

Good question.....was Jesus Christ just a CopyCat Savior Myth?

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This is the continuation of the introductory article on the CopyCat Savior discussion, at
(copycat.html)

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These alleged "identicalities" generally attempt to identify Jesus with deities within a couple of categories (which have some overlap).

1. First there are the "Dying and Rising Gods" (e.g. Adonis, Baal (and Hadad), Marduk, Osiris, Tammuz/Dumuzi, Melquart, Eshmun), popularized in James G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* [WR:GB]

2. Secondly are the figures in the Mystery Religions (e.g. Mithra, Dionysos, Hellenistic period Isis/Osirus).

3. Third, there are the more "major players" (e.g. Buddha, Krishna)

4. Finally are the figures that are allegedly linked by broader motifs such as 'miracle worker', 'savior' or 'virgin born'--heroes and divine men-- without an explicit death/resurrection notion (e.g. Indra, Thor, Horus?)

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Let's look at these in turn...

The Dying and Rising Gods

This is an older category, originally brilliantly championed by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, that has been abandoned by scholars in that field:

"The Frazerian construct of a general 'Oriental' vegetation god who periodically dies and rises from the dead has been discredited by more recent scholarship. There is no evidence for a resurrection of Attis; even Osiris remains with the dead; and if Persephone returns to the world every year, a joyous event for gods and men, the initiates do not follow her. There is a dimension of death in all of the mystery initiations, but the concept of rebirth or resurrection of either gods or mystai is anything but explicit." [HI:AMC:75]

"Despite its faults, Sir J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* remains a pioneering monument in the field. It is full of comparative data on kingship and ritual, but its value is lessened by Frazer's ritualist interpretation of myth and by his eagerness to establish dubious analogies between myths of primitive tribes and classical myths." [HI:CMY6:2-3]

"Like writers on myth during the Enlightenment, Frazer ignored the possibility that change might not always bring improvement. Frazer himself did no field work. He integrated into his master scheme a vast body of data, often carelessly gathered, and manipulated it to fit his theory." [HI:CM3:645]

"The *Golden Bough* is an extensive study of ancient cults and folklore and comprises a vast amount of anthropological research. While remarkable as a collection of data, the work's conclusions are now often considered somewhat dubious." [SDFML, s.v. "Frazer, Sir James George"]

By the way, this is not a problem with us somehow only having "slight amounts of data"--we have TONS and TONS of information today about this issue. But it is this abundance of data about these

ancient figures that leads us away from Frazer & Co's mis-interpretation of that data. Unfortunately, too much popular 'skeptical' literature on the subject still uses this category and concept as 'credible', but the scholarly worlds--both Christian-oriented and non-Christian in orientation-- has essentially 'moved away' from this...[BTW, this is not a matter of the work just not being cited today because it is already 'established'(!), as the quotes above specifically demonstrate. It has been "discredited" not 'accepted as being indisputable fact'.]

I want to give an extended quote here from The Encyclopedia of Religion [Macmillian: 1987; article is by Jonathan Z. Smith, Professor at University of Chicago, and general editor of the HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion]. The entry under "Dying and Rising Gods" starts this way (emphasis mine):

"The category of dying and rising gods, once a major topic of scholarly investigation, must now be understood to have been largely a misnomer based on imaginative reconstructions and exceedingly late or highly ambiguous texts.

"Definition. As applied in the scholarly literature, 'dying and rising gods' is a generic appellation for a group of male deities found in agrarian Mediterranean societies who serve as the focus of myths and rituals that allegedly narrate and annually represent their death and resurrection.

" Beyond this sufficient criterion, dying and rising deities were often held by scholars to have a number of cultic associations, sometimes thought to form a "pattern." They were young male figures of fertility; the drama of their lives was often associated with mother or virgin goddesses; in some areas, they were related to the institution of sacred kingship, often expressed through rituals of sacred marriage; there were dramatic reenactments of their life, death, and putative resurrection, often accompanied by a ritual identification of either the society or given individuals with their fate.

"The category of dying and rising gods, as well as the pattern of its mythic and ritual associations, received its earliest full formulation in the influential work of James G. Frazer The Golden Bough, especially in its two central volumes, The Dying God and Adonis, Attis, Osiris. Frazer offered two interpretations, one euhemerist, the other naturist. In the former, which focused on the figure of the dying god, it was held that a (sacred) king would be slain when his fertility waned. This practice, it was suggested, would be later mythologized, giving rise to a dying god. The naturist explanation, which covered the full cycle of dying and rising, held the deities to be personifications of the seasonal cycle of vegetation. The two interpretations were linked by the notion that death followed upon a loss of fertility, with a period of sterility being followed by one of rejuvenation, either in the transfer of the kingship to a successor or by the rebirth or resurrection of the deity.

"There are empirical problems with the euhemerist theory. The evidence for sacral regicide is limited and ambiguous; where it appears to occur, there are no instances of a dying god figure. The naturist explanation is flawed at the level of theory. Modern scholarship has largely rejected, for good reasons, an interpretation of deities as projections of natural phenomena.

"Nevertheless, the figure of the dying and rising deity has continued to be employed, largely as a preoccupation of biblical scholarship, among those working on ancient Near Eastern sacred kingship in relation to the Hebrew Bible and among those concerned with the Hellenistic mystery cults in relation to the New Testament.

"Broader Categories. Despite the shock this fact may deal to modern Western religious sensibilities, it is a commonplace within the history of religions that immortality is not a prime characteristic of divinity: gods die. Nor is the concomitant of omnipresence a widespread requisite: gods disappear.

The putative category of dying and rising deities thus takes its place within the larger category of dying gods and the even larger category of disappearing deities. Some of these divine figures simply disappear; some disappear only to return again in the near or distant future; some disappear and reappear with monotonous frequency. All the deities that have been identified as belonging to the class of dying and rising deities can be subsumed under the two larger classes of disappearing deities or dying deities. In the first case, the deities return but have not died; in the second case, the gods die but do not return. There is no unambiguous instance in the history of religions of a dying and rising deity."

Now, we can summarize this quote thus:

1. There is simply "NO unambiguous data" to support the belief in the existence of ANY dyin'-n-risin' deity apart from Jesus Christ;
2. There is (therefore) data CONTRARY to the belief that this was a COMMON figure before the time of Christ (to say the least);
3. And therefore, there would not be ANY motif/images FROM WHICH the NT authors could even borrow the image of a dying and rising God.
4. (And also that any biblical and ANE scholarship that still uses this image in trying to understand ANE sacral kingship and NT Mystery Religions is simply unaware of the fact that the comparative data has moved out from under them)

Now, from a practical standpoint, we SHOULD BE able to end the matter here. Since most of the alleged pre-Christian "Christs" are held up as dying-and-rising deities, this SINGLE criticism of modern scholarship ALONE would destroy the 'material borrowing' or CopyCat hypothesis totally. But let's go a bit further...let's look at some of the specific deities offered as pagan christs, and see how scholarship views these 'almost identical' claims (pages cited are from the Eliade work, cited above, "Dying and Rising Gods", by J. Smith, unless otherwise noted):

Adonis (p.522). "There is no suggestion of Adonis rising (in either the Panyasisian form or the Ovidian form of the myth)".....

The two versions of this myth are:

□ (Aphrodite sees the dead body of Adonis, killed by a boar while hunting) "she rushed down...she complained against the Fates, crying: 'But still everything will not be subject to your decrees; a memorial of my grief for you, Adonis, will abide forever. The scene of your death will be recreated annually with the ritual of my grief performed. But your blood will be transformed into a flower. O Persephone, you were allowed at one time to change the limbs of the maiden Mentha into the fragrant mint--will I be begrudged then the transformation of my hero, the son of Cinyars?'...With these words she sprinkled fragrant nectar on his blood which, at the touch of the drops, began to swell just like a gleaming bubble in the rain. In no longer than an hour's time a flower sprang from the blood, red as the thick skin of the fruit of the pomegranate that hides the seeds within. Yet the flower is of brief enjoyment for the winds (which give it its name, anemone) blow upon it; with difficulty it clings to life and falls under the blast and buffeting." [Ovid's version, cited at HI:CMY120f; note that this might be considered some kind of survival 'inside' death? but certainly not a resurrection in any real sense. The scene of death is recreated annually, but the death is a once-for-all event in the myth.]

□ "When Adonis was an infant, Aphrodite put Adonis in a chest and gave it to Persephone to keep. Persephone looked inside; and once she saw the beauty of the boy, she refused to give him back. Zeus settled the quarrel that ensued by deciding that Adonis would stay with Persephone below one part of the year and with Aphrodite in the upper world for the other part." [HI:CMY6:122; note that this 'movement' from the underworld to the upperworld is done BEFORE Adonis dies (when he is still an infant)...it is easy to see why Smith sees no reference to resurrection in this: "This tradition

of bilocation has no suggestion of death and rebirth.".]

"By every indication, however, the Adonis of the Athenians could not have been a god of vegetation but the very opposite...The gardens of Adonis, where new growth withered, were conceived by the Greeks themselves as the negation of the cultivation of grain and the order of Demeter...The Athenian Adonis, adopted by women and celebrated in the home, suggests a crisis in the city marked by the intrusion of private values, rather than a cosmic drama occasioned by the death of a god who is supposed to be the symbol of the agricultural cycle." [WR:MYB:1:434f]
"The frequently cited 'gardens of Adonis' (kepoi) were proverbial illustrations of the brief, transitory nature of life and contain no hint of rebirth. The point is that the young plant shoots rapidly whiter and die, and not that the seeds have been 'reborn' when they sprout" (Smith)

Baal/Hadad/Adad (p. 522f). In discussing the fragmentary evidence we have about these, Smith points out that

"As it stands, the text appears to be one of a descent to the underworld and return--a pattern not necessarily equivalent to dying and rising. Baal is 'as if he is dead'; he then appears alive." (p523)
[One might also note that in the Baal-Mot interchange, Baal actually agrees to 'be Mot's slave'--not the same as being 'consumed by Mot'. Mot 'consumes him', of course, but perhaps Baal maintained his essential life order to 'serve Mot'. This would make sense of the 'slave' image, and also explain why he 'descends' to the underworld with his entire 'staff' of weather servants.]

