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The *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* is designed to promote the academic study of religion at the graduate and undergraduate levels. The journal is a student initiative affiliated with the Religious Studies Program and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Utah State University. Our academic review board includes professional scholars specializing in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Mormonism, as well as specialists in the fields of History, Philosophy, Psychology, Anthropology, Sociology, and Religion. The journal is housed in the Intermountain West, but gladly accepts submissions from students throughout the United States and around the world.
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Diogène

Jules Bastein-Lepage

Oil on canvas, 1873

“İ am just looking for an honest man.”
HADYN B. CALL is a doctoral student at Utah State University pursuing a Ph.D. in Education, specializing in Curriculum and Instruction with an emphasis in Social Studies. His interests involve all aspects of Social Studies, including Religious Studies and Mormon history. He has a background in education and history (B.A. in History and M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction from Weber State University and an M.A. in History from Utah State University).
J* MORMONS AND MUSLIMS—AN ONGOING ENCOUNTER J*

Joseph Smith, Jr., born 23 December 1805 in Sharon, Vermont, relocated to Palmyra, New York with his family at age ten. His father, Joseph Smith Sr., and mother, Lucy Mack, had eleven children. Smith’s unique childhood in the “Burned-over District of Western New York, with all its revivalism and religious emotionalism,”¹ created an intense curiosity and love for religion. As a child and throughout his life, Smith admired, tolerated, and was influenced by other Christian and non-Christian denominations.

Smith believed firmly in the Bible, and challenged “if any man will prove to me by one passage of Holy writ, one item I believe, to be false, I will renounce it disclaim it far as I have promulgated it.” It was his faith and love for the Bible that led him to read and discover the “Epistle of James, first chapter and fifth verse, which reads: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”² His naïve faith led him to a grove to pray. This action was life altering and catapulted him into a position of leadership that brought about turmoil, persecution, and eventually death.

Smith strongly believed in freedom of religion. He said, “I am the greatest advocate of the Constitution. of U.S. there is there on the earth”³ and “[t]his is a love of liberty which inspires my soul, civil and religious liberty—were diffused into my soul by my grandfathers.”⁴ He believed that all religions were good and stressed that, “[t]he grand fundamental principles of Mormonism are truth, friendship, and relief.”⁵ Regarding truth, Smith taught that “Mormonism is to receive truth let it come

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³ Sermon delivered at Nauvoo temple grounds on Sunday October 15, 1843 by Joseph Smith written by Willard Richards.
⁴ Sermon delivered at the Nauvoo temple grounds on Sunday July 9, 1843 by Joseph Smith written by Willard Richards.
Under friendship, Smith stated “let me be resurrected with the saints whether to heaven or hell or any other good place—good society. What do we care if the society is good? Don’t care what a character is if he’s my friend.” Concerning relief, Smith claimed “if it has been demonstrated that I have been willing to die for a Mormon I am bold to declare before heaven that I am just as ready to die for a presbyterian, a baptist or any other denomination.” Regardless of religion, Smith sought truth, kindled friendships, and provided relief for those in need.

Throughout his ministry, Smith’s tolerance and acceptance of other religions was apparent. Samuel Prior, a Methodist minister, attended one of Smith’s sermons. He was “waiting to hear that foul aspersion of other sects…that rancorous denunciation of every individual but a Mormon.’ To his amazement, instead he ‘was invited to preach, and did so.’ Sparked by the teachings of the Book of Mormon, Smith had an extreme interest in Judaism, and was particularly interested in learning Hebrew. Smith was able to hire Joshua Seixas, an instructor from Hudson Seminary, to educate Mormons in Hebraic translation. Over the course of their relationship, Smith expressed “that Seixas ‘conversed freely,’ that he was ‘an interesting man,’ cordial, intelligent, and pleasant. Smith lent his own horses and sleigh so that his instructor could visit his wife and children in nearby Hudson during the cold winter months.”

Smith’s knowledge and background, his revelations, and the Book of Mormon all played a major role in his tolerant views and acceptance of other religions. As expressed by Heber C. Kimball, “we were some of us Baptists, some Methodists, some Presbyterians, some Campbellites, some

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6 Sermon delivered at the Nauvoo temple grounds on Sunday July 9, 1843 by Joseph Smith written by Willard Richards.
7 Sermon delivered at Nauvoo, Illinois on July 23, 1843 by Joseph Smith written by Willard Richards.
8 Sermon delivered at the Nauvoo temple grounds on Sunday July 9, 1843 by Joseph Smith written by Willard Richards.
9 Steven Epperson, Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel (Salt Lake City, UT: Signature Books, 1992), pp. 92-93.
10 Ibid, p. 83.
Accordingly, most early converts of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were previously members of other faiths. By following his three “fundamental principles of Mormonism,” Smith sought truth and friendship inside and outside his new faith. He believed in providing relief to all those who needed it—regardless of their religion. This Mormon melting pot was led by a man who genuinely looked at other faiths with admiration and respect.

Joseph Smith’s dealings with those of other religions set a precedent that has continued to resonate through the Mormon Church and among its leaders. Although Smith’s encounters with Muslims were limited, modern church leaders have fostered healthy relationships with the Muslim people both in the United States and abroad. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that friendships can be established between fundamentally different religions; that the LDS Church has in fact made efforts to bridge the gap between themselves and Islam