Proposed Title: TEXT GROWTH AND TRADITION INTERACTION IN THE FIRST CENTURY
Alternate suggestions can be considered at the 2015 Alpha Christianity business meeting (9:30-10 PM)

Present Sponsors: E Bruce Brooks (Univ of Massachusetts at Amherst); Glenn S Holland (Allegheny College)

Scope: To bring higher-critical methods to bear on all the canonical texts plus several major noncanonical texts (Barnabas, 1 Clement, Didache, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Thomas) and parallel traditions (the Baptist movement) with a view to revealing the interplay between these texts and traditions in the first century, and recovering their chronological position and contribution to the formation of later Christianity.

Possibilities: Growth of and between the Gospels; Editorial Shaping of Paul’s letters; Contact between Pauline and Gospel traditions; Hardening of Doctrine in the DeuteroPaulines and elsewhere; changing relation to Judaism; Influence of Jewish Canon Formation (as between Jude and its transform in 2 Peter); Incipient Gnosticism; Qumran Parallels in the Gospels and John the Baptist; Mandaean echoes of Baptist tradition; Rome as the emergent center of Christian orthodoxy. The Stratification of the Gospels, especially Mark, and isolation of the earliest evidence for the Historical Jesus; development of the Historical Jesus persona over the First Century.

Contribution: Some of these topics are not addressed in the present SBL units (there has been little work on the Didache since the end of the Didache unit several years ago; nothing in 2015), and others are not addressed in the wider context here proposed. We believe that the proposed consultancy would complement and enrich the work of the present SBL units.

Parallel: TEXTS AND TRADITIONS IN THE SECOND CENTURY. This existing unit would be paralleled in for the First Century by the unit here proposed. We would look for a fruitful cooperation between the two, as is suggested by the topic of one session of this unit on the 2015 program: “Paul and the Second Century.”

Advantages: Some of the topics here proposed are controversial; others are simply new. The existence of such a unit would give an opportunity to bring together scholars working in the higher-criticism tradition (now typically isolated), and those with a historical rather than confessional approach to the texts, and permit fruitful interchange among them. Publication of selected papers in the Project’s annual journal Alpha offers a further advantage to participants.

We Need: (1) People to serve on the committee. (2) People to submit tentative abstracts (address below), to indicate in our proposal that there exists significant interest in this approach. (3) People available to present invited papers in 2016. (4) People with experience in managing such units (a few have indicated their availability) to provide guidance to the new unit in its first years.

Please Contact ebbrooks@research.umass.edu if you can help us in any capacity, or would like to indicate an interest in having such a unit as part of the regular SBL annual program.

Thank You for your interest, and your suggestions for refining this draft of a proposal.