

# Christ in Art

Ernest Renan

Text: Ernest Renan

Layout:

Baseline Co Ltd

61A-63A Vo Van Tan Street

4<sup>th</sup> Floor

District 3, Ho Chi Minh City

Vietnam

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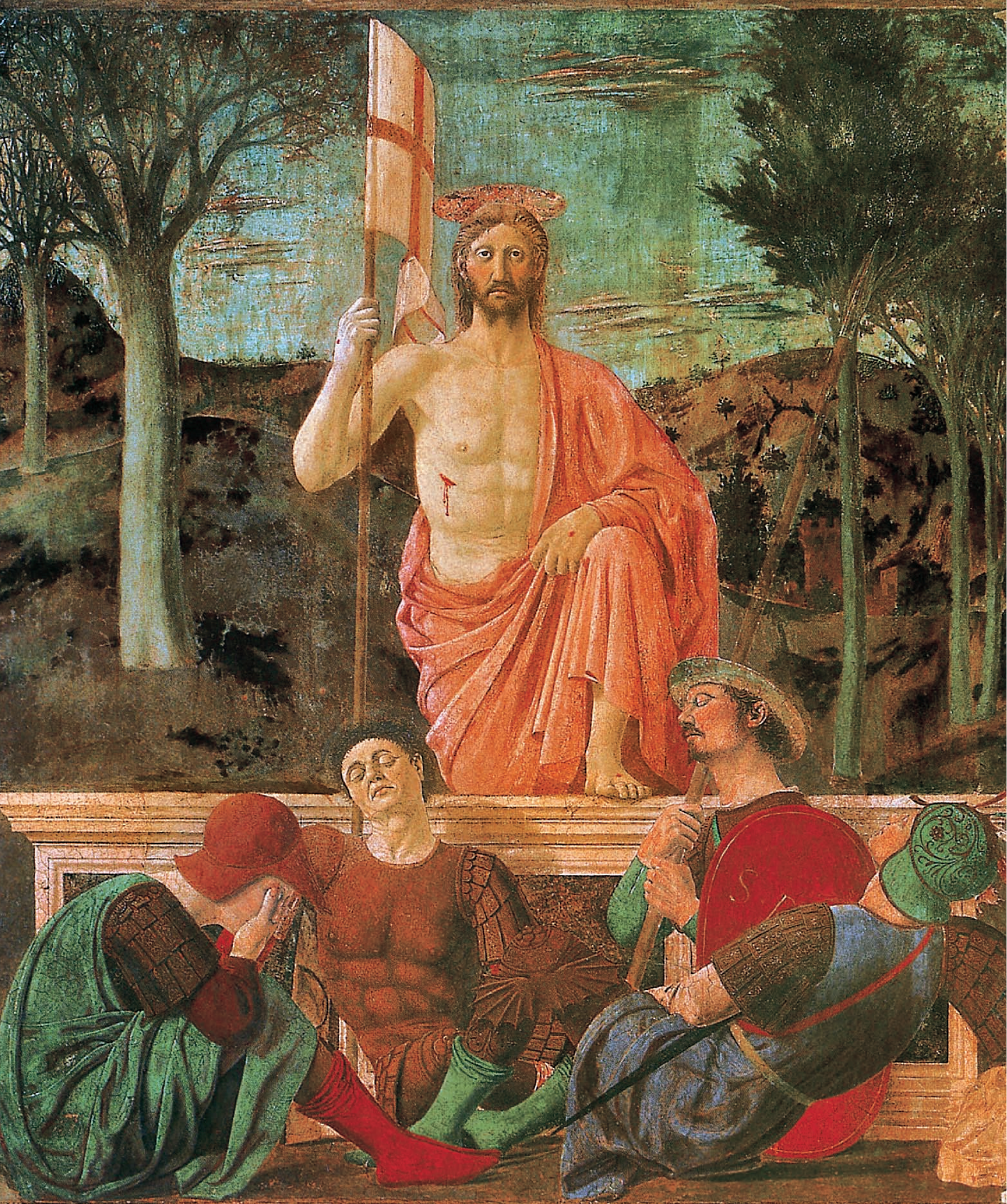
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# Origins of the Story of Christ

A history of the “Origins of Christianity” touches the obscure and subterranean period where it extends from the first beginnings of this religion to the time when its existence becomes a public, well-known fact, evident to the eyes of all men. Such a history consists of four books. The first, which I now present to the public, addresses the event that served as the starting-point of the new religion. The second will address the apostles and their immediate disciples, or rather the revolutions in religious thought of the first two Christian generations. I will close it about the year 100, when the last friends of Jesus have died, and all the books of the ‘New Testament have become fixed very nearly in the form in which we read them. The third book will set forth the condition of Christianity under the Antonines, slowly developing, and maintaining an almost permanent war against the empire, which having now reached the highest degree of administrative perfection and being governed by philosophers, combats in the infant sect of a secret and theocratic society that obstinately denies and incessantly undermines it. This book will comprise the whole of the second century. Finally, the fourth book will show the decisive progress of Christianity from the time of the Syrian emperors. In it, the construction of the Antonines will be seen falling to pieces, the decay of the ancient civilization becoming definitive, Christianity profiting by its ruin, Syria conquering the whole West, and Jesus, in company with the gods and divinized sages of Asia, taking possession of a society for which philosophy and a purely civil government no longer suffice. It is then that the religious ideas of the races grouped about the Mediterranean are radically modified. Oriental religions everywhere assume the ascendancy, Christianity, having become a mighty church, entirely forgets its millennial dreams, breaks its last connection with Judaism, and passes entirely into the Greek and Latin world. The literary struggles and labours of the third century, already public matters, will be set forth only in general terms.

