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org. Claire Clivaz and Mina Monier (DH+, SIB, Lausanne)
and Dan Batovici (KU Leuven, BE)*

Cerinthus and the Resurrection Story in the Gospel of Mark

Joan Taylor, King's College London (UK)

Abstract

Cerinthus has long remained a mysterious figure, identified as a heretic in the rhetoric of early Christian scholars, but hard to pin down as a real person with coherent ideas. It seems highly likely that he was Jewish, with 'John' being his first name (hence he appears in debates concerning the authorship of Johannine literature). He is associated with Ephesus, but he was trained in Egypt and shared the same philosophical ideas of Philo of Alexandria. Importantly for the Gospel of Mark, Cerinthus held an adoptionist Christology whereby, a great power - called 'Christ' - came down from God and entered into Jesus after his baptism, 'in the form of a dove'.

This power departed before Jesus' death. What then of Cerinthus' understanding of the resurrection? From the *Epistula Apostolorum* it appears that for Cerinthus Jesus' resurrection was not fleshly, as indeed we have a non-fleshly resurrection in the longer ending of Mark. Might Mark then originally have had a resurrection story well-suited to Cerinthian thinking, a story that has been edited in the surviving longer ending of Mark, re-formed in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, and John, and sometimes just boldly cut out? If so, how might this original story be reconstructed?