



2013 American Lecture in the History of Religions

John G. Gager, Jr.

William H. Danforth Professor of Religion, Emeritus,
Princeton University

Sponsored by the American Academy of Religion,
Agnes Scott College, Emory University, Georgia State
University, and Spelman College

Winners and Losers in the Making of Early Christianity

- *A Tale of Two Stories: Winners and Losers in the Making of Early Christianity*
Monday, April 1, 7:00 pm-9:00 pm
Agnes Scott College, Alston Luchsinger Lounge
- *Turning the World Upside Down: An Ancient Jewish Life of Jesus*
Tuesday, April 2, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm
Georgia State University, Troy Moore Library, 9th Floor of General Classroom
Building
- *Was the Apostle Paul the Father of Christian Anti-Judaism?*
Wednesday, April 3, 11:00 am-12:00 pm
Atlanta University Center, Robert Franklin Auditorium
- *The Apostle Paul in Jewish Eyes: Heretic or Hero?*
Thursday, April 4, 7:00 pm-9:00 pm
Emory University, Room 252 Candler School of Theology
- *Let's Meet Downtown in the Synagogue: Jews and Greeks in the Ancient World*
Friday, April 5, 5:00 pm-7:00 pm
Georgia State University Center for Hellenic Studies, Goethe Zentrum in Colony
Square

LECTURE SERIES ON EARLY CHRISTIANITY HOSTED BY ATLANTA AREA UNIVERSITIES

John G. Gager, Jr., First Lecturer in the American Lectures in the History of Religions
Series in a Decade

Atlanta, GA – For the first time in ten years, the century-old American Lectureship in the History of Religions (ALHR) is undergoing a rebirth in Atlanta, the city of new beginnings.

John G. Gager, Jr., William H. Danforth Professor of Religion Emeritus, Princeton University, is delivering a week-long lecture series titled “Winners and Losers in the Making of Early Christianity” at Atlanta-area universities during the week of April 1-5. Gager retired from Princeton University in 2006 after a long career as a professor, author, and expert in Early Christianity.

Gager is the 2013 American Lecturer in the History of Religions – the first in ten years. The ALHR was established by a grant from the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) in 1891 to encourage path-breaking scholarship through a lecture and book series. The American Academy of Religion (AAR) has administered the series since 1994. The list of ALHR lecturers, beginning in 1893, reads like a “Who’s Who” in the History of Religions.

Following the unexpected death of Willard G. Oxtoby, University of Toronto, the 2003 lecturer, the long-time series languished. AAR is pleased to relaunch the ALHR lectureship with a new structure and a streamlined academic format. Previously, the lecturer visited multiple cities over a nine month period. The new lecture series will occur in over the course of one week in a single North American city.

AAR is kicking off the new ALHR series in its hometown of Atlanta with Gager’s lectures. Agnes Scott College, Georgia State University, Atlanta University Center, and Emory University will be hosting the lecture series the week of April 1-5. Visit the AAR’s web site at www.aarweb.org for more information.

John Goodrich Gager, Jr.

John G. Gager received his BA from Yale College and spent a post-baccalaureate year at the Sorbonne in Paris. He returned to Yale, where he earned a B.D. degree from Yale Divinity School. Gager then returned to Europe to attend graduate study at the University of Tübingen. He completed the PhD program in Religion at Harvard University in 1968.

He taught for one year at Haverford College and was hired by Princeton University's Department of Religion in 1968. He retired from Princeton as the William H. Danforth Professor of Religion. He has served as a Fulbright Researcher and Lecturer at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, as a Visiting Professor of Religious Studies in *l'Ecole Pratiques des Hautes Etudes* in Paris, and as a Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in Jerusalem.

Professor Gager's work invites us to think with new categories, and to consider new attitudes in our scholarly approach to the late Roman empire and the period of early Christian formation. We should not assume that what we today think of as Jewish, Christian or Pagan corresponds in any simple way to how citizens of the later Roman empire understood themselves in religious and/or ethnic terms. Professor Gager's major publications all perform these rich insights. He explored the nexus of early Jewish-Christian relations in several landmark studies: *Kingdom and Community: The Social World of Early Christianity* (Prentice Hall, 1975); *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (Oxford University Press, 1983, paperback 1985); and *Reinventing Paul* (Oxford University Press 2000, paperback 2002). Those who work on the Greek side of such questions have profited from John Gager's imagination and creativity, as displayed in two other landmark studies: *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (SBL Monograph Series, 1972), and *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (Oxford University Press, 1992).

In addition to his extensive scholarly and archaeological activities, Gager is also an avid rock climber and cyclist.

Lecture Abstracts for *Winners and Losers in the Making of Early Christianity*

Monday, April 1, 7:00 pm-9:00 pm

Agnes Scott College, Alston Luchsinger Lounge

A Tale of Two Stories: Winners and Losers in the Making of Early Christianity

The traditional view of Christian origins is that Jesus came to found a new religion, called Christianity. Judaism, with its empty rituals and dead practices, was soon left behind.