I shall relate still more briefly the persecutions during the beginning of the fourth century, the last effort of the empire to return to its old principles, which were denied religious association in any place in the State. In conclusion, I shall merely foreshadow the change of policy which, under Constantine, inverted conditions and made the freest and most spontaneous religious movement an official religion, subjected to the State and persecuting in its turn.

I know not that I shall have enough of life and ability to complete a plan so vast. I shall be satisfied if, after having written the life of Jesus as I understand it, the history of the apostles, the condition of the Christian consciousness during the weeks which followed the death of Jesus, the formation of the legendary cycle of the resurrection, the first acts of the church of Jerusalem, the life of St. Paul, the crisis of the time of Nero, the vision of the Apocalypse, the fall of Jerusalem, the foundation of the Hebraic Christians of Batanea, the compilation of the gospels, the origin of the great schools of Asia Minor, sprung from John. Everything pales in comparison beside this marvellous first century.

**Piero della Francesca**, *Resurrection*,  
c. 1460.  
Fresco, 225 x 200 cm.  
Museo Civico, Sansepolcro. (p. 4)

*The Face of Christ*, late 15th century.  
Papier-mâché, painted,  
19 x 15, 5.5 cm.  
Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.



By a singularity rare in history, we see much more clearly what passed in the Christian world from the year 50 to the year 75, than from the year 100 to the year 150.

I believe that I have neglected, among ancient authorities, a source of information. Five great collections of writings, not to speak of a multitude of other scattered data, remain regarding Jesus and the time in which he lived. First, the gospels and the general writings of the New Testament; second, the compositions called the “Apocrypha of the Old Testament” third, the works of Philo; fourth, those of Josephus; fifth, the Talmud. The writings of Philo have the inestimable advantage of showing us what thoughts were fermenting in the time of Jesus in souls occupied with great religious questions. Philo lived, it is true, in quite another province of Judaism, but like Jesus he was free from the closed-mindedness which was prominent in Jerusalem; Philo is truly the elder brother of Jesus. He was sixty-two years old when the prophet of Nazareth was at the highest degree of his activity, and he survived him at least ten years. What a misfortune that the chances of life did not lead him into Galilee! What would he not have taught us!

Josephus, writing principally for the pagans, has not the same sincerity in his style. His brief notices of Jesus, John the Baptist, and Judas the Gaulonite, are dry and colourless. We feel that he is seeking to present these movements, thoroughly Jewish in character and spirit, under a form which may be intelligible to the Greeks and Romans. I think the passage on Jesus authentic. It is in the style of Josephus, and if this historian had made mention of Jesus, it would have been in that way. We perceive only that some Christian hand has retouched the fragment, has added a few words without

*Adoration of the Magi, c. 200.*  
Fresco.  
Capella Greca, Catacombs of Priscilla,  
Rome.





which it would have been almost blasphemous, and has perhaps curtailed or modified some expressions! We must remember that the literary fortune of Josephus was made by the Christians, who adopted his writings as documents essential to their sacred history. There was, probably in the second century, an edition corrected according to Christian ideals. But at all events, what constitutes the great interest of Josephus for the subject before us, is the vivid light which he throws upon the period. Thanks to him, Herod, Herodias, Antipater, Philip, Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate are persons upon whom we can put our finger, and whom we see living before us with striking reality.

The Apocrypha of the Old Testament, especially the Jewish portion of the Sibylline verses, and the Book of Enoch, taken with the Book of Daniel, are of cardinal importance for the history of the development of the Messianic theories and for the understanding of the conceptions of Jesus in regard to the kingdom of God. The Book of Enoch, in particular, which was very much read in the region of Jesus, gives the key to the expression "son of man," and the ideas which were associated with it. The age of these different books is now fixed beyond doubt. All now agree in placing the compilation of the more important of them in the second and first centuries before Christ. The date of the Book of Daniel is still more certain. The character of the two languages in which it is written; the use of Greek words; the clear announcement, determinate and dated, of events as late as the time of Antiochus Epiphanes; the false images of ancient Babylon traced in it; the general colouring of the book, which reminds us in no way of the writings of the captivity, which corresponds on the contrary, by a multitude of analogies, with the beliefs, the manners, and the peculiar fancies of the time of the Seleucids; the apocalyptic character of the visions. The place of the book in the Hebrew canon after

*The Good Shepherd*, c. 250.

Fresco.

Capella Greca, Catacombs of Priscilla,  
Rome.

the series of the prophets, the omission of Daniel in the panegyrics of the twenty-ninth chapter of Ecclesiastes, in which his rank was indicated; many other evidences which have been deduced a hundred times and leave no doubt that the Book of Daniel was the fruit of the great exaltation produced among the Jews by the persecution of Antiochus. This book must not be classed in old prophetic literature, but rather at the head of the apocalyptic literature as the first model of a style of composition and the various sibylline poems, the Book of Enoch, the Apocalypse of John, the Ascension of Isaiah, and the fourth book of Esdras.