"This is a disappearing-reappearing narrative [note: Hadad hides in a bog for seven years]. There is no suggestion of death and resurrection...Nor is there any suggestion of an annual cycle of death and rebirth...The question whether Aliyan Baal is a dying and rising deity must remain sub judice." (p.523)

"It should be noted that the identification of Baal as an annually dying and rising god with the Babylonian Tammuz has lately suffered. New Sumerian tablets published by S. Kramer show that Tammuz died once for all and C. H. Gordon has argued that Baal too had no annual death and resurrection. See the whole discussion with refs. in E. M. Yamauchi, "Tammuz and the Bible" JBL 84:283-90. r.l.h.]" [TWOT, s.v. 'baal']

"There has been considerable discussion whether the Baal cycle and, in particular, the Baal-Mot cycle reflects the seasonal cycle of an ordinary agricultural year or a 7-year (sabbatical) cycle. The chief proponent of a cyclic seasonal interpretation of the whole of the Baal epic is J. C. de Moor (1971), who compares the allusions in the various sections with current climactic conditions known from Syria today. However, there are a number of objections to the details of de Moor's thesis, as for example his reordering of the tablets so that the first 3 are to be read in the sequence 3, 1, 2. Thus, tablet 3 is related to the autumn, tablets 1 and 2 to the winter, tablets 4 and 5 to the spring, and tablet 6 to the summer. However, de Moor's reordering creates a problem in connection with the building of Baal's house, which de Moor has to suppose was begun, then abandoned, and only later completed." [ABD, "Baal"; note the issue of the 'fragmentary evidence'--there is a huge problem in how to sequence the events in the tablets and pieces of tablets we have.]

After Baal wins his palace, he is challenged by Mot, the god of death, who kills him. On another occasion Baal killed Mot for seven years. Since Mot remains dead for seven years, this cannot be seasonal conflict" [Cyrus Gordon, in BANE:93]

(The relevant texts on Aliyan Baal are collected and translated in Cyrus H. Gordon's Ugaritic Literature (Rome, 1949) and Godfrey R. Driver's Canaanite Myths and Legends (Edinburgh, 1956), both of which reject the dying and rising pattern.)

Baal is supposed to be one of the best examples of a dying and rising god--that the data is ambiguous at best is not a good sign for the CopyCat thesis...

Attis (p. 523). "The complex mythology of Attis is largely irrelevant to the question of dying and rising deities. In the old, Phrygian versions, Attis is killed by being castrated, either by himself or by another; in the old Lydian version, he is killed by a boar. In neither case is there any question of his returning to life...Neither myth nor ritual offer any warrant for classifying Attis as a dying and rising deity."

"All of the attempts in the scholarly literature to identify Attis as a dying and rising deity depend not on the mythology but rather on the ritual, in particular a questionable interpretation of the five-day festival of Cybele on 22-27 March. The question of the relationship between the Day of Blood (24 March) and the Day of Joy (25 March) caught the attention of some scholars, who, employing the analogy of the relationship of Good Friday to Easter Sunday, reasoned that if among other activities on the Day of Blood there was mourning for Attis, then the object of the 'joy' on the following day must be Attis's resurrection. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that this was the case. The Day of Joy is a late addition to what was once a three-day ritual in which the Day of Blood was followed by a purificatory ritual and the return of the statue of the goddess to the temple. Within the cult, the new feast of the Day of Joy celebrates Cybele. The sole text that connects the Day of Joy with Attis is a fifth-century biography of Isidore the Dialectician by the Neoplatonic philosopher Damascius, who reports that Isidore once had a dream in which he was Attis and the Day of Joy was celebrated in his honor!" [p.523]

There are several accounts of Attis' death (and relationship to Cybele):

□ "Attis was born in Phrygia of human parents, normal except for the fact that he was unable to beget children. As an adult, he moved to Lydia and established the rites of the Mother there. These rites attracted an enormous following, more so than the cult of Zeus, with the result that Zeus was jealous and sent a boar to kill Attis. In view of the manner of his death, the Galatian residents of Pessinous refused to eat pork." [ascribed to Hermesianax, in Pausanias 7.17.9, from HI:ISGM:240, no mention of resurrection, etc.]

□ "A more grisly variant on this narrative can be found in Servius' Commentary on Aeneid 9.115. In Servius' story, too, Attis becomes conspicuous for his devotions to the Magna Mater, but in this account Attis's undoing is his physical beauty, which attracts the attention of the king of his (unnamed) city. To escape the advances of this king, Attis flees from the city to the forest, but the king pursues him and rapes him. Attis retaliates by castrating the king, who then castrates Attis in turn. Attis is found by the attendants of the Mother's temple lying under a pine tree, dying of his wounds. They try unsuccessfully to save him, and after his death, they institute an annual period of mourning in his honor, during which the goddess's attendants, here called archigalli, castrate themselves in memory of Attis." [HI:ISGM:240n11; no mention of resurrection--only perpetual death]

□ "Diodorus preserves a rather simple tale in which the human Cybele, cast out by her parents, falls in love with the handsome young shepherd Attis. She becomes pregnant by him but then is recognized by her parents and taken in again. When they learn of her pregnancy, they cause Attis to be killed, whereupon Cybele goes mad with grief and wanders through the countryside. Eventually, after a famine, she is recognized as a goddess and Attis is worshipped with her. Because his body had long since disappeared, an image of him served as the focal point of his cult" [HI:ISGM:241]

□ "Attis rages round like a wild maenad, until he falls down exhausted, under a pine-tree and in an

access of insanity emasculates himself. Only when he sees Attis dying of his mutilation does Agdistis regret his behavior, beseeching Zeus to raise Attis from the dead and resuscitate him. The god does not refuse Agdistis' request completely, and allows Attis' body to remain uncorrupted, his hair to grow on and his 'little finger' to stay alive and move continuously (*digitorum ut minimissimus vivat*).” [from Ovid, Pausanias, Arnobious, et.al. XCA:91]

Notice that none of these accounts have even a semi-resurrection or semi-rebirth aspect in them...

Marduk (p. 523-4).

"There is no hint of Marduk's death in the triumphant account of his cosmic kingship in Enuma elish.....The so-called Death and Resurrection of Bel-Marduk is most likely an Assyrian political parody of some now unrecoverable Babylonian ritual...it is doubtful that Marduk was understood as a dying and rising deity...There is no evidence that the Babylonian Marduk was ever understood to be a dying and rising deity..." [Smith]

"This interpretation of the so-called enthronement Psalms unfortunately has continued for quite some time, notwithstanding the fact that Assyriologists doubt whether the resurrection of Marduk was in fact part of the cult. It has been shown by W. von Soden (130-66) and P. Welten (297-310) that texts KAR 143 and 219 could not be understood as part of the main festival, and therefore could not be held as proof of the glorious reappearance of Marduk." [NIDOTTE, s.v. Melek; note: the Enuma Elish certainly does not describe a death for victorious Marduk, but some have argued that the New Year's festival of apiku did relate some such story. This is what the KAR 143/210 documents are referring to.]]

"According to an earlier hypothesis (Zimmern 1918: 2–20; Pallis 1926: 221–43), the New Year festival's cultic drama included another episode, in which Marduk, prior to his battle with Tiamat, was put to death, taken down to the netherworld, and resurrected, in imitation of the cult of the dying god Dumuzi—Tammuz. However, the NA cultic commentary, on which this hypothesis is based, turned out to be nothing but an anti-Babylonian or pro-Babylonian propaganda. The purpose of this text was either to justify Sennacherib's destruction of Babylon and capture of Marduk's statue, in terms of a divine trial (von Soden 1955:51: 130–166), or to explain Marduk's exile and his return to his city, in terms of death, descent to the netherworld, and resurrection (Frymer-Kensky 1983: 131–44). In any case, this vestigial and late addition to the New Year's Day ritual has nothing to do with the motif of the dying fertility god." [ABD, "akitu"]

Osiris (p.524-525).

As Smith points out, the Osiris story is surprisingly consistent over its long history.

"Osiris was murdered and his body dismembered and scattered. The pieces of his body were recovered and rejoined, and the god was rejuvenated. However, he did not return to his former mode of existence but rather journeyed to the underworld, where he became the powerful lord of the dead. In no sense can Osiris be said to have 'risen' in the sense required by the dying and rising pattern (as described by Frazer et.al.); most certainly it was never considered as an annual event."

"In no sense can the dramatic myth of his death and reanimation be harmonized to the pattern of dying and rising gods (as described by Frazer et.al.)."

"The repeated formula 'Rise up, you have not died,' whether applied to Osiris or a citizen of Egypt, signaled a new, permanent life in the realm of the dead."

Frankfort concurs:

"Osiris, in fact, was not a 'dying' god at all but a 'dead' god. He never returned among the living; he was not liberated from the world of the dead, as Tammuz was. On the contrary, Osiris altogether belonged to the world of the dead; it was from there that he bestowed his blessings upon Egypt. He was always depicted as a mummy, a dead king." [Kingship and the gods: a study of ancient Near Eastern religion as the integration of society & nature. UChicago:1978 edition, p.289]
In other words, Osiris is a dead/dying deity, but not a rising/resurrected one...

Tammuz/Dumuzi (p. 525f). The death of Tammuz is fairly widely attested--his rebirth is not.

"The ritual evidence is unambiguously negative...In all of these varied reports, the character of the ritual is the same. It is a relentlessly funereal cult...There is no evidence for any cultic celebration of a rebirth of Tammuz apart from late Christian texts where he is identified with Adonis...Even more detrimental to the dying and rising hypothesis, the actions performed on Tammuz in these three strophes are elements from the funeral ritual...." (Smith, 525)

"Early in the 20th century Tammuz was taken to be the classic example of the "dying-and-rising" god. Based on the work of Frazer (1935: 6), this position saw Tammuz as the divine representation of the life cycle of crops and therefore a vegetation deity (Langdon 1914: 114). It was held that the god died with the plants and rose again when they reappeared the next season; the cult, it was maintained, spread from Mesopotamia throughout the ancient world and was found with assorted names given for the Tammuz deity from Egypt (Osiris) through Palestine (Eshmun) into Greece (Adonis). Even the Christian Christ story was related to the myth (Frazer 1935: 6; Langdon 1914: 1; Moortgat 1949: 142–43; Kramer 1969: 133, 160 n. 48; Burkert 1979: 105–11). With the recognition that Tammuz was a shepherd, the death and rising of the god became less obvious (Falkenstein 1954: 65; Kramer 1951: 1–17). A fragmentary end of a myth has been suggested as evidence for Tammuz' return from the dead (Falkenstein 1965: 281; Kramer 1966: 31), but this material is open to more than one interpretation...Most of the material which has been preserved concerning the god relates him to the cult of Inanna/Ishtar. The courtship and marriage of these two deities have been recorded in numerous poems for her cult and have been taken at times to be examples of fertility rite liturgies. It is the myth of Inanna's Descent which supplies the best known rendition of the death of the god; she sends her husband to her sister Ereshkigal since someone must take her place among the dead. It would seem to be this story which is alluded to in the Gilgamesh Epic (VI: 46–47). Here Inanna/Ishtar assigns annual weeping in the cult for Tammuz, while the context suggests duplicity on her part toward him; this is no doubt what the women are observing at the Jerusalem temple when Ezekiel describes their apostasy (Ezek 8:14). Yet there are other mythological sources for Tammuz which do not include the goddess, perhaps the most intriguing being "Dumuzi's Dream" as it presents a totally different version of the death of the god, one related to his being a shepherd (Gurney 1962: 153; Miller 1980: 50). Other minor works also dwell upon the fact that Tammuz is dead (Gurney 1962: 154), so this aspect of the cult of the god appears to be consistent, while a return to the living is, at best, conjectural. " [ABD, "tammuz"]

Melquart, Eshmun.

