticism seems to be a development of the Second, Third and 4th centuries; there is no evidence that the movement as such had any traction at the time when events reported in the New Testament were taking place or when the Books of the New Testament were being written. However, historical scholars do not think that a movement like this simply appeared fully formed in the mid-2nd century; the assumption is that the ideas and trends that would later define Gnosticism must have been present earlier. Thus, it became common for New Testament scholars to speak of an almost invisible and largely unidentified proto-Gnosticism as part of the medium that composed the World of the New Testament. The Apostle Paul writes about the distinction between what is of the flesh and what is of the spirit (Rom. 8:4-13; Gal. 5:16-26; 6:8). The Gospel of John and the Letters Johannine emphasize that Jesus was not only a spiritual being, but a man with a body of real flesh (John 1:14; 1 John 4:2). Texts like these (there are many more) seem to indicate that Gnosticism was on the horizon: people were already thinking about the kinds of things gnosticism would seek sometimes in ways compatible with New Testament documents and sometimes in ways that that radically distinct from those written. Social Systems and Cultural Values Understanding the World of the New Testament also involves knowing the mentality of the people for whom these documents were first written. In recent years, the New Testament scholarship has become more attentive to the identification of social codes not written for this world—subjects that may have been so widespread that they could simply be considered certain. Some of these topics will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters. Some deserve to be mentioned here. Wealth and Poverty The Roman Empire was characterized by grotesque economic inequality. There was nothing comparable to what we would call the middle class; most often, people were extremely wealthy (about 3% of the population) or extremely poor (about 90%). Most of those who belonged to the last group lived at a subsistence level or close to a subsistence level, doing just enough to survive, with little hope of saving anything that would allow them to improve their position or provide them with cover against calamity. The most fortunate of these impoverished people could at least learn an office (as apparently was the case with Jesus, his disciples, and the Apostle Paul), but for many people in rural areas subsistence meant living outside the land, and so life was subject to the vicissitudes of agriculture. Thus, for the less fortunate—beggars, widows, orphans, prisoners, unqualified day workers—survival itself may have been often questioned. Modern estimates suggest that about 28% of the population of the Roman Empire during New Testament times lived below the subsistence level, meaning that these people did not know on a day-to-day high whether they would be able to obtain these things necessary to sustain life. Given the extremes of such a situation, attitudes towards wealth and poverty were a significant part of the social world. Some religious people in Jesus' day believed that wealth could be seen as a sign of God's blessing and that poverty could be understood as a consequence of divine discontent. It is difficult, however, to know how widespread this notion was. What seems more certain is that virtually everyone in this period of time has remained in what is now called the theory of the limited good. People believed that the money and things that money can buy were not on short offer (or at least finite); the common perception — in contrast to modern capitalism — was the acquisition of wealth or resources by some in need of depletion of wealth or resources for others. Simply put, virtually everyone in New Testament times believed that there was so much out there and that some had less than they needed because other people had more than they needed. Patronage relationship and patron-customer loyalty: a social system whereby people with power serve as benefactors to those who do not have Roman society (in Palestine and elsewhere) operated in accordance with strong expectations of benefaction and obligation. At the simplest level, the exchange of favors was practically definitive of friendship. Friends were people who did things for each other, and even if no one should keep scoring, assistance and support would have to be mutual in the long run or else friendship would break. On another level, however, almost all people were engaged in patron-client relationships with people who were not their social equals. Very few people had money or power, but those who did were expected to serve as benefactors to those who did not. The rich can, for example, allow peasants to live on their land or provide them with food, grain or employment. In sociological terms, such benefactors are called patrons, and beneficiaries of benefits are called customers. In such a relationship, the exchange of favors could not be mutual, but customers were expected to offer their patron what they could: gratitude and, above all, loyalty. They were expected to praise their patron, speak well of their patron, and improve their social reputation. They were expected to rely on their patron to continue supplying them. And, if necessary, they were expected to perform various services that the patron could request from them. Such relationships were not legally constituted, but on a basic level they represented how most people thought the world should work and, in fact, how it normally did. Patron-client relations would form a significant scenario for the development of Christian theology. The term most commonly used for granting patron benefits is charis (typically translated as grace in the New Testament), and the term that is often used for the expected attitude of customer loyalty toward its patron is pistis (often translated as faith in the New Testament). Thus, the phenomenon of patron-client relationships seems to have served as a harsh analogy for divine-human encounters in which the constitutive elements are grace and faith: God gives people freely and generously (grace), and this awakens within people an appropriate response of trust, devotion, and willingness to serve (faith). Honor and Shame The crucial social value in the World of the New Testament (among Greeks, Romans, Jews, and all others) was honor—that is, the status one has in the eyes of those whose opinions are considered significant. To some extent, honor was attributed through factors beyond an individual's control: age, gender, nationality, ethnicity, height, physical health, economic