In the history of the origins of Christianity, the Talmud has been far too neglected. I think that the true idea of the circumstances amid which Jesus was brought forth must be sought in this strange compilation, where so much precious information is mingled with the most insignificant scholasticism. Christian theology and Jewish theology indeed followed two parallel paths; the history of either cannot be understood without the history of the other. Countless materials detail the gospels' finds, moreover, their commentary in the Talmud. The vast Latin collections of Lightfoot, Schoettgen, Buxtorf, and Otho contain a mass of such information. I have made it a rule to verify the original quotations which I have made without a single exception. The aid which has been rendered to me in this portion of my labour, by a learned Israelite, M. Neubauer, who is exceedingly well versed in Talmudic literature, has enabled me to go further, and to clear up the most delicate portions of my subject by some new comparisons. The distinction of epochs is very important, the compilation of the Talmud extending from the year 200 to the year 500 specifically. We have brought as much discrimination as is possible in the present condition of these studies. Such recent dates will cause some worries to those who are accustomed to accord value to a document only for the period in which it was written. But such scruples would be out of place. The teaching of the Jews from the Asmonean epoch to the second century was principally oral. We must not judge such intellectual conditions after the habitudes of a time in which much is written. The Vedas and the ancient Arab poems were preserved by memory for centuries, and yet these compositions present a very definite and very delicate form. In the Talmud, on the contrary, the form is of no account. We must add, that before the Mischna of Judah the Holy, which superseded all the rest, there were attempts at the compilation – the first of which dates back perhaps further than is commonly supposed. The style of the Talmud is that of running notes. The style of the Talmud is like that of course notes – the drafters probably filed all the entries that had accumulated in the various schools over generations under certain titles.

We have yet to speak of the documents which, being presented as biographies of the founder of Christianity, must of course hold first place in the life of Jesus. A complete treatise on the compilation of the gospels would be a volume of itself. Thanks to the thorough studies of which this question has been the subject for thirty years, a problem that would formerly have been deemed impossible, has reached a solution which leaves room for much uncertainty, but which is amply sufficient for the demands of history. We shall have occasion to return to this in our second book, the composition of the gospels having been one of the most important events to the future of Christianity which occurred during the second half of the first century. We shall here touch but a single phase of the subject, that which is indispensable to the substantiation of our narrative. Leaving aside all that belongs to the description of the apostolic times, we shall inquire only to what extent the data furnished by the gospels may be employed in a history projected upon rational principles.

*The Good Shepherd*, 4th century.  
Marble, height: 43 cm, including base.  
Museo Nazionale Romano, Rome.





Let the gospels be in part legendary, that is evident since they are full of miracles and the supernatural; but there are a different species of legends. Nobody doubts the principal traits of the life of Francis of Assisi, though, in it, the supernatural is met at every step. Nobody, on the contrary, gives credence to the “Life of Apollonius of Tyana,” because it was written long after its hero, and under the conditions of a pure romance. At what period, by what hands, and under what conditions were the gospels compiled? This is the capital question upon which the opinion that we must form to their credibility depends.

We know that each of the four gospels bears at its head the name of a person known either in the apostolic history or in the gospel history itself. These four persons are not presented to us strictly as authors. The formulae “according to Matthew,” “according to Mark,” “according to Luke,” and “according to John,” do not imply that in the oldest opinion, these narratives had been written from one end to the other by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They signify only that those were the traditions coming from each of these apostles, and covered by their authority. It is clear that if these titles are exact, the gospels, without ceasing to be in part legendary, assume a high value since they carry us back to the half century following the death of Jesus, and even, in two cases, to eyewitness accounts of his acts.

As for Luke, doubt is hardly possible. Luke’s gospel is a regular composition founded on anterior documents. It is the work of a man who selects, prunes, and combines. The author of this gospel is certainly the same as the author of the Acts of the Apostles. Now, the author of the Book of Acts is a companion of St Paul, a title perfectly fitting to Luke. I know that more than one objection may be interposed to this, but one thing at least is beyond doubt: that the author of the third gospel and of the Acts is a man of the second apostolic generation and that is enough for our purpose. The date of this gospel may, moreover, be determined with much precision by considerations drawn from the book itself. Chapter Twenty One, inseparable from the rest of the work, was certainly written after the siege of Jerusalem, and soon after. We are here, therefore, on firm ground; for we have a work written entirely by the same hand, and of the most perfect unity.

The gospels of Matthew and Mark are far from having the same individual seal. They are impersonal compositions, in which the author totally disappears. A proper name written at the head of such works does not mean much. But if the gospel of Luke is dated, those of Matthew and Mark are as well. It is certain that the third gospel is posterior to the first and presents the character of a much more advanced compilation. We have besides, in this respect, a most important testimonial of the first half of the second century. It is by Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, a man of weight, a man of tradition, who was all his life attentive to the collection of whatever could be learned of the person of Jesus. After declaring that in such a matter he prefers oral tradition to books, Papias mentions two written works on the words and deeds of Christ: first, a work of Mark, the interpreter of the apostle Peter, brief, incomplete, not arranged in chronological order, and comprising of narratives and sayings (λεχθενταηπραχθεντα) composed from the accounts and reminiscences of the apostle Peter; secondly, a collection of sayings (λογια) written in Hebrew by Matthew, “and which he has translated as best he could.” Certain it is that these two descriptions correspond very well to the general physiognomy of the two books now called “The Gospel according to Matthew,” and “The Gospel according to Mark,” the first characterized by its long discourses; the second, full of anecdote, much more exact than the first in regard to minute acts, brief to dryness, poor in discourses and badly

*The Good Shepherd* (detail), c. 450.  
Mosaic.