These are Phoenician deities, discussed by Ward in POTW:204: "Dying and reviving gods (Melquart, Eshmun, and Adonis) related to the seasonal pattern have been postulated (emphasis

mine), though here the evidence is all from classical sources."

"According to the Greek historian Menander, and as repeated by Flavius Josephus (first century A.D.), the temple of Heracles (that is, of Milqart) at Tyre was founded by King Hiram in the tenth century B.C. According to the same sources, a curious celebration called the "awakening of Milqart" belongs to the same period. Several explanations have been proposed, almost always based on Greek sources. In this perspective, Milqart is a god of vegetation, dying and reborn, the festivals of "burial and resurrection" implying sexual rites, notably the hieros gamos (sacred marriage). But in the absence of direct sources, and because of the difficulties raised by the explanation of some difficult passages in the Phoenician and Punic texts, one must remain cautious. As for the god Eshmun, in Tyre he seems to have been confined to his role as healer-god, inferior to Milqart, in contrast with the situation in Sidon where, as was noted, Eshmun was an important deity."
[WR:MYB:1:196]

"[C]lassical sources, however, reveal that Melqart was thought of as being asleep during the winter months [ABD, 'baal'; note 'asleep' is not the same as 'dead'...]

(Just so you know, Mithras is not included in this section because he is not a 'suffering' or 'dying' deity) at all:

"Finally, even if we grant the importance of the 'suffering god' myth for mysteries, it is virtually impossible to include Mithras in this company... Once again we must acknowledge the special position of the mysteries of Mithras: they are mysteries without a 'suffering god' myth.
[HI:AMC:76]

Macleod summarizes this:

"Since the time of the Renaissance the mystery religions of antiquity have engaged the attention of scholars, and since the nineteenth century a number of more radical scholars have argued that there was widespread worship of a dying and rising fertility god—Tammuz in Mesopotamia, Adonis in Syria, Attis in Asia Minor, and Osiris in Egypt. It is to these Greco-Oriental myths, it is said, that one must look for the origin of the belief in Jesus' resurrection. The controversial Hugh Schonfield wrote, "Christians remained related under the skin to the devotees of Adonis and Osiris, Dionysus and Mithras." Earlier in the century a French scholar, Alfred Loisy, had written that Jesus was "a savior-god, after the manner of an Osiris, an Attis, a Mithra.... Like Adonis, Osiris, and Attis he had died a violent death, and like them he had returned to life."

"The evidence for such a view is, however, is fragile. There are three serious objections to the view: First, the parallels with Christ's resurrection are superficial. Mesopotamian Tammuz (Sumerian Dumuzi), for example, is not rescued from the underworld but is sent there by the goddess Inanna-Ishtar as her substitute. In another fragmentary text Tammuz has his sister take his place for half the year. Some have argued that initiation into the mysteries of Isis are comparable to Christianity. However, there is no exact parallel. In the myth Isis promises the initiate not immortality or resurrection but that he shall live under her protection. When he does die and go to the realm of the dead, he shall adore her. Perhaps the only pagan god for whom there is a resurrection is the Egyptian Osiris. Close examination of this story shows that it is very different from Christ's resurrection. Osiris did not rise; he ruled in the abode of the dead. As biblical scholar, Roland de Vaux, wrote, "What is meant of Osiris being 'raised to life?' Simply that, thanks to the ministrations of Isis, he is able to lead a life beyond the tomb which is an almost perfect replica of earthly existence. But he will never again come among the living and will reign only over the dead.... This revived god is in reality a 'mummy' god."... No, the mummified Osiris was hardly an inspiration for the resurrected Christ... As Yamauchi observes, "Ordinary men aspired to identification with Osiris as one who had triumphed over death." But it is a mistake to equate the Egyptian view of the

afterlife with the biblical doctrine of resurrection. To achieve immortality the Egyptian had to meet three conditions: First, his body had to be preserved by mummification. Second, nourishment was provided by the actual offering of daily bread and beer. Third, magical spells were interred with him. His body did not rise from the dead; rather elements of his personality—his Ba and Ka—continued to hover over his body. ["The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Myth, Hoax, or History?" David J. MacLeod, in *The Emmaus Journal*, V7 #2, Winter 98, p169]

Smith summarizes the bankruptcy of the Dying and Rising Gods position quite simply (p.526): "As the above examples make plain, the category of dying and rising deities is exceedingly dubious. It has been based largely on Christian interest and tenuous evidence. As such, the category is of more interest to the history of scholarship than to the history of religions."

In other words, the Jesus stories were NOT based on some alleged earlier (and common) Dying and Rising God theme--for it simply has never existed.

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Pushback: "Hey, didn't I read somewhere that the Early Church Father dudes themselves interpreted all these pagan gods as 'dying and rising' gods? And that the main reason these gods are considered 'Jesus-like' is because THEY described them this way? If that's true, then wouldn't that prove that these cults DID have DARG's in them--in spite of what modern scholars say?"

Good question. It is true that most of our evidence about these cults come from late literary sources, and that many of these literary sources are Christian.

First of all, most of the indigenous texts about a deity do not indicate a 'dying and rising' status for the deity, although occasionally some texts in that language are used as evidence for a DARG-status (e.g., the early interpretations of the Marduk material):

"The list of specific deities to whom the appellation "dying and rising" has been attached varies. In most cases, the decipherment and interpretation of texts in the language native to the deity's cult has led to questions as to the applicability of the category." [Smith, 522]

Secondly, DARG-categories aren't applied to these deities until very much later, and generally then by "re-interpreters" in the Classical tradition, and generally after Christian concepts have been established in the culture:

"The majority of evidence for Near Eastern dying and rising deities occurs in Greek and Latin texts of late antiquity, usually post-Christian in date." [Smith, 522]

Third, Smith gives a detailed example of Adonis [with my annotations in brackets]:

"The rituals of Adonis, held during the summer months, are everywhere described as periods of intense mourning [these are the 'native language' and indigenous accounts]. Only late texts, largely [but not exclusively, as with Lucian] influenced by or written by Christians, claim that there is a subsequent day of celebration for Adonis having been raised from the dead. The earliest of these is alleged to be the second century account of Lucian (Syrian Goddess 6-7) that, on the third day of the ritual, a statue of Adonis is "brought out into the light" and "addressed as if alive"; but this is an ambiguous report. Lucian goes on to say that some think the ritual is not for Adonis but rather for some Egyptian deity. The practice of addressing a statue "as if alive" is no proof of belief in resurrection; rather it is the common presupposition of any cultic activity in the Mediterranean

world that uses images. Besides, Lucian reports that after the "address" women cut their hair as a sign of mourning...Considerably later, the Christian writers Origen [185-255] and Jerome[349?-420], commenting on Ezekiel 8:14, and Cyril of Alexandria and Procopius of Gaza, commenting on Isaiah 18: 1, clearly report joyous festivities on the third day to celebrate Adonis (identified with Tammuz) having been "raised from the dead." [p.522]

Fourth, he points out that this occurs often, and that this information is generally the only data that indicates some kind of DARGness about the deity (!):

"This pattern will recur for many of the figures considered: an indigenous mythology and ritual focusing on the deity's death and rituals of lamentation, followed by a later Christian report adding the element nowhere found in the earlier native sources, that the god was resurrected. (p.522)

Smith lists two possible reasons for these Christian comments"

"Whether this represents an interpretatio Christiana or whether late third- and fourth-century forms of the Adonis cult themselves developed a dying and rising mythology (possibility in imitation of the Christian myth) cannot be determined.

The Christian interpretation point (perhaps better phrased as "Christian paranoia"?) was certainly operative in Tertullian (c.200), with his accusation of 'imitation' against the pagan cults. He mentions their competing with Christian 'sacraments', by offering their own type of water baptism and oblation of bread, and even uses the phrase "a semblance of a resurrection" (in the Mithras cult). As we noted earlier, "full" bodily resurrection was a Christian distinctive (drawing scorn from Celsus and Porphyry), so it is certainly understandable how some Christian writers could get sensitized to 'see it' hiding in analogous images and references--especially phenomena that they personally were not involved in. Although they came from diverse pre-Christian backgrounds, they do not seem to know very much actual detail about the mystery initiations and beliefs, and may have been 'guessing' at this, just as the pagans 'guessed' at what went on at the Christian events (e.g. the Lord's supper was sometimes 'guessed' at being cannibalistic). And, that one couldn't be sure what exactly a pagan meant by 'resurrection' can be seen from this section from Celsus, in which he accuses Christians of (a) saying the same thing as traditional resurrection myths; and THEN THAT (b) our resurrection story doesn't make sense!

"How many others produce wonders like this to convince simple hearers whom they exploit by deceit? They say that Zalmoxis, the slave of Pythagoras, also did this among the Scythians, and Pythagoras himself in Italy, and Rhampsinitus in Egypt. The last-named played dice with Demeter in Hades and returned bearing a gift from her, a golden napkin. Moreover, they say that Orpheus did this among the Odrysians, and Protesilaus in Thessaly, and Heracles at Taenarum, and Theseus. But we must examine this question whether anyone who really died ever rose again with the same body. Or do you think that the stories of these others really are the legends which they appear to be, and yet that the ending of your tragedy is to be regarded as noble and convincing-" [2.55]

Likewise, the possibility of real imitation of Christian elements by the pagan cults should be given adequate weight (especially ritual elements). We have noted that many believe the 'born to eternity' taurobolic inscription was influenced by Christianity, and the period in which these references will occur (late) will be the period in which 'inducements to act/look Christian' will abound. "Imitation" at the time will be both innocent and manipulative, and often in-between. We must also remember that Tertullian's (and others') paranoia over earlier imitation might still have an element of truth in it, especially if the 'born to eternity' understanding is correct. Plus, the period in which he and Justin write are after the sweeping changes in religious praxis made by Antoninus Pius, which seem to reflect a syncretistic mood in itself (e.g., the additions of the taurobolix to Cybele, and the imperial

focus for taurobolia).