class, and the like could define certain parameters that would define the limits of how much honor one could expect to achieve. Given these limitations, however, things can increase honor (religious, religious piety, virtuous behavior, a pleasant or charitable disposition, etc.), and many things can precipitate a loss of honor or even bring its opposite, shame. Such a value system may not seem strange to us because even in modern Western society everyone likes to receive honor and no one wants to be put in shame. The difference, however, could be of magnitude: the World of the New Testament was one in which honor should be valued above all else and shame was to be avoided at all costs. For example, people wanted to be rich not primarily because wealth would allow them to live in luxury, but because almost everyone believed it was honorable to have money to spare. Likewise, it was shameful to be needy; Ben Sira, a prominent Jewish teacher from the Second Temple period taught that it is better to die than to beg (Lord 40:28). He said this not because begging was immoral or sinful, but because it was shameful, and life without honor is not worth living. Everyone in Jesus' day (including beggars) probably believed it. gentiles: people who are not Jewish. The language of honor and shame is found throughout the New Testament. Some voices in the New Testament take advantage of language to present faithfulness as a way to achieve honor and avoid shame (1 Pet. 1:7, 2:6). Other voices seek to overthrow conventional wisdom about how these values are applied, claiming, for example, that it is more honorable to behave like a servant than to dominate others as a person of power and privilege (Mark 10:42-43; cf. Luke 14:7-11). And some New Testament documents whollyenot repudiate the fixation with honor, calling on readers to develop a new system of values defined by Christ, which did not seek honor or fame or glory, but instead carried the shame of the cross (Heb. 12:2). Fig. 1.8. Shame. In the World of the New Testament, shame was not only a temporary emotional response (as an embarrassment), but rather a predominant psychological status according to which one lived in disgrace and was considered unworthy of divine or human attention (or even of life itself). Cowards, losers and fools lived in shame, as well as tax collectors, lepers, beggars and prostitutes. Compare the use of nudity to display shame here with the 19th-century depiction of Truth in Fig. 1.4. (Bridgeman Images) Life under Roman rule How was life under Roman rule? On the one hand, the Romans were very good at administration, and many things probably ran more smoothly under their control than they would otherwise have. They cleared the sea of pirates, built aqueducts and roads, kept crime to a minimum, and provided many job opportunities. The extent of the Roman Empire, and its basic stability, brought an unprecedented unity to the world, a sometimes referred to as the Pax Romana. Trade flowed more freely than ever, and both travel and communication (communication sending letters) has become relatively easy—an essential factor for the rapid spread of Christianity, persecution: a program or campaign to exterminate, deter or subjugate people based on their participation in a religious, ethnic, or social group. In Palestine, however, these benefits came at a very high price. First, the tax burden seems to have been incredibly oppressive, forcing most people into poverty and keeping them there. In fact, it is estimated that in the New Testament era between a quarter and a third of all people in the Roman Empire were slaves (see box 23.2). Some people actually became slaves voluntarily hoping to improve their lot (at least then one would be fed). Second, the Jewish people (even those who were not literally slaves) knew that they were not free, and this knowledge was an affront to their national honor and religious sensibilities. There were soldiers everywhere, reminding them that they were a conquered people. The Jews were officially allowed to practice their religion, but Israel had a long-standing tradition of prophets who ran against injustice and expunted the shenanigans of the powerful, and the Romans did not go to this sort of thing (as John the Baptist discovered). What was allowed was an innocuous type of religion that did not disturb or challenge the powers they were. Several ancient sources indicate that Palestine became increasingly unstable in the second half of the first century (after the time of Herod Agrippa I). Passionate Jewish rebels known as Zealots eventually led an all-out war against Rome (66-73 D.C.) that had disastrous consequences for the Jewish people. The city of Jerusalem was conquered and the temple destroyed in 70 .C. About sixty years later, a second Jewish uprising, led by Simon ben Kosiba, popularly known as Bar Kokhba, was also mercilessly suppressed. After that, with the pain of death, no Jew was allowed to enter what had once been Jerusalem. We do not know for sure what happened to the Christian church in Palestine, but the focal point for the growing Christian movement has moved from Jerusalem to places like Ephesus, Antioch and Rome. This is mainly due to the success of missionaries like Paul in bringing the gospel to a large number of Gentiles. In these areas, Christians sometimes encountered hostility from Jewish neighbors who came to see the new faith as an aberration or false religion (see 1 Thess. 2:14). The Romans were always the greatest threat, however, and their hostility came to a head under Emperor Nero, who began the first open government-sponsored persecution of Christians in Rome in the 1960s, a terrible purge in which Peter, Paul and several others were martyred. Box 1.2 Whose pax? The Pax Romana was established through conquest. Calgacus, a caledonium of one of the nations defeated to this end, commented commented They create desolation and call it peace (Tacitus, Agricola 30). Tacit, Agricola, trans. Harold Mattingly (New York: Penguin, 2009). By the beginning of the second century, almost all the books of the New Testament had been written, including the Gospels and all of Paul's letters. At that time, the Romans had regarded Christianity and Judaism as separate religions, and the former was now regarded as an unauthorized innovation and was officially banned. We have a good picture of what this meant in practice from a set of letters sent by the Roman governor Pliny to emperor Trajan in about 112 years. General politics was a kind of Do not ask, do not say approach: Christians were not sought, but when they came to the attention of a ruler, they should be tortured and killed unless they renounced