Galla Placidia Mausoleum, Ravenna.

*Leo VI Prostrate before Christ in Majesty*,  
9th-10th century.

Mosaic.

Hagia Sophia, Istanbul. (pp. 14-15)





composed. These two works as we read them are absolutely similar to those which Papias read, and cannot be maintained in the first place, because the work of Matthew to Papias was composed exclusively of discourses in Hebrew, with translations that were varying considerably in circulation, and in the second place, because the work of Mark and that of Matthew were to him quite distinct, compiled without any concord, and, it seems, written in different languages. Now, in the present condition of the texts, the Gospel according to Matthew and the Gospel according to Mark present parallel passages so long and so perfectly identical that we must suppose that either the final compiler of the first had the second before him, or that both have copied the same prototype. What appears most probable is that neither that of Matthew nor that of Mark have the original compilations; that our two first gospels are already arrangements in which there has been an attempt to fill the hiatuses in one text by another. Each wished indeed to possess a complete copy. He who had only the discourses in his copy desired to have the narratives, and vice versa. Thus “the Gospel according to Matthew” is found to have incorporated nearly all the anecdotes of Mark, and “the Gospel according to Mark” now contains a multitude of traits which come from the Gospel of Matthew. Each drew largely from the evangelical traditions continuing about him. These traditions are so far from having been exhausted by the gospels that the Acts of the Apostles and the most ancient fathers quote many sayings of Jesus which appear authentic, yet which are not found in the gospels that we possess.

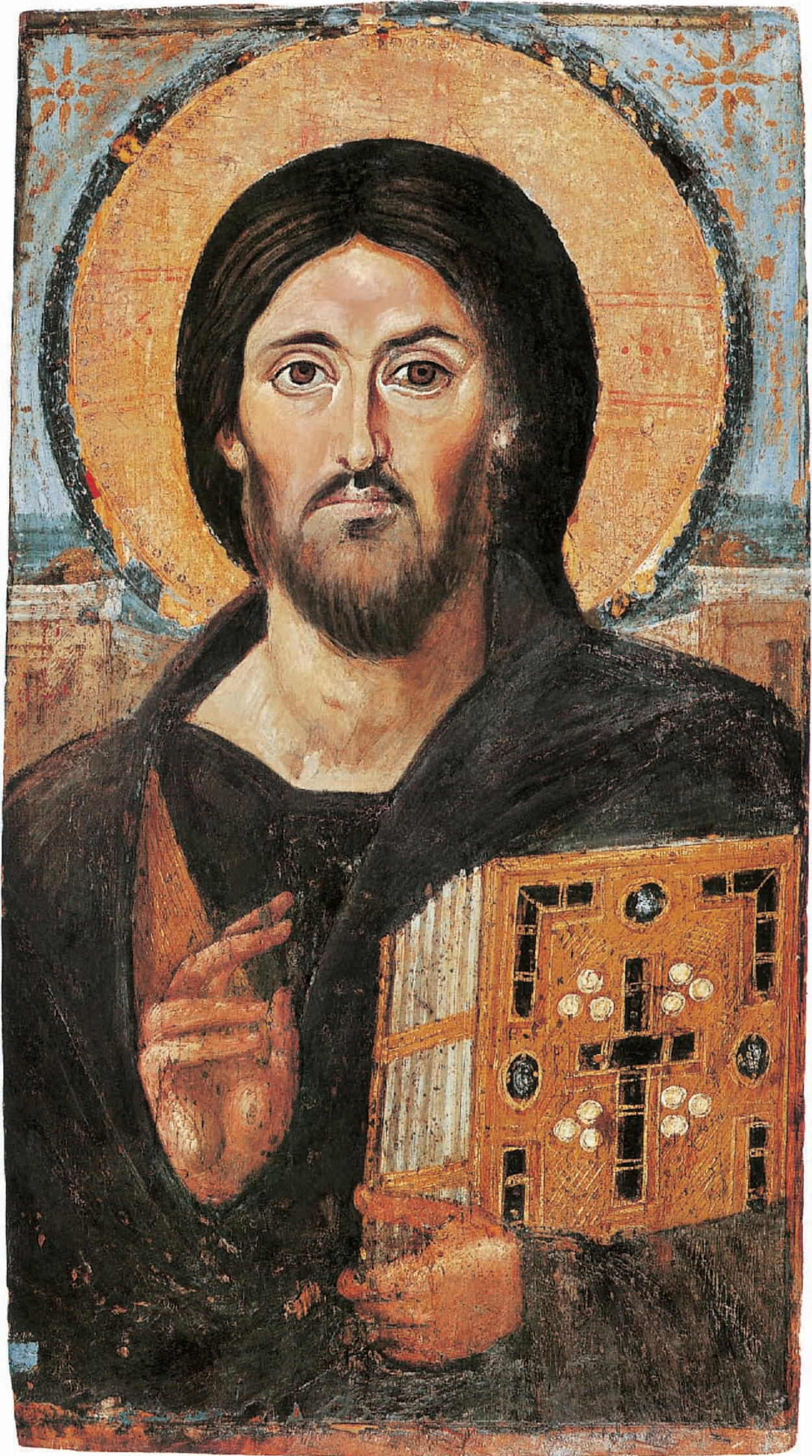
It is of small importance to the present object to carry this delicate analysis farther, and to endeavour to reconstruct in some manner, on the one hand, the original Logia of Matthew; on the other, the primitive narration as it flowed from the pen of Mark. The Logia are undoubtedly represented to us by the grand discourses of Jesus, which fill a considerable portion of the first gospel. These discourses form, indeed, when detached from the rest, a tolerably complete whole. As for the narratives of the first and second gospels, they seem to be based upon a common document, the text of which is found sometimes in one and sometimes in the other, and of which the second gospel, as we now find it, is but a slightly modified reproduction. In other words, the system of the life of Jesus with the synoptic rests upon two original documents: first, the discourses of Jesus collected by the apostle Matthew; second, the collection of anecdotes and personal information which Mark wrote from Peter’s reminiscences. We may say that we now have these two documents, mingled with matter from other sources, in the two first gospels, which bear not wrongfully the name of “Gospel according to Matthew;” and “Gospel according to Mark.”