We do know, for example, that Julian the Apostate (emperor 360-363 AD) specifically implemented some 'imitations':

"He endeavored to purge the revived paganism of its more palpable weaknesses and attempted to incorporate in it some of the institutional features of the Christian Church, such as a hierarchy, monasteries for meditation, penance, the sermon, and almonries" [LHC:1:94]

"Thus, a century later, the emperor Julian launched a campaign to institute pagan charities in an effort to match the Christians." [ROC:83]

"Pagan attempts to counter the growing influence of Christianity by imitating it are clearly apparent in measures instituted by Julian the Apostate, who was the Roman emperor from A.D. 361 to 363" [Metzger, below]

We will also discuss (below) the probable case in which Philostratus imitated some of the miracles of Jesus in his *Life of Apollonius*.

[BTW, some have argued that the late similarities of some of these cults to one another were 'parallel developments' and not interactions between the various cults. In this scenario, the 'rebirth' and/or 'risen again' terminology would have developed independently in the more intimate cults (e.g., Christianity, some of the Mysteries, some of the associations). This would not affect this particular argument, since it would still be a later-development, and hence, not in the cults at the time the NT was being written.]

I personally think that it will likely be a mix of these two. We do know that the Christian interpretation element may be overly sensitized, since the pagan responses in Celsus and Porphyry never include a "what you Christians offer in resurrection, is something we pagans already have in our DARGs" response. They DO seem to recognize the novelty in the Christian proclamation, so it is probably more a matter of the 'sensitive' Christian reading-into some pagan statements than of them seeing what was there all along (but never revealed in the pagan sources). And, we do have some data supporting the imitation model (i.e., the inscription, the accusations, Julian's actions, and the political pressures to 'imitate' later), so it is likely to be at play as well.

What we don't have any unambiguous evidence for--even including contemporary or near contemporary Christian witness--is for the existence of DARGs prior to the time of the creation of the New Testament message and documents....and that is what this discussion is all about.

.....
Pushback: "Well, what about the Virgin Birth, then?!...You almost sound like you really believe these scholars' nit-picking about the Virgin Birth! When, all the time, the earliest Christians believed the contrary! Justin specifically says the birth (and life, miracles, and death for that matter) of Jesus were no different from the pagan Gods...Why are these scholars trying to 'undo' the 'confession of guilt' already in your Christian writings?"

Good question—let's look at this famous passage...

But first, let's note that Justin's remarks cannot have any real bearing on the issue of parallels—given the criteria set up by the specialists at the beginning of the article. Justin could simply be dead wrong, or partially wrong and it not affect our study here. We are looking for objective details, in the 'numerous, complex, detailed' category, with structure and system to them. If we cannot find that in these cases (which we haven't so far in the article), then the accuracy of other observers will

have be questioned, too. And this might be case with this Church leader...but let's see:

Let's look at Justin's remarks (in context) in Apology 1.20ff (trans. By Cyril Richardson; emphases mine, [letters in bold CAPs] refer to annotations/comments below):

20. Both Sybil and Hystaspes declared that there will be a destruction of corruptible things by fire. Those who are called Stoic philosophers teach that God himself will be resolved into fire, and the universe come into being again by return. We think that God, the Maker of all, is superior to changeable things [A]. But if on some points we agree with the poets and philosophers whom you honor, and on others [teach] more completely and more worthily of God [B], and are the only ones who offer proof, why are we above all hated unjustly? When we say that all things have been ordered and made by God we appear to offer the teaching of Plato--in speaking of a coming destruction by fire, that of the Stoics; in declaring that the souls of the unrighteous will be punished after death, still remaining in conscious existence, and those of the virtuous, delivered from punishments, will enjoy happiness, we seem to agree with [various] poets and philosophers; in declaring that men ought not to worship the works of their hands we are saying the same things as the comedian Menander and others who have said this, for they declared that the Fashioner is greater than what he has formed. [C]

21. In saying that the Word, who is the first offspring of God, was born for us without sexual union, as Jesus Christ our Teacher, and that he was crucified and died and after rising again ascended into heaven we introduce nothing new beyond [what you say of] those whom you call sons of Zeus [D]. You know how many sons of Zeus the writers whom you honor speak of Hermes, the hermeneutic Word and teacher of all; Asclepius, who was also a healer and after being struck by lightning ascended into heaven--as did Dionysus who was torn in pieces; Heracles, who to escape his torments threw himself into the fire; the Dioscuri born of Leda and Perseus of Dana; and Bellerophon who, though of human origin, rode on the [divine] horse Pegasus. Need I mention Ariadne and those who like her are said to have been placed among the stars? and what of your deceased emperors, whom you regularly think worthy of being raised to immortality, introducing a witness who swears that he saw the cremated Caesar ascending into heaven from the funeral pyre? Nor is it necessary to remind you what kind of actions are related of each of those who are called sons of Zeus [E], except [to point out] that they are recorded for the benefit and instruction of students--for all consider it a fine thing to be imitators of the gods. Far be it from every sound mind to entertain such a concept of the deities as that Zeus, whom they call the ruler and begetter of all, should have been a parricide and the son of a parricide, and that moved by desire of evil and shameful pleasures he descended on Ganymede and the many women whom he seduced, and that his sons after him were guilty of similar actions. But, as we said before, it was the wicked demons who did these things [F]. We have been taught that only those who live close to God in holiness and virtue attain to immortality, and we believe that those who live unjustly and do not reform will be punished in eternal fire. [G]

22. Now if God's Son, who is called Jesus, were only an ordinary man, he would be worthy because of his wisdom to be called Son of God, for all authors call God father of men and gods. When we say, as before, that he was begotten by God as the Word of God in a unique manner beyond ordinary birth, this should be no strange thing for you who speak of Hermes as the announcing word from God. [H] If somebody objects that he was crucified, this is in common with the sons of Zeus, as you call them, who suffered, as previously listed. Since their fatal sufferings are narrated as not similar but different, so his unique passion should not seem to be any worse [I]--indeed I will, as I have undertaken, show, as the argument proceeds, that he was better; for he is shown to be better by his actions. If we declare that he was born of a virgin, you should consider this something in common with Perseus [J]. When we say that he healed the lame, the paralytic, and those born blind, and raised the dead, we seem to be talking about things like those said to have been done by Asclepius.

[K]

23. In order to make this clear to you I will present the evidence that the things we say, as disciples of Christ and of the prophets who came before him, are the only truths and older than all the writers who have lived, and we ask to be accepted, not because we say the same things as they do, [L] but because we are speaking the truth--[second] that Jesus Christ alone was really begotten as Son of God, being his Word and Firstbegotten and Power, and becoming man by his will he taught us these things for the reconciliation and restoration of the human race--and [third] that before he came among men as man, there were some who, on account of the already mentioned wicked demons, told through the poets as already having occurred the myths they had invented[M] , just as now they are responsible for the slanders and godless deeds alleged against us, of which there is neither witness nor demonstration.

The first thing to note is something from Justin's background: he is a philosopher, and like the other philosophers of his ilk (including Augustin), believed the universe was permeated by hyper-reason (or Logos). This colored all his thinking as he wrestled with the concept of revelation and pagan myths:

"Justin always remained a philosopher. He regarded his conversion as a passing from an imperfect to the perfect philosophy. Thus he sees the truths of the Christian religion to a certain extent foreshadowed through the seminal Logos, of whom all men partake, in the religious philosophies -- truths which in Christianity are guaranteed by the manifestation of the Logos in the person of Christ (Apol. 11. 8: 10). Accordingly he maintains the salvability of the heathen who lived "with the Logos;" they are Christians even though they have been thought atheists, as among the Greeks Socrates and Heraclitus and men like them (Apol. 1. 46; 11. 10). All philosophical wisdom and all prophetic inspiration came from the same origin, the Logos. " [Klotsche, History of Christian Doctrine.]

"In the philosophers of Gentile nations the same Logos was supposed to have dwelt that afterward appeared in Christ. 'Our [doctrines] appear more splendid than all human teaching because the Christ revealed through us was the whole Logos-nature, body, intellect, and soul. For whatever things the philosophers and lawgivers excellently uttered or invented were wrought out by them through the co-operation of the Logos in discovery or contemplation'...Hence much is found in heathen authors that is erroneous." [Seeburg, The History of Doctrines.]

What this means for our study of this passage is that we need to understand that Justin believed that a trace of truth existed in everything (e.g., Logos effects), but at the same time, that humans and demons had perverted much of the original truth. He is no 'accommodationist' to pagan beliefs--by any means(!)--but still maintains that pagans and Christians may have points of agreement, concerning Logos-type truth (generally moral and governance maxims--not mythological events and systems).

Okay, let's go through the comment markers above:

A. He starts off disagreeing with the Stoics on whether God is changeable or not.

B. In this comment we can see that logos-background. Some truth is mutual (as would be expected in a moral universe), but the Christian (having access to the incarnate Logos) sometimes teaches more 'completely' and with higher moral purity.

C. He seems to start distancing himself from the pagan positions, beginning in this comment, with phrases that show up throughout the rest of the selection: we appear to offer, we seem to agree, we

are saying the same things [principles] as Menander, what you say about, whom you call sons of Zeus, writers whom you honor, are said to have been placed, you regularly think worthy of, you who speak of Hermes as, sons of Zeus--as you call them, we seem to be talking about, said to have been done by Asclepius. On the whole, this string of phrases might lead us to believe Justin is writing in a sarcastic or mocking tone (e.g. "but YOU say"), and/or denial stance (e.g. "are [only] SAID to have been placed"), and certainly in a 'we only LOOK close to your position' vein (e.g. "we SEEM to be saying the same thing"). On the basis of this rather persistent emphasis on distance, I would not feel comfortable at all in trying to make his words into an endorsement of non-superficial parallels. In fact, the 'seem to' and 'appear to' types of phrases are specific indicators of 'surface structural' similarities. Also in this section is his question to the pagan: "if you pagans notice similarities between our principles and yours, then why do you persecute us?"..."If there are even surface similarities, between us and Plato, then why do you hate us so?"