their faith and made sacrifices to the Roman gods (see box 26.6). Conclusion New Testament documents are written loaded with value that criticize the cultural standards of the world in which they were produced. Both Roman and Jewish social systems are evaluated, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively. For example, as we move through these writings, we will find a very sustained critique of Roman imperialism. The outlook is not completely negative — there were benefits to the Roman system. Still, although it is not always declared immediately, it is not necessary to look carefully to see that most new testament authors are at least somewhat of pax romana: world peace is good, but at what cost it was achieved, and at what cost is it maintained? liberation theology: a movement in Christian theology, developed mainly by Latin American Roman Catholics of the twentieth century, which emphasizes the liberation of oppression. It should come as no surprise to discover that modern theologians have sought to apply these criticisms to the world we live in now. Feminists challenge the status quo of male supremacy, and liberation theologians criticize the process of colonialism through which European powers impose their political and religious systems on developing nations. In the 21st century, some theologians would speak critically of Pax Americana or even Pax Christiana, according to which relative peace can be preserved through the dominance of a political, cultural and/or religious system —and, of course, the writings of the New Testament are referenced in such discussions. As we will see, however, these documents do not speak unilaterally, and people with different sociopolitical ideas are often able to find support for their preferred position in comments offered in one or the other of the New Testament books. But even when there is a lack of clarity as to the application of New Testament values to our modern world, the questions are brought to the fore: At what cost do the benefits of modern modern society have And at what cost are they kept? FOR MORE READING: The Bell of the Roman World, Albert A. Exploring the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide to the World of Jesus and the Early Christians. Nelson, 1998. Carter, Warren. 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Church and State: The Ethics of Subordination 1.20. Church and State: The Ethics of Critical Distancing 2 New Testament Fund The Jewish World [2017 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/Bridgeman Images] The New Testament tells a story already underway. He assumes that his readers know the material that constitutes what Christians call the Old Testament, and they should also know what happened to the Jewish people in the years since these books were written. Let's try a quick exercise. Look at the list of words below and try to guess what they all have in common—two things in fact: what do those words have in common? First, all of them common phenomena that are often mentioned in the New Testament. Second, they designate rare phenomena, rarely mentioned (if at all) in the Old Testament. Clearly, much has changed in what could be widely called the biblical world. The Old Testament Israelites became the Jews of the New Testament, and much has happened to them and the world in which they live. History So far The Old Testament tells the story of a people who identified themselves as those chosen by God. His history as a people began with the selection of God from Abraham and Sarah and God's decision to have a special relationship with all his descendants. These descendants were organized into twelve tribes, but were collectively known as children of Israel. They had to endure difficult years of slavery in Egypt, but God called Moses to deliver them, give them the Torah (instruction of how God's people should live), and take them to the promised land (a region the Romans would later call Palestine). There they became a significant nation that reached its high point under King David around 1000 a.C. They built a magnificent temple, but subsequent centuries were marked by division and decline. In 587 .C, the Babylonians conquered the capital Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and led the population into exile. Fifty years later, Cyrus of Persia allowed the people (now called Jews) to return and build a new temple, which was dedicated in 515 a.C. and much later destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.C. Thus, the period of Jewish history from 515 to .C. to 70 D.C. is often referred to as the period of the Second Temple. It is also subdivided into four periods. The Persian Period (ca. 537-332 to .C.) During this period, the Jewish nation was ruled by priests with minimal interference from the Persian kings. It was at this time that synagogues emerged as significant places for teaching and worship. Jews have become increasingly focused on fidelity to the Torah as the hallmark of their religion. The Hellenistic Period (ca. 332-167 .C.) Hellenistic: affected by Hellenism — that is, the influence of Greek and Roman culture, customs, philosophy and ways of thinking. With the conquests of Alexander the Great, Palestine came under Greek control; after Alexander's death, Palestine first became part of the Ptolemy empire, whose power was centered in Egypt (320-198 .C.). It then became part of the Seleucid empire, whose power was centered in Syria (198-167 .C.). One of the Seleucid rulers, Antioch IV Epiphanes (175-164 a.C.), sought to exterminate the Jewish religion by inflicting horrific atrocities on anyone who professed or practiced the faith. The Hasmonean Period (167-63 .C.) Hanukkah: an eight-day Jewish festival commemorating the rededication of the Jewish temple in 164 .C. Rebels apellidados de Maccabees Maccabees led a revolt against Antioch and gained independence. The temple (contaminated by Antioch) was rededicated at an event that would later be celebrated through the Hanukkah Festival. The Maccabees established a Jewish state ruled by the Hasmonean dynasty (Hasmonean is the official family name for the leaders of the Maccabees). Jewish sects, including those that would eventually be known as Pharisees and saducts, emerged at this time. The Roman Period (63 a.C.- 70 d.C.) The civil war between the Hasmonaeans left the Jewish state ripe for conquest by the growing Roman Empire. The Roman general Pompey annexed the territory without much fighting in 63 a.C., and Palestine would remain under Roman rule until the end of the second temple period—and beyond. Box 2.1 Basic chronology of the New Testament

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