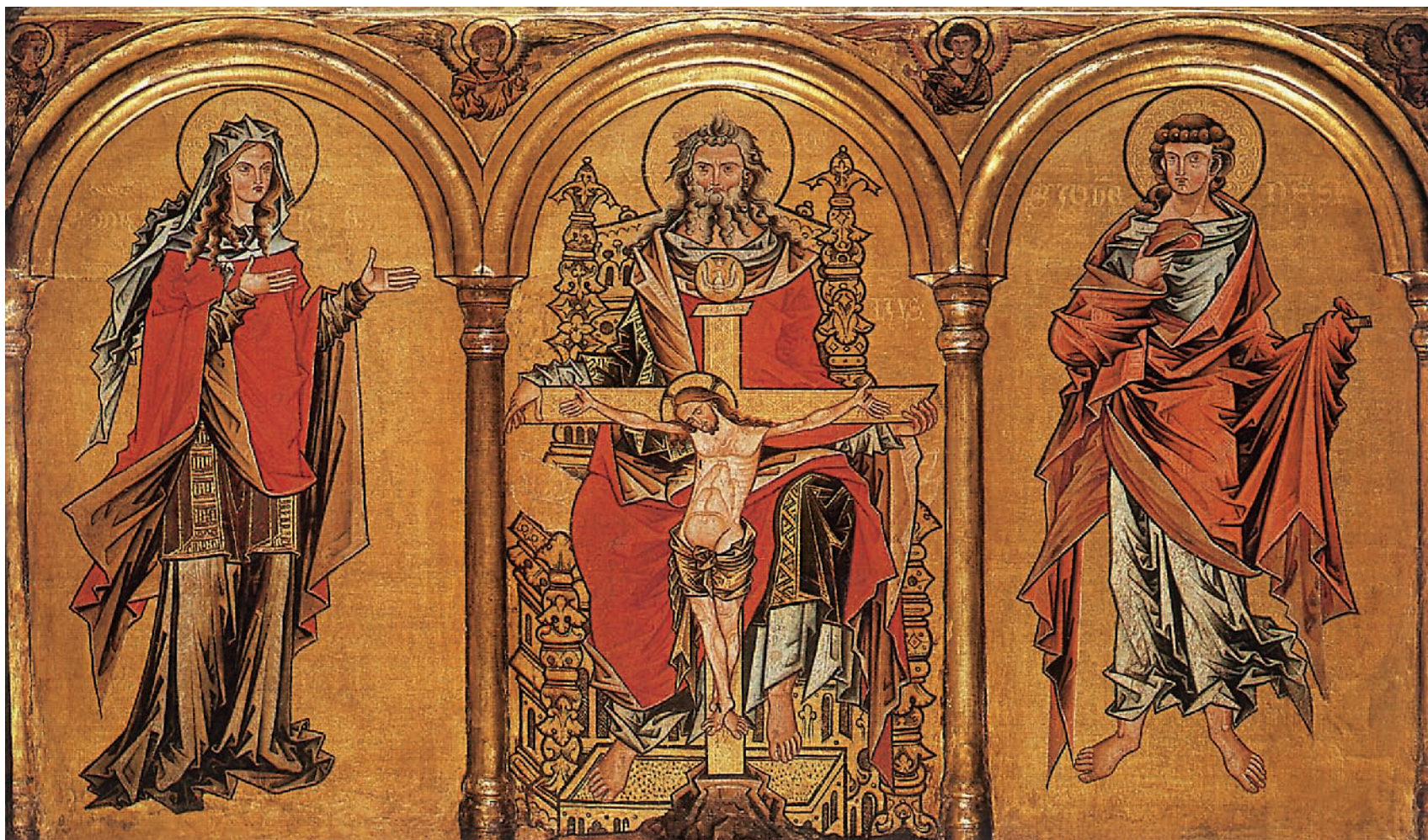
There is no doubt that early on the discourses of Jesus were reduced to writing in the Aramaic language, and that at an early age his remarkable deeds were recorded. These were not texts settled and fixed dogmatically. Besides the gospels which have reached us, there were a multitude of others professing to represent eyewitness accounts. Little importance was attached to these writings, and the collectors, like Papias, much preferred oral tradition. As they believed the world near its end, they cared little to compose books for the future; it was important only to preserve in their hearts the living image of him whom they hoped soon to see again in the clouds. Hence the little authority which the evangelical texts possessed for a hundred and fifty years. There was no scruple about inserting additions, combining them diversely, or completing some by others. The poor man who has one book, desires it to contain all that speaks to his heart. They lent these little rolls to one another: each transcribed on the margin of his copy the sayings and the parables which he found elsewhere, and which touched him. The finest thing in the world thus resulted from an obscure and entirely popular elaboration— no compilation

*Deesis* (detail), 1261.  
Mosaic.  
Hagia Sophia, Istanbul.









had absolute value. Justin, who often appeals to what he calls “the memoirs of the apostles,” had before him a condition of the evangelical documents considerably differing from that which we have; at all events, he takes no care to cite them textually. The gospel quotations in the pseudo-Clementine writings of Ebionite origin present the same character. The spirit was everything and the letter nothing. It was when tradition grew weak in the latter half of the second century that the texts bearing the names of the apostles assumed decisive authority and obtained the force of law.