D. Given that in the above section he has set up a principle of "don't persecute us, if you can detect similarities in our theological/moral beliefs", this first sentence in 21 looks like he is building a similar case about mythic motifs (and not just the principles in 20). He is basically saying "hey, don't hassle us because we talk of miraculous things about OUR god--because YOU FOLKS talk the same way about yours". This type of defensive argument would not reveal/indicate anything about (a) the truth or falsity of the pagan position [as evidenced by the "what YOU say about those whom you call..." phrase; nor anything about (b) how 'close' a parallel or similarity Justin thought the pagan could see. In other words, the argument starts from the position that it is the pagan who can see the 'similarity' and NOT from the position that Justin believes in one...

E. He is continuing the 'distancing' setup here. He makes a reference to the 'writers whom YOU honor' early, which at the end of the passage he will accuse of being misled by demons! He also slurs them with his accusation of the 'false witness' ("and in whose behalf you produce some one who swears") that testifies to the divinity of their dead emperors. Not a very strong accommodation tactic...

F. He then launches into the attack on the very character (and even 'concept') of their gods, mentioning some of the more obvious moral turpitude "developmental needs" of the pantheon. In fact, a 'sound mind' should not even reflect on these gods. But at the end of this passage, Justin probably alludes to a Jewish story, about the 'sons of God' of Genesis 6 cohabiting with women. He seems to be saying that the wicked deeds of the pagan gods might actually have some basis in truth, in the story of the Fallen Watchers of Genesis 6. But once again, Justin is simply calling their gods 'demons' (and in one case, a dead emperor). Not quite an out-right denial of their myths, but polemically even worse: all the 'bad part' is true--they are demons, not gods--and none of the 'good part' is true.

G. This seems to contradict the pagan belief expressed earlier, that the various 'sons of Zeus' (moral failures as they were) and dead Roman emperors ascended to immortality. This seems to flatly deny immortality to ANY person--god, emperor, human--apart from true virtue before the true God. This, of course, is another denial of the truth of their myths.

H. This is another statement of 'why should you be surprised at our terminology? you use the same things in talking about YOUR false gods'. The fact that he is talking about THEIR perception and not about HIS BELIEF can be seen from the phrase "be no strange thing TO YOU" (we have noticed above that many of the statements start from THEIR perspectives, and NOT from Justin's belief system).

I. This looks like a technical argument, in which he tries to answer the possible objection that "Hermes was the Word, and he didn't die--so the fact that Jesus died means he cannot be the Word

(i.e., Logos cannot die)". He counters with something like "but YOU saw that OTHER sons of Zeus can die, so why couldn't the ONLY Son of God fulfill multiple roles?". He also distances Jesus' sufferings from the others with the phrase "peculiar" or "unique" sufferings.

J. This is clearly a 'let's assume YOUR position for a moment' type of argument, of the kind he has been making all along. The tip-off is the "YOU should consider this" (again, from the pagan perspective). At the same time, again, Justin distances himself from actually saying they are the same, with the phrase "something in common with". But the main point is that if the pagan wants to object to Justin's claims of a virgin birth for Jesus, then they had better figure out how to avoid the same objection against their own system. But notice carefully that nothing is said in this passage about what Justin actually believes about this. He doesn't actually say that Perseus was born of a virgin at all. (In fact, he has already argued that Perseus doesn't actually exist as such!).

K. Another distancing statement (seem to be talking), another denial statement (said to have been done by Asclepius), another pagan-perspective (seem to be talking [from your pagan perspective, NOT ours]).

L. This is an odd statement, but there are a couple of things to note here. (a) This is an announcement of the program for the rest of the book; (b) He explicitly states that Christ's truth is the ONLY truth (as opposed to all the myths he has just discussed and disparaged); (c) That the Logos truth that came through Jesus is the most ancient--and therefore uncorrupted--truth; (d) He appeals to his reader to 'accept' or 'acknowledge' their evidence/case [i.e., 'give them a fair and impartial hearing', 'allowing him to present his apologia']; (e) he asks that the appeal be heard/evaluated on the basis of (philosophical or Logos) truth--as opposed to any simple similarity of words and images to the ancient writers. Again, he does not seem to be saying that they are saying the same thing, but only that similarity of expressions is not his basis for appeal.

M. And here, again, he flatly denies all the truth-content of the myths under discussion. He accuses the demons (of Genesis 6)--who actually did some of the wicked deeds ascribed to the greek pagan deities--of fabricating the myths and passing them off as 'true' through the instrumentality of the Greek Poets. There is no way to see this as supporting a view that Justin believed the Greek myths enough to try to build 'common ground' there. He certainly did in some aspects of moral teaching and structure (e.g., Logos-type truth), but the pagan stories were all lies, peddled by demons onto the Greek poets.

Okay, if we back up now and look at the overall pattern of the argument, we should recognize that (1) Justin in no way took the pagan stories seriously and that (2) he used them in an argumentation structure that didn't have to assume the truthfulness of the stories at all. Of course, he consistently--in those few short paragraphs--attacked most of the foundational beliefs of the entire system...The details of the argument, the focus on the pagan-perspective on these miraculous elements, and the consistent denial of any truth value to them lead me to conclude that this passage cannot be used to support the position that Justin actually believed in the virgin birth of Perseus, or that he was actively teaching that Jesus' birth was actually no different than the non-existent Perseus'.

[Not all would agree with me (cf. [HI:AACSC:170]) on where on the spectrum of "Paganism to Logos-ism to Exclusivism" of revelation Justin stood--as a philosopher he will always be suspect (smile)--but I think it is safe to say that Justin cannot be used as a proponent of the 'Copycat Savior' hypothesis...and neither would the other like-minded Christian philosophers of that period, such as Augustine. I might expect them to use similar Logos-in-common arguments and presuppositions, but never openly state that they believed that the myths and images were 'close enough' for a basis of dialogue/common ground.]

.....

Again, the DARG stuff just doesn't match enough:

"The oriental myth of the dying and rising saviour-god (Tammuz, Bel-Marduk, Adonis, Sandan-Heracles of Tarsus, Attis, Osiris, the Cretan Zeus, Dionysus, and cf. the Mithras sacrifice and the double life of Kore) constitutes neither the native soil of the Gospel nor a true parallel to it. Egeirein and egeiresthai hardly occur at all in the relevant passages.... It is rather said that the god is delivered (Firm. Mat.Err. Prof. Rel., 22) or that he or the deliverance has come from Hades (Plut.Is. et Os., 19 [II, 358b]; Phot. Bibliotheca, 242 [MPG, 103, 1281a], or that he lives (Ps. Luc.Syr. Dea, 6). Indeed, sometimes the continued life is only partial (Arnobius, Adversus Nationes, V, 7 and 14 [A. Reiffenscheid in CSEL, IV]; Paus., VII, 17, 12), or perhaps even symbolical in the form of budding almonds or figs in the myths or wild jubilation and dramatic representation in the cults. Decomposition may take place (Diod. S., III, 59, 7). The resurrection of the god is not original in the Attis cult. Plut.Is. et Os., 11 (II, 355b); 58 (II, 374e) contests the historical character of the myths. Imaginary erotic pictures simply express the unfailing power of nature. The case seems to be rather different when we come to Dionysus. In him the Greeks perceive not so much the successiveness as the identity of life and death. We thus have an advanced identity mysticism of a speculative type. While the spiritual and ethical note is almost completely lacking in the eastern world, it is present here, but in a form very different from that of the NT, In neither case do we find the distinctive eschatological concept, e.g., of R. 6:10. For all the points of contact and mutual influence between the NT and the surrounding world, there is the decisive difference that in the NT the kernel and basis is spiritually and ethically significant history rather than nature myth or speculative myth. [TDNT: egeiro, 'arise']

.....

Secondly are the figures in the Mystery Religions (e.g. Mithra, Dionysos, Hellenistic period Isis/Osirus).

First we need to note that Mystery "Religions" might be a bad term for this, and that mystery "initiations" might be better. These initiations into the various cults were not 'required' for all membership (like baptism was for Christians at this time), but was an 'optional' rite available for those who wished it:

"It should be noted that in most cases there exist forms of a 'normal' cult alongside the mysteries, that is, worship for the non-initiated, independent of possible candidacy for myesis or telete... In Rome, Mater Magna had her great festival in the spring, but the reported dates of taurobolia are unrelated to calendrical events. In any case, mysteries are seen to be a special form of worship offered in the larger context of religious practice. Thus the use of the term 'mystery religions' as a pervasive and exclusive name for a closed system, is inappropriate. Mystery initiations were an option activity within polytheistic religions, comparable to, say, a pilgrimage to Santiago di Compostela within the Christian system." [HI:AMC:10]

"The place of the taurobolium in the religion of Mithras is controversial. It belongs properly to the cult of Cybele, but the cults had a close fraternal relationship. It may be taken as certain that the majority of chapels do not have the space for such a rite...it looks as if it were a ritual occasionally practiced but not universally observed." [RRE:112]

The Mystery Religions flourished during the Hellenistic Age (ca. 300bc - 200 ad+), and were small, local cults up until 100 a.d. . "These mysteries, involving the worship of deities from Greece, Syria, Anatolia, Egypt, or Persia, were diverse in geographical origin and heterogeneous in historical development and theological orientation." [TAM:4], and were generally confined to specific localities until around 100 a.d. [Nash]. They were essentially closed, small groups, in which

initiation into 'the secrets of the god' had to be earned through deeds and rituals. They are commonly said to offer their devotees some types of "baptism", "rebirth", and "salvation". Their main claim to fame (in our context here) is that they "re-enact" the myth through ritual. In other words, it is often claimed that the initiate 're-capitulates' (smile) the DARGing of the relevant deity. Again, this was an older view and much of the original data has been reinterpreted:

"Moreover, the key examples so favored by the early myth-ritualists and their followers among biblical scholars—the Babylonian Akitu Festival and Enuma Elish, and the tales of Attis, Osiris, and Adonis—all turn out to be examples supportive of myth-ritual conclusions only if one utilizes very late and unreliable evidence (Burkert 1979: 100–1)." [ABD, "myth and mythology"]

We have almost no contemporary data about the Hellenistic mystery cults [NTB:120], and we are almost totally dependent on 3rd century a.d. sources [NASH]. Nash cautions about this:

"It is not until we come to the third century A.D. that we find sufficient source material to permit a relatively complete reconstruction of their content. Far too many writers use this later source material (after A.D. 200) to form reconstructions of the third-century mystery experience and then uncritically reason back to what they think must have been the earlier nature of the cults. This practice is exceptionally bad scholarship and should not be allowed to stand without challenge. Information about a cult that formed several hundred years after the close of the New Testament canon must not be read back into what is presumed to be the status of the cult during the first century A.D. The crucial question is not what possible influence the mysteries may have had on segments of Christendom after A.D. 400, but what effect the emerging mysteries may have had on the New Testament in the first century."