The New Testament gospels and Paul's letters came to be understood as speaking with a single voice in proclaiming this theology of anti-Judaism. There is much that is wrong

with this picture. Jesus and his followers are portrayed as loyal Jews in the New Testament gospels. Some early followers resisted Paul's gospel which held that Gentile believers were saved without observing any Jewish practices, most notably circumcision. In later centuries we hear of various groups of Jesus-believers who opposed Paul bitterly and observed traditional Jewish practices; they held that Jesus was the long expected Messiah who had come not to overturn Judaism but to reinforce it. These groups survived for many centuries and seem to have disappeared with the arrival and expansion of Islam in the 7th and 8th centuries. One result of renewed attention to these forms of Jewish Christianity has been a reassessment of the New Testament itself. The gospel of Matthew and the book of Revelation are now widely seen as Jewish texts, not Christian texts influenced by Judaism but Jewish texts pure and simple. Jesus plays a central role in both texts, but he remains entirely within the world of ancient Judaism. Much the same has been said of Paul and his gospel. All of this calls into question the traditional view of Christianity as a religion that quickly left Judaism behind.

Tuesday, April 2, 2:00 pm-4:00 pm

Georgia State University, Troy Moore Library, 9th Floor of General Classroom Building

Turning the World Upside Down: An Ancient Jewish Life of Jesus

Much has been written about the sad history of Christian anti-Judaism. Christian writers produced all manner of anti-Jewish writings. And these anti-Jewish beliefs spilled over into actions, from the destruction of Jewish synagogues, to the limitation of Jewish rights in public life, and even mass murder in the Crusades and later. This history is often told as if Jews were silent, passive players who failed to respond. In the past several decades this view has undergone serious revision, with a new emphasis on Jewish resistance to Christian anti-Judaism. One form of this resistance appears in a series of Jewish anti-gospels, known collectively as the *Toledot Yeshu*, or the story of Jesus. These little studied texts turn out to have been something like ancient and medieval best-sellers, satirical and polemical retellings of the Christian gospels in which everything is turned upside down. Jesus is a magician and a disreputable student of the sages who eventually arrest him and put him to death as a renegade Jew. Conversely, Peter and Paul turn out to be double-agents of the Jewish sages; their role is to create Christianity as a false religion and to urge Christians to leave the Jews in peace; they remained loyal Jews throughout their lives. The sources for these texts are very old; complete versions in Hebrew and Aramaic appear by the 6th century. Eventually they were translated into a variety of Jewish languages, then into Latin, and finally into German by Martin Luther.

Wednesday, April 3, 11:00 am-12:00 pm

Atlanta University Center, Robert Franklin Auditorium

Was the Apostle Paul the Father of Christian Anti-Judaism?

We know three things about Paul that are beyond doubt. First, during his lifetime he was an extraordinarily controversial figure; his preaching of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles aroused hatred and opposition from other Jesus-followers who insisted that Gentile believers had to become Jews in order to be saved. Second, despite these controversies, he became a central figure in the Christian New Testament – writings by him, or

attributed to him, or about him, make up more than half of the New Testament. Third, he was interpreted (and often still is) as the originator of Christian anti-Judaism, the view that Jews were no longer the people of God. In the past several decades, in large part under the shadow of the Nazi Holocaust, this view of Paul has come under serious attack, by scholars of various persuasions. We will survey these new views, paying special attention to the somewhat surprising role played by Jewish interpreters of Paul.

Thursday, April 4, 7:00 pm-9:00 pm

Emory University, Room 252 Candler School of Theology

The Apostle Paul in Jewish Eyes: Heretic or Hero?

The apostle Paul has played a central role among Jewish thinkers in the past two centuries – and earlier. Some have seen him as an apostate from Judaism, who turned his back on his faith and became the father of Christian anti-Judaism. Others have adopted him as an ally in their resistance to what they take to be unacceptably legalistic forms of Judaism. Others have come to understand him as a loyal Jew, misunderstood by Jews and Christians alike. This repatriation of a Jewish heretic has taken some surprising forms. Some controversies stem from Paul's own lifetime; early on, he was an avid persecutor of Jesus-followers. Later, after his "conversion" or commissioning, he stirred up angry opposition to his preaching in synagogues. And yet, in the end, by his inclusion in the Christian New Testament, he became "a domesticated apostle."

Friday, April 5, 5:00 pm-7:00 pm

Georgia State University Center for Hellenic Studies, Goethe Zentrum in Colony Square

Let's Meet Downtown in the Synagogue: Jews and Greeks in the Ancient World

Relations between Jews and Greeks go back a very long time. The earliest reference is in the work of Theophrastus, a student of Aristotle. He is fascinated by animal sacrifice in the Jerusalem temple, but puzzled that Jews do not eat what they offer. He calls Jews a nation of philosophers – a view that continued for centuries. Greeks were attracted to Jewish synagogues, before the arrival of Christianity and after. We will examine inscriptions from two Greek sites in Asia Minor--Sardis and Aphrodisias-- where Greeks affiliated themselves with local synagogues. Next, we will look at a series of sermons by John Chrysostom, in which he expresses horror that members of his congregation are celebrating Jewish holidays (Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkoth) with their Jewish neighbors. These sermons mark the beginning of the end of cordial relations between Jews and Greeks and became important sources for later Christian anti-Judaism.