“Who does not see the preciousness of documents thus composed of the tender memories, of the simple recitals of the two first Christian generations, yet filled with the strong impression which the founder had made, and which seems long to have survived him? These gospels too, appear to come through that branch of the Christian family which was most closely allied with Jesus. The last compilation work, at least of the text which bears the name of Matthew, appears to have been done in one of the countries situated to the northeast of Palestine, such as Gaulonitis, Haouran or Batanea, where many Christians took refuge during the persecution by the Romans, where the relatives of Jesus were still found in the second century, and where the first Galilean direction was preserved longer than anywhere else.

Hitherto we have spoken only of the three gospels called synoptic. We must now speak of the fourth, which bears the name of John. Here is much more ground for doubt, and the question is less near a solution. Papias, who belonged to the school of John, and who, if he had not heard him, as Irenaeus will have it, had attended much upon his immediate disciples, among others Aristion, and he who was called Presbyteros Joannes Papias, who had eagerly collected the oral narrations of this Aristion and

*Christ Pantocrator*, 6th century.  
Encaustic, 84 x 45.5 cm.  
Saint Catherine's Monastery, Mount Sinai.

*Trinity, Virgin Mary and Saint John*,  
c. 1250.  
Altarpiece from the Wiesenkirche.  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin.

Presbyteros Joannes quotes not a word of a “Life of Jesus” written by John. Had any such mention been found in his work, Eusebius, who extracts from him all that is of value for the literary history of the apostolic century, would undoubtedly have remarked it. The intrinsic difficulties drawn from the reading of the fourth gospel itself are equally great. How is it that by the side of definite details, which savour so strongly of an eyewitness, we find such discourses, totally different from those of Matthew? How, by the side of a general plan of a life of Jesus, which appears much more satisfactory and exact than that of the synoptic, these singular passages in which we perceive a dogmatic interest peculiar to the compiler, ideas entirely foreign to Jesus and sometimes indications which put us on our guard as to the good faith of the narrator? How, in short, by the side of the purest, the most just, the most truly evangelical views, these spots in which we would fain to see the interpolations of an ardent sectary? Is it indeed John, the son of Zebedee, the brother of James, (of whom no single mention is made in the fourth gospel), who was able to write in Greek these lessons of abstract metaphysics to which neither the synoptic nor the Talmud present any analogy? All this is weighty, and, for my part, I dare not be certain, that the fourth gospel was written entirely by the pen of an ex-fisherman from Galilee. But that in substance this gospel issued towards the end of the first century, from the great school of Asia Minor, which held to John, a version of the Master’s life, worthy of high consideration and often of preference demonstrated both by external evidence and by the examination of the document itself, in a manner that leaves nothing to be desired.

And first, there is no doubt that towards the year 150 the fourth gospel was in existence and was attributed to John. Formal texts of St. Justin, Theophilus of Antioch, and St. Irenaeus show that from that time this gospel was used in all controversies and served as the cornerstone for the development of the doctrine. Irenaeus was formal; now, Irenaeus came from the school of John, and between him and the apostle there was only Polycarp. The part of this gospel in Gnosticism, and particularly in the system of Valentine, in Montanism was no less decisive. The school of John was on the course of which is most clearly seen during the second century. Now, this school cannot be understood if we do not place the fourth gospel at its very cradle. The first epistle also, attributed to St. John, is certainly by the same author as the fourth gospel; now the epistle is identified as John’s by Polycarp, Papias, and Irenaeus.

But above all the book itself is of an impressive character. The author speaks continually as an eyewitness as if he desires to pass for the apostle John. If, therefore, this work is not really by the apostle, we must admit a deception which the author confesses to himself. Now, although the ideas of that day were, in matters of literary honesty, essentially different from ours, we have no example in the apostolic world, of a forgery of this kind. Moreover, not only does the author desire to pass for the apostle John, but we see clearly that he writes in the interest of that apostle. On every page the intention is betrayed as if showing that he was the favourite of Jesus and that upon all the most solemn occasions (at the Supper, on Calvary, at the grave) he held the first place. The relations, fraternal on the whole, though not excluding a certain rivalry of the author with Peter, his hatred on the contrary to Judas, a hatred perhaps anterior to the betrayal which seemed to disclose themselves here and there.