We immediately run into a problem here--that of "who borrowed from whom?". If the NT was completed before the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 a.d., and the Mystery Religions (MR's) in the Roman Empire only started 'flourishing' after 100 A.D. (and were almost certainly not present/influential in Jerusalem before its Fall!), then any alleged dependence of the gospels on the MR's is a bit tenuous. This problem is most acute in the case of Mithras, but also applies to a lesser extent to the Hellenistic version of Isis/Osiris and Dionysos. So, Meyer, in his sourcebook about the subject [TAM:226]:

"Scholars have proposed several theories to account for the obvious similarities between Christianity and the mystery religions. Theories of dependence frequently have been proposed. Early Christian authors noted the similarities between Christianity and Mithraism and charged that the mysteries were godless, demonically inspired imitations of true Christianity....Some modern scholars, conversely, have suggested that early Christianity (even before the fourth century C.E., when Christianity began to adopt the practices of its non-Christian neighbors with vigor) borrowed substantially from the mystery religions all around...

"Today, however, most scholars are considerably more cautious about the parallels between early Christianity and the mysteries and hesitate before jumping to conclusions about dependence."

Here, I want to go off-topic for just a second...The main topic under discussion here (in spite of my ramblings) deals with Jesus and the deities in other cults and religions. We have already seen that the older DARG concept is no longer held as a useful one, especially for comparisons with Jesus. And, since Jesus' main claim of distinction (from the standpoint of apostolic preaching) was His death, burial, and bodily resurrection from the dead (non-symbolic), then the bulk of our discussion should be over. In other words, similarities with non-DARG deities or heroes will be less relevant to the question of 'core borrowing' on the part of the NT authors and shapers.

However, since parallels between Christian practice (i.e., ritual) and MR (Mystery Religions) practice are sometimes alleged as evidence for wholesale 'borrowing' by Christians from the MR's, I thought it might be useful just to review the current scholarly thinking on these allegations of parallels (and borrowing). So I want to take a quick look at alleged parallels between these groups, in matters of basic praxis and non-Christological belief (i.e., beliefs about things other than 'who Jesus was').

Remember that we are looking for 'numerous, complex, detailed' similarities, which reveal underlying parallels. Outward 'forms' and rituals just won't be enough, unless the meaning can be shown to be the same. In the MR/Christianity case, these meanings can be shown to be different:

"The "dying and rising" of the deities in the mysteries, where it occurs, relates to the cycle of nature and was no true resurrection. The NT terminology of mystery has to do with the divine plan, previously hidden but now revealed. The Christian initiation was not secret. Where washings occur in the mysteries, this was part of the purification preliminary to the initiation, not the initiation itself as in Christian baptism. The mysteries were rather expensive and were for the few deemed already worthy, whereas Christianity invited everyone (as the pagan critic Celsus pointed out—according to Origen Cont. Cels. 3.59). [NT:DictLNT, s.v. "Religions, Greco-Roman"]

Consider Burkert's review of the mystery cults' "offerings" relative to the afterlife, "rebirth" and even baptism (pages from HI:AMC):

"It is tempting to assume that the central idea of all initiations should be death and resurrection, so that extinction and salvation are anticipated in the ritual, and real death becomes a repetition of secondary importance; but the pagan evidence for resurrection symbolism is unconvincing at best [p23]

"In the documents of the so-called Oriental cults, the dimension of the afterlife is much less obvious..."[25]

"If we turn finally to Mithras, we are left with a surprising dearth of relevant evidence. It has generally been assumed, as a result of our ideas of what a "mystery religion" should be, that Mithras should guarantee his followers some kind of transcendent salvation immortality, ascent to heaven from the "cave" which is the cosmos. Clear evidence, however, is lacking. This is all the more surprising because spiritual life, the immortality of the soul, and the ascent of the righteous to heaven are such well-established ideas in Iranian, Zoroastrian tradition. But this is not so with Mithras. [27]

"The emphasis is, once again, on a "safe anchor" in this life. A redirection of religion toward otherworldly concerns, contrary to what is often assumed, is not to be found with the "Oriental" gods and their mysteries. At best they continue what was already there. In the eyes of a pagan, Christianity was a religion of tombs, excessively concerned about death and decay. None of the pagan mysteries made such an impression " [28]

"The basic idea of an initiation ritual is generally taken to be that of death and rebirth. A well-known book of Mircea Eliade has appeared in successive editions under the title of either Rites and Symbols of Initiation or just Birth and Rebirth. Being essentially initiations ceremonies, ancient mysteries should conform to this pattern, which at the same time seems to supply the best explanation of why this ritual is believed to overcome the threat of real death. Yet, as in the corresponding case of the "dying god" myth, the evidence is less explicit and more varied than the general hypothesis would postulate." [99]

"To sum up, there is a dynamic paradox of death and life in all the mysteries associated with the opposites of night and day, darkness and light, below and above, but there is nothing as explicit and resounding as the passages in the New Testament, especially in Saint Paul and in the Gospel of John, concerning dying with Christ and spiritual rebirth. There is as yet no philosophical-historical proof that such passages are directly derived from pagan mysteries; nor should they be used as the exclusive key to the procedures and ideology of mysteries. " [101]

"It is appropriate to emphasize in this connection that there is hardly any evidence for baptism in pagan mysteries, though this has often been claimed. Of course there are various forms of purification, of sprinkling or washing with water, as in almost all the other cults as well. But such procedures should not be confused with baptism proper--immersion into a river or basin as a symbol of starting a new life" [101]

And MacMullen makes the same observations about these matters [HI:PTRE]:

"Among felt wants, the modern observer expects to find none sharper than the need for life, promised for ever. But, like a deity to insure good harvests, assurances of immortality prove unexpectedly hard to find in the evidence. Even the longing for it is not much attested." [53]

"People belonging to one or another of a small number of cults, and in small groups, sought further lessons in their beliefs, lessons learned through rites designed to catch the imagination and arouse awe. Impressiveness of presentation could be heightened by rules forbidding the lessons to be talked about with outsiders. Obedient secrecy of course obscured the historical record forever. One group, nevertheless, in the worship of Dionysus, can be faintly discerned through inscriptions, developing more formal ceremonies of instruction, at least in Italy, in the later second and third century. During the ceremonies, participants may have received promises of afterlife. But evidence for all this is unfortunately very little and very indirect. Similarly with Isiacism: the evidence lies in the concluding chapters of Apuleius's novel, in which his hero Lucius undergoes a lengthy and most expensive course of instruction at the hands of Isis's priests. At the end, he is fully satisfied by her promise, "You shall live in blessedness," vives beatus; and when life is over, he may continue to worship her. He is the envy of everyone for being renatus, reborn 'in a sort of way'--defined as having earned the goddess as his patron and at the cost of no more than temporary bankruptcy. There is, however, no word of his being renatus in aeternum, which is what counts." [p53]

"Inscriptions here as on other points hold out the best hope for a broad sampling. "Savior" in them, or "salvation," had to do with health or other matters of this earth, not of the soul for life eternal. Or in epitaphs, people so often joke about annihilation that the jokes at last congeal into commonplaces or abbreviations: "I was not, I am not, I care not," boiled down to six letters. [57]

Also, let's note three of the major differences between the death of Jesus and the various deities subsumed so far in the previous two sections:

1. None of the so-called savior-gods died for someone else, in their place (substitution). The notion of the Son of God fully dying in place of His creatures is unique to Christianity.
2. Only Jesus died purposefully for sin. As Gunter Wagner observes, to none of the pagan gods "has the intention of helping men been attributed. The sort of death that they died is quite different (hunting accident, self-emasculation, etc.)." [cited in Nash]
3. Unlike the mystery gods, Jesus died voluntarily. Nothing like this appears even implicitly in the mysteries. [The closest is the self-castration of Attis, but this is generally attributed to his insanity, not to a free-and-clear choice.]

And then one last point about 'rebirth'--it was NOT a word specific to the Mysteries, but was in general use (and would have been 'shared' by Jews, Christians, regular-pagans, mystery rites):

"It [the word for 'rebirth'] seems quite early to have come into use outside the Stoic schools and to have become part of the heritage of the educated world, thus acquiring a more general sense. This is shown by Cic.Att., 6, 6, where return from banishment is described as paliggenesiva...It cannot be finally proved whether paliggenesia played any role in the Mysteries of the 1st cent. A.D. The word occurs only in the so-called birth mystery in Corp. Herm., XIII, where it is used 10 times

(Reitzenstein Poim., 339, 4 and 6; 340, 12; 341, 5; 342, 15; 343, 12; 344, 12 and 14; 345, 16; 348, 8). But here the word does not have the meaning hitherto found in pagan Gk., i.e., return to existence. It signifies renewal to a higher existence by means of an incantation. The mystery of regeneration is certainly later than the NT. When Plutarch uses the term in his description of the Dionysus and Osiris myths, it is an open question whether he takes it from the Mysteries or from his philosophical heritage. The latter is more probable, since this is almost certainly the derivation of the parallel anabiosis. In the 1st cent. B.C., then, paliggenesiva is in general use in educated circles, and its use in the Mysteries may thus be presumed." [TDNT, s.v. "palingenesis", 'born again']

And concepts of resurrection, immortality were neither understood the same, nor generally offered by, the MRs:

"Certainly, not all the new cults offered life after death; in the case of Jupiter Dolichenus, for example, there is no evidence to suggest that immortality was an issue. [footnote: "Nor was the cult of Attis concerned with the after-life"] And those religions that did make claims about a future life after death presented radically different pictures. When in a dream Isis promised Lucius escape from his ass's body, she said that he would be subject to her for the rest of his life, which she could prolong beyond what the fates appointed, and after death he would find her shining in the darkness of the underworld. His subsequent initiation, as we saw, took him down to the entrance of the underworld and back to life again. The cult of Isis had implications for life and death, but even so more emphasis is placed on extending the span of life than on the after-life - which is pictured in fairly undifferentiated terms. The transformational aspects of the cult of Mithras are more striking, as the initiate ascended through the seven grades. In addition to its cultic title (raven, male bride, etc.), each grade was correlated with a different planet: and the soul of the initiate was probably conceived as rising during his lifetime further and further away from the earth, finally achieving apogenesis or birth away from the material world. That is, the progressive transformation of the soul of the initiate in this life, on which much of the cult focussed, was probably conceived as continuing after death. This is a quite different conception from the ideas of immortality or resurrection that developed among some Jews by the first century A.D., and became particularly associated with Christianity - which offered not only a radically new life here and now, but also the hope of a bodily resurrection and a glorious after-life." [HI:RR1:289f]

These are some very material and significant differences between even a most generous reading of the MR and DARG texts. This should be enough data to indicate that "numerous, complex, and detailed parallels" are going to be difficult to find and defend; much more difficult will be the allegations of "dependence". The similarities (especially theological) between early NT-time Christianity and the MR's of the same period are simply too fragile to carry the weight of such a position.