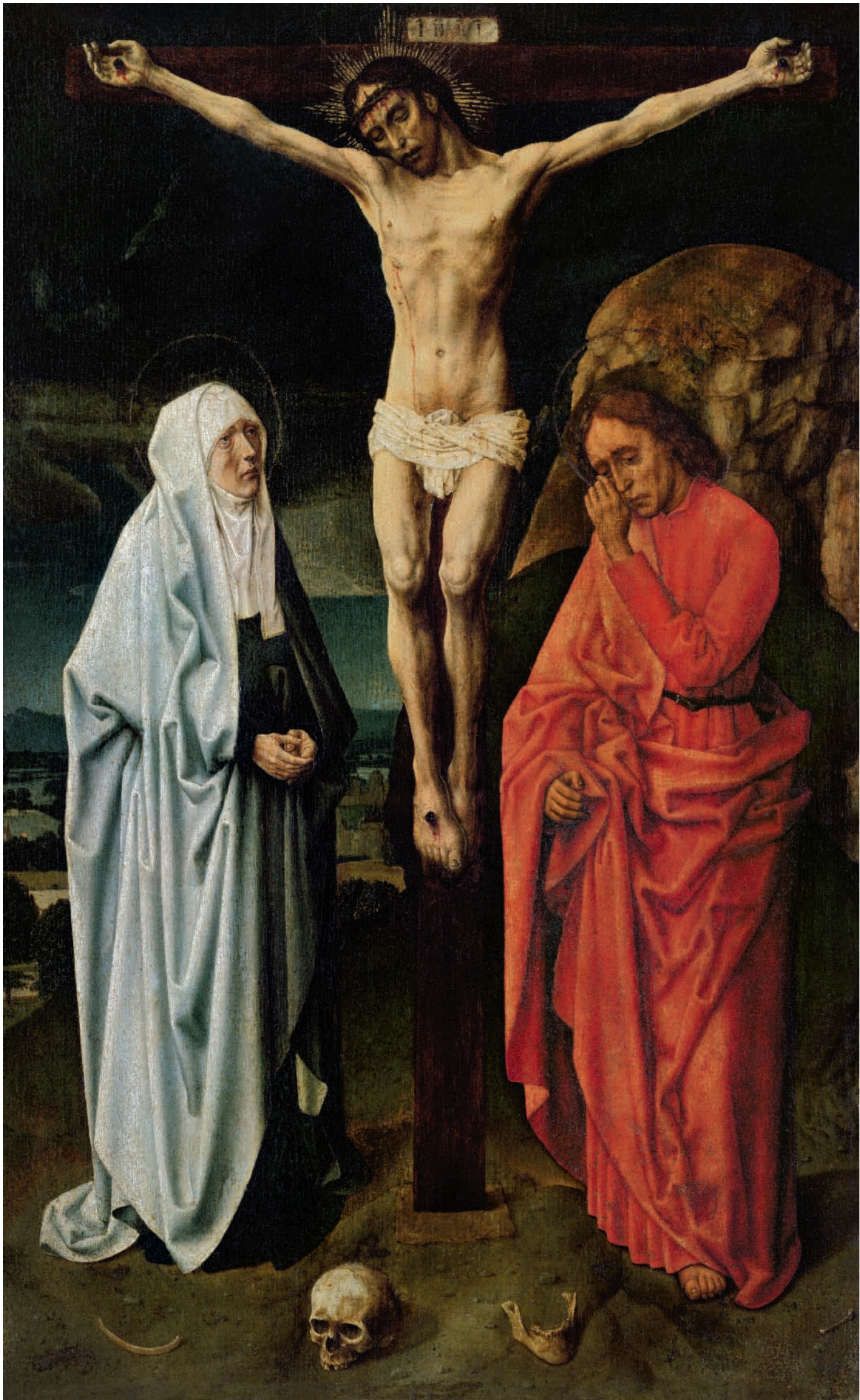
We are tempted to believe that John, in his old age, having read the evangelical narrations which were in circulation, remarked, on the one hand, various inaccuracies, and on the other hand was wounded at seeing that there had not been accorded to him a sufficiently prominent place in the history of Christ. Then he began to dictate many things which he knew better than the rest with the intention

*Christ Militant*, c. 520.  
Mosaic.  
Museo Arcivescovile e Cappella di  
San Andrea, Ravenna.

**Hugo Van der Goes**, *The Crucifixion*,  
c. 1470.  
Oil on panel.  
Museo Correr, Venice. (p. 22)

*Head of Christ and the Lentulus Letter*,  
late 15th or early 16th century.  
Oil on wood, 38.5 x 27.3 cm.  
Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht.  
(p. 23)











of showing that in a great number of cases in which mention had been made of Peter only, he had figured with and before him. Already in the lifetime of Jesus, this slight feeling of jealousy had betrayed itself between the sons of Zebedee and the other disciples. Since the death of James, his brother, John was the sole possessor of the affectionate memories of which these two disciples, by the confession of all, were the depositaries. Hence his perpetual care to keep in mind that he is the last surviving eyewitness, and the pleasure that he takes in relating circumstances with which he alone could be acquainted. Hence so many little traits of precision which seem like the scholiast of an annotator: "It was the sixth hour" "it was night" "the servant's name was Malchus" "they had made a fire of coals, for it was cold" "now the coat was without seam". Hence, finally, the disorder of the compilation, the irregularity of the progress, the disconnection of the first chapters were regulated. There are so many inexplicable things on the supposition that this gospel was only a theological thesis without any historical value, and which, on the contrary, are perfectly comprehensible, if we see in them, according to the tradition, the memories of an old man, sometimes of marvellous freshness, sometimes having suffered strange mutations.