[It might also be noted here that the similarities between the various MR's don't seem to be very strong either--superficials abound, perhaps, but the underlying meanings are so different. Frankfort (in Kingship and the gods: a study of ancient Near Eastern religion as the integration of society & nature. UChicago:1978 edition, 293) compares the meaning underlying the various myths of Tammuz, Adonis, Osiris, concludes: "In comparison with the deep-rooted differences between the three gods, their 'generic likeness' dwindles to insignificance; they personify the life in vegetation but that in a manner which is peculiar to each case."]

There were massive differences in ethics and actions, also, as noted by the sociologist Stark (ROC; the following quotes, although long, will at least give the impression of the point I am trying to make here) [*italics his; bold mine*]:

"Let me state my thesis: Central doctrines of Christianity Prompted and sustained attractive,

liberating, and effective social relations and organizations.

"I believe that it was the religion's particular doctrines that permitted Christianity to be among the most sweeping and successful revitalization movements in history. And it was the way these doctrines took on actual flesh, the way they directed organizational actions and individual behavior, that led to the rise of Christianity. My treatment of these two points will be brief since they have always been implicit, and very often explicit, in the previous nine chapters.

"To anyone raised in a Judeo-Christian or Islamic culture, the pagan gods seem almost trivial. Each is but one of a host of gods and godlings of very limited scope, power, and concern. Moreover, they seem quite morally deficient. They do terrible things to one another, and sometimes they play ugly pranks on humans. But, for the most part, they appear to pay little attention to things "down below."

"The simple phrase "For God so loved the world . . ." would have puzzled an educated pagan. And the notion that the gods care how we treat one another would have been dismissed as patently absurd.

"From the pagan viewpoint, there was nothing new in the Jewish or Christian teachings that God makes behavioral demands upon humans--the gods have always demanded sacrifice and worship. Nor was there anything new in the idea that God will respond to human desires--that the gods can be induced to exchange services for sacrifices. But, as I noted in chapter 4, the idea that God loves those who love him was entirely new.

"Indeed, as E. A. judge has noted in detail, classical philosophers regarded mercy and pity as pathological emotions--defects of character to be avoided by all rational men. Since mercy involves providing unearned help or relief, it was contrary to justice. Therefore "mercy indeed is not governed by reason at all," and humans must learn "to curb the impulse"; "the cry of the undeserving for mercy" must go "unanswered" Judge 1986:107). judge continued: "Pity was a defect of character unworthy of the wise and excusable only in those who have not yet grown up. It was an impulsive response based on ignorance. Plato had removed the problem of beggars from his ideal state by dumping them over its borders."

"This was the moral climate in which Christianity taught that mercy is one of the primary virtues--that a merciful God requires humans to be merciful. Moreover, the corollary that because God loves humanity, Christians may not please God unless they love one another was something entirely new. Perhaps even more revolutionary was the principle that Christian love and charity must extend beyond the boundaries of family and tribe, that it must extend to "all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 1:2). Indeed, love and charity must even extend beyond the Christian community. Recall Cyprian's instructions to his Carthaginian flock, quoted at length in chapter 4, "that there is nothing remarkable in cherishing merely our own people with the due attentions of love, but that one might become perfect who should do something more than heathen men or publicans, one who, overcoming evil with good, and practicing a merciful kindness like that of God, should love his enemies as well.... Thus the good was done to all men, not merely to the household of faith." (Quoted in Harnack 1908: 1:172-173)

"This was revolutionary stuff. Indeed, it was the cultural basis for the revitalization of a Roman world groaning under a host of miseries.

"In his fine recent work *The Origins of Christian Morality*, Wayne Meeks reminded us that when we are talking about "morality or ethics we are talking about people. Texts do not have an ethic; people do" (1993:4). It was only as Christian texts and teachings were acted out in daily life that Christianity was able to transform the human experience so as to mitigate misery.

"Chief among these miseries was the cultural chaos produced by the crazy quilt of ethnic diversity and the blazing hatreds entailed thereby. In uniting its empire, Rome created economic and political unity at the cost of cultural chaos. Ramsay MacMullen has written of the immense "diversity of tongues, cults, traditions and levels of education" encompassed by the Roman Empire (1981:xi). But it must be recognized that Greco-Roman cities were microcosms of this cultural diversity. People of many cultures, speaking many languages, worshiping all manner of gods, had been dumped together helter-skelter.

"In my judgment, a major way in which Christianity served as a revitalization movement within the empire was in offering a coherent culture that was entirely stripped of ethnicity. All were welcome without need to dispense with ethnic ties. Yet, for this very reason, among Christians ethnicity tended to be submerged as new, more universalistic, and indeed cosmopolitan, norms and customs emerged. In this way Christianity first evaded and then overwhelmed the ethnic barrier that had prevented Judaism from serving as the basis for revitalization. Unlike the pagan gods, the God of Israel did indeed impose moral codes and responsibilities upon his people. But to embrace the Jewish God, one had also to don Jewish ethnicity, albeit that, as Alan Segal (1991) suggests, the Judaism of the first century may have been more inclusive than has been recognized. I agree with Segal that the existence of the God-Fearers demonstrates this inclusiveness, but it also seems clear that the God-Fearers were limited to the social fringes of the diasporan Jewish communities precisely because of their failure to fully embrace the Law, and hence the Law remained the primary ethnic barrier to conversion. Indeed, as I argued in chapter 3, many Hellenized Jews of the diaspora found Christianity so appealing precisely because it freed them from an ethnic identity with which they had become uncomfortable.

"Christianity also prompted liberating social relations between the sexes and within the family-to which much of chapter 5 was devoted. And, as noted in chapter 7, Christianity also greatly modulated class differences-more than rhetoric was involved when slave and noble greeted one another as brothers in Christ.

"But, perhaps above all else, Christianity brought a new conception of humanity to a world saturated with capricious cruelty and the vicarious love of death (Barton 1993). Consider the account of the martyrdom of Perpetua. Here we learn the details of the long ordeal and gruesome death suffered by this tiny band of resolute Christians as they were attacked by wild beasts in front of a delighted crowd assembled in the arena. But we also learn that had the Christians all given in to the demand to sacrifice to the emperor, and thereby been spared, someone else would have been thrown to the animals. After all, these were games held in honor of the birthday of the emperor's young son. And whenever there were games, people had to die. Dozens of them, sometimes hundreds (Barton 1993).

"Unlike the gladiators, who were often paid volunteers, those thrown to the wild animals were frequently condemned criminals, of whom it might be argued that they had earned their fates. But the issue here is not capital punishment, not even very cruel forms of capital punishment. The issue is spectacle for the throngs in the stadia, watching people torn and devoured by beasts or killed in armed combat was the ultimate spectator sport, worthy of a boy's birthday treat. It is difficult to comprehend the emotional life of such peoples

"In any event, Christians condemned both the cruelties and the spectators. Thou shalt not kill, as Tertullian (*De Spectaculis*) reminded his readers. And, as they gained ascendancy, Christians prohibited such "games." More important, Christians effectively promulgated a moral vision utterly incompatible with the casual cruelty of pagan custom.

"Finally, what Christianity gave to its converts was nothing less than their humanity. In this sense

virtue was its own reward." [ROC:211-215]

Or MacMullen [CRE:54]:

"Judaism taught concern for poverty (and who outside that tradition in the ancient world would have been recorded on his tombstone as "a lover of the poor"?). The tradition carried forward within Christianity. As the pagan temples closed, the churches opened: the Basilica of St. Peter in Rome, for example, as setting for an enormous banquet for the poor provided by a senator in commemoration of the anniversary of his wife's death; or the Basilica of St. Ambrose in Milan, where the bishop preached on the need to succor the less fortunate. Julian was right to see this transfer of function to his rivals as important to their success. "It is generosity toward non-members, care for the graves of the dead, and pretended holiness of life that have specially fostered the growth of atheism" (i.e. Christianity). Therefore he was right in his plan to make temples even more active centers for relief of the poor. However, that project came to nothing."

But let's be clear about one thing: the early church did not achieve its massive growth rate by offering a "me too" solution. Another 'look alike' mystery cult wasn't gonna 'win religious marketshare' (to use Stark's sociological phrase). The appeal of the early Christians--in addition to the worldview distinctiveness noted above--was in its love and care for others. Note the verdict of other historians on this:

First, Ferguson:

"Jesus claimed a unique relationship with Yahweh, with whose authority he spoke, challenging the religious authorities with their conventionality, and illustrating his teaching with varied wit and stories. As the attitude of the authorities stiffened, popular support fell away. He still hoped with his immediate followers to establish the New Israel, which he personified as the Son of Man, but soon came to see that the triumph of the new community would be won only through suffering. Hence much of his teaching is 'eschatological'; it looks to the ultimate triumph of God; yet in one sense the eschatology is 'realized', for Jesus saw Yahweh's kingship as fully realized in his own obedience. Some of his support came from those who looked for a military leader against the Romans, and it may have been in an effort to force his hand that a misguided follower betrayed him to the authorities. Jesus accepted the betrayal and, left in his full obedience the sole representative of the kingdom, allowed himself to be executed.

"Then something happened. The disciples (the word really means apprentices) who had run away in cowardice found a new lease of life. They declared that Jesus had appeared to them visibly after death, and that even after those appearances had ceased they had been lifted out of themselves by a power they called impartially the Spirit of God or Spirit of Jesus. So they went out with a proclamation (kerygma) which in its simplest form ran something like: 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know--this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.' The book we call The Gospel according to Mark is simply an expansion of that affirmation; it is not a biography of Jesus but a preachment of Christ.

"Those who came in shared in the teaching (didache): this was based upon 'love', a concept so new that a virtually new word (agape) had to be coined for it. It was the dim reflection of the love they had experienced from their God; it was the cement of the new society; it was the secret of their out-reaching to the afflicted and their relations with their enemies. The behaviour it implies may be seen in the collection of sayings called 'The Sermon on the Mount', or in Paul's letters to the Romans or Galatians, or the moralizing letter of James. Or, from the second century AD, we may cite the

anonymous letter to Diognetus with its picture of Christians exercising their citizenship of heaven through their citizenships on earth, obeying the laws, and going far beyond the laws in their standard of behaviour, free with their hospitality but not with their chastity, like others in having children, unlike others in not leaving children to die. Besides, each week they shared in the sacrament of a common meal, in the course of which came the Thanksgiving or Eucharist, in which they broke the bread and poured the wine in commemoration of their founder's broken body and blood shed, and shared the power of his life as they ate and drank.

"Wherein then lay the appeal of Christianity? It was first in the personality of the founder. This has been doubted, because it is not stressed by the apologists. It is not stressed because it was taken for granted: no need to repeat in the second century what was in the gospels. That the person of Christ was central is seen in the critiques of Celsus and Porphyry, in the exaltation of Apollonius by Philostratus and Hierocles as a counterblast, in the heroic witness of a Polycarp: 'I have been his servant for eighty-six years and he has done me no wrong; how can I blaspheme my King who saved me? It was secondly in the way of love revealed, in the witness of community (koinonia), in a fellowship which took in Jew and Gentile, slave and free, men and women, and whose solid practicality in their care for the needy won the admiration even of Lucian. 'How these Christians love one another!' was a respectful affirmation. There was a curious gaiety about the Christians; years later it was this warmth which attracted Augustine. The women were a particular power: Mithras, for example, did not admit them. It was thirdly in the very strength of conviction, in the simple directness which cut through the multitudinous choices offered by the ancient world, above all in the courage which faced martyrdom without flinching and wrung a grudging recognition from Celsus and Marcus Aurelius, and secured the conversion of Justin and Tertullian. It was finally in a message of hope for all, for from the first resurrection of Christ had meant for his followers a certainty of victory over death. As Nock put it pungently, 'it was left to Christianity to democratize mystery'" [RRE:125ff]

And, Hillgarth points out that this was still a major aspect of church life-heart, even after they were placed in uneasy compromise with the State:

"The Church, from a persecuted minority, became an immensely rich institution, heavily endowed by the State, its clergy largely exempt from the burdens which weighed increasingly on most of their fellow citizens. Two years after Alaric sacked Rome, church lands were exempted from most taxes. Not only were bishops (and by 412 all clergy) immune to trial in secular courts, but they acquired many of the functions of the local magistrate and judge. They became arbiters between the central government and their locality.

"Equipped with all this power and privilege, was the Church able to assimilate and change the social life of the time, or was it only able to provide an alternative to it in monasticism? Extreme oppression of the poor by the State and the rich is indisputable. The Church was now part of the political and social structure of the oppressive Empire. It was virtually impossible for it to protest against such all-encompassing institutions as slavery or the normal use of torture for judicial purposes. "Defenders" of cities were created in 368 to defend the local populations against the rich. In 409 their appointment was shared between bishops and the very men they were intended to control. All the Church could do was campaign against such obvious abuses as gladiatorial combats (only finally abolished c. 438), and, in general, try to mitigate the application of a totalitarian system it could not change. The right (419) to seek asylum in a church and permission to a bishop to visit State prisons and help prisoners are examples of the way the Church was able to alleviate the rigor of the laws. But, by its care for the poor through its own institutions, especially through hospitals which it created in the East and in Rome in the fourth century and for which no precedent existed in antiquity, the Church did more for the ordinary man than the meager influence of Christianity on the Theodosian Code reveals." [CAP:46]

[Would that we, "the Church", lived and loved like that today...]

So, a little off the subject, but hopefully constructive:

1. There were major differences in the very concept and definition of resurrection.
2. The usage of the very word 'mystery' was different.
3. Christian initiation was not secret.
4. 'Baptism' had radically different purposes in MR's (and there is very little evidence for it in MR's anyway)
5. The belief in an afterlife was radically different (and there is very little evidence for it in MR's anyway)
6. MR's didn't offer a 'salvation' for the future life.
7. Even the nature of the death of Jesus (other-centered, purposeful, voluntary) was radically different from the 'deaths' of the MR deities.
8. The moral content--of love and compassion and charitable action--was completely different, and the Christian way of life was recognized by its enemies as being 'superior'.
9. The actual appeal of Jesus to others was not in some 'competitive me-too' clone strategy, but in the genuineness of lived-out, loved-out REAL resurrection life...real rebirth.

So, even some of the areas that are commonly mentioned as having being 'borrowed from paganism' do not hold up under careful scrutiny. The early church--especially at the time the NT was being formed--just didn't do "borrowing" apparently...

.....
Pushback: "I don't get this...you are saying they mourned their gods at some of these festivals, but DIDN'T believe the gods were "truly" resurrected...but that doesn't make sense--what good is a 'dead god'? They MUST have believed their gods were resurrected every year (especially since they lamented a death every year...duh)..."

Well, your position makes sense to me, but it would likely be wasted on the ancient pagans...

It seems the pagan writers who describe these gods (i.e., Celsus, Porphyry, Lucian, Plutarch) don't seem to believe the myths anyway--but they still celebrated the festivals anyway...

"It is "not reasonable" to consider idols as gods, when they have been manufactured by men, and, worse, by men of low social status and morals; and the point was long ago made by a pagan Heraclitus (of the first century), so says the pagan Celsus--it was no invention of higher-minded Christians. Celsus is indeed right in bringing out how much derisory or outraged criticism of current cult practices, theology, and mythology could be found in pagan writers. Here it is aimed at implications that gods are the mere creatures of men.

"And to continue the survey of divinity as it is portrayed in these less obvious sources: gods or divinity can do no ill, being goodness perfect and complete. That, like all the points now to be summarized, has also been found or implied in Plutarch, Dio Chrysostom, and Lucian. Further, the gods are infinitely remote from the material world, themselves incorporeal and insubstantial. To imagine that they have any need of the world would imply some incompleteness in them; rather, it is of the essence of divinity to have no desire, no wish, no lack or feeling at all.

"It follows that the gods cannot change, assume other shapes, grow up or grow old. Assuredly they cannot die and be reborn, like Osiris. They cannot be cut up, wounded, put in chains, tossed out of Olympus, crippled; nor have they appetites. They do not eat or drink, defecate, or fornicate. Of course not. Rejection of such pictures is registered or implied in the writings of Plutarch and Lucian but also of Heraclitus and Celsus. And no one may rightly accuse the gods of adultery, sodomy,

theft, perjury, cowardice, murder, or wicked or disgraceful acts of that sort--again, features of belief shocking to pagans and highly convenient to Christians. The gods should never be thought of or portrayed as dependent, servile, or menial. The opposite is the truth. Still less should they ever be described as monsters of any sort, misshapen, abnormal, or even as animals: Egyptian crocodiles and so forth.

"From conceptualizations, the higher criticism turned to visible routines of worship to make its point. Idols that were in the first place sawn, glued, nailed, and filed could hardly be divine. The materials of their manufacture were base, and they endured the birds that shit on them and mice that nested in them. It was equally misguided, if the gods were conceived aright, to suppose that they could "taste good strong thick stupefying incense-smoke," or respond--still more wicked folly--to human sacrifice. Of all the dancing, singing, miming, or recitation of prose hymns; of all the anointing, bathing, wreathing, robing, and parading about of images; of all the toasting, holocausts, and cheerful tables; of ivory, gold, sublime skills in painting and carving--really nothing remained that held the faintest interest for Olympus, if that high realm and all its denizens in fact existed. Probably not.

"Certainly not in the sense or shapes that Homer meant, certainly not in the Dionysiac's or Isiac's demented terms--not if the pagan purists were to be believed. The gods really lived; but at a great remove. Cult could not reach them. It might be inoffensive, never persuasive. Mythology, not only as the poets had written it but as the Phrygians embraced Cybele in it, or the Syrians, Atargatis, was folly or insult to the true beings above. The sacred had lost its story when its enlightened critics finished with it.

"But who cared? The inappropriateness of common forms of worship, seen through the eyes of Seneca or Porphyry, appears not to have deterred a single soul from the inheritance of his tribe. [HI:PTRE:76f; emphasis mine]

And the vast majority of the festivals and special religious 'endowments' are done by the wealthy elite--in Rome, this was the educated as well...

Stark considered the popular level of opinion as well (as opposed to the literary one noted by MacMullen above):

"Nevertheless, I think there may be a substitute for an opinion poll of religious belief in antiquity. What is wanted is a sample of unfiltered public attitudes. Consider, then, the archaeological discovery that the walls of Pompeii abound in extremely blasphemous graffiti and drawings, some of them very obscene as well. While I harbor no thoughts that these were connected to the city's fate, they arouse my deepest suspicions about the overall state of reverence--not simply because some residents were prompted to create them, but because no one was prompted to remove or cover them. MacMullen commented that "we may take [the existence of similar graffiti] for granted elsewhere, if there were other sites so well preserved" (1981:63). I may be leaping to unjustified conclusions, but these data speak to me of widespread irreverence....Blasphemous graffiti may also reflect that pagan gods were not entirely godlike as we understand that term today (or as the early Christians understood it). While I reserve extended discussion of pagan conceptions of the gods for chapter 10, we may usefully anticipate that discussion here. E. R. Dodds pointed out that in "popular Greek tradition a god differed from a man chiefly in being exempt from death and in the supernatural power which this exemption conferred on him" ([1965] 1970:74). Moreover, while people often appealed to various gods for help,, it was not assumed that the gods truly cared about humans--Aristotle taught that gods could feel no love for mere humans. Classical mythology abounds in stories in which the gods do wicked things to humans--often for the sport of it. Arthur

Darby Nock noted that worship of such gods need not have inspired sincere belief." [ROC:200f] There is no necessary 'consistency' in their position, though scholars still try to see what the worshippers believed at these festivals...The death of Attis was an event in the distant mythological past--how could someone believe it happened again each year? (where was the boar, or the castrating flint?)...Religious skepticism was rampant--from both high and low--but religion was "useful" to the society [Augustine tried to shame the Empire by pointing out their utilitarian approach to 'truth']. Consistency itself could easily be a sacrificial victim too...

In other words, the obvious logic in "they must have believed in a resurrected god, because what good is a dead god?" would have been met back then with MacMullen's phrase above: "who cares?"...

.....

But let's also take a brief look at the major figures that are prominent in the better known MR's of the Roman Empire. The ones most often referenced in NT background reference sourcebooks such as KOC, DSG, and NTB are the Greek MRs (Eleusinian--based on the rape of Persephone by Pluto; Dionysos (Bacchus)) and the Oriental MRs (Isis, Cybele/Attis--examined above, Mithras) [For a discussion of this breakdown, see NTSE:132-137.] We will only look at the ones of these with "unique" deities that might fall into a semi-DARG category.

The discussion continues in [copycatwho2.html](#)...

The Christian ThinkTank...[<http://www.Christian-thinktank.com>] (Reference Abbreviations)