A capital distinction, indeed, must be made in the gospel of John. On the one hand, this gospel presents to us a picture of the life of Jesus which differs considerably from that of the synoptics. On the other, he puts into the mouth of Jesus discourses, the tone, the style, the manner, the doctrines of which have nothing in common with the logia reported by the synoptics. Under this second relation the difference is so great that we must make a decided choice. If Jesus spoke as Matthew has it, he could not have spoken as John has it. Between the two authorities, no critic has hesitated, none will levitate. A thousand miles from the simple, disinterested, impersonal tone of the synoptic, the gospel of John discovers continually the preoccupations of the apologist, the afterthoughts of the sectary, the intention of proving a thesis and of convincing adversaries. Not by pretentious, heavy, badly-written tirades, saying little to the moral sense, did Jesus found his divine work. Even if Papias had not told us that Matthew wrote the sayings of Jesus in their original tongue, the naturalness, the ineffable truth, the peerless charm of the synoptic discourses, their thoroughly Hebraic manner, the analogies which they present to the sayings of the Jewish doctors of the same period, their perfect harmony with Galilean nature, all these characters, if we compare them with the obscure Gnosticism and the distorted metaphysics which fill the discourses of John, speak loudly enough. This does not mean that there are not in the discourses of John wonderful flashes of light, touches which come really from Jesus. But the mystic tone of these discourses corresponds in no wise to the character of the eloquence of Jesus such as we imagine it from the synoptic. A new spirit has come; Gnosticism has already commenced; the Galilean era of the kingdom of God is ended; the hope of the speedy coming of Christ grows dim; we are entering into the acridities of metaphysics, into the darkness of abstract dogma. The spirit of Jesus is not there, and if the son of Zebedee had really written these pages, he certainly had quite forgotten the writings of Lake Galilee and the charming conversations he had heard on the edges.

A circumstance, moreover, which fully proves that the discourses reported by the fourth gospel are not historic, but compositions intended to cover with the authority of Jesus, certain doctrines dear to the compiler, is their perfect harmony with the intellectual state of Asia Minor, at the time they were written. Asia Minor was then the theatre of a singular movement of syncretical philosophy; all the germs of Gnosticism were already in existence. John appears to have drunk from these foreign fountains. It may be that after the crises of the year 68 (the year the Book of Revelation is thought

**Matthias Grünewald**, *Resurrection*,  
from the *Isenheim Altarpiece* (detail),  
1512-1516.  
Musée Unterlinden, Colmar.

to have been written) and the year 70 (the fall of Jerusalem), the old apostle, with his ardent and mobile soul, disabused the belief in the speedy appearance of the Son of Man in the clouds, inclined towards the ideas which he found about him, a man who readily mixed certain Christian doctrines. In attributing these new ideas to Jesus, he followed a very natural inclination. Our memories are transformed with all the rest; the idea of a person whom we have known changes with us. Considering Jesus as the incarnation of truth, John could not but attribute to him what he had come to take for truth.

And now finally, we will add that probably John himself had small part in this, that this change was made around him rather than by him. We are sometimes tempted to believe those precious words, coming from the apostle, were employed by his disciples in a sense very different from the primitive evangelical spirit. Indeed, certain portions of the fourth gospel have been added afterwards; such as the entire twenty-first chapter, in which the author seems to have intended to render homage to the apostle Peter after his death, and to reply to the objections which might be, or which had already been, drawn from the death of John himself (v. 21-23). Several other passages bear traces of erasures and corrections.

It is impossible, at this distance, to possess the key of all these singular problems, and many surprises would be in reserve for us, could we penetrate into the secrets of this mysterious school of Ephesus, which more than once appears to have taken delight in obscure paths. But a decisive test is this. Every person who sits down to write the life of Jesus without a rigid theory as to the relative value of the gospels, allowing himself to be guided entirely by the sentiment of the subject, will be led in a multitude of cases to prefer the narrative of John to that of the synoptic. The last months of the life of Jesus in particular are explained only by John; many features of the Passion, that are unintelligible in other sources, assume in the relation of the fourth gospel, probability and possibility. On the contrary, I dare any person to compose a consistent life of Jesus, if he makes account of the discourses which John attributes to Jesus. This style of extolling himself and demonstrating himself incessantly, this perpetual argumentation, this scenic representation without simplicity, this long moralising at the end of each miracle, these stiff and awkward discourses, the tone of which is so often false and unequal, are unendurable to a man of taste by the side of the delicious sayings of the synoptic. We have here, evidently, artificial pieces which represent the teachings of Jesus, as the dialogues of Plato renders the conversation of Socrates. They are in some way variations of a musician improvising on his own account upon a given theme. The theme may be not without some authenticity, but in the execution, the artist gives his fantasy full play. We feel the factitious procedure, the rhetoric and the gloss.

Besides, the vocabulary of Jesus is not found in the fragments of which we are speaking. The expression "kingdom of God," which was so familiar to the master, is seen only once. On the other hand, the style of the discourses attributed to Jesus by the fourth gospel present the most complete analogy to that of the epistles of St. John. We see that in writing his discourses the author followed, not his memories, but the rather monotonous movement of his own thought. An entire new mystic language was unfolded, a language of which the synoptic had not the least idea ("world," "truth," "life," "light," "darkness," etc.). Had Jesus never spoken in this style, which has in it nothing Hebrew, nothing Jewish, nothing Talmudic, if I may so express myself, how could a single one of his listeners have kept the secret so well?

*Christ on the Cross*, mid-12th century.  
Gilded bronze, 22 x 21.5 x 3.9 cm.  
Musée du Louvre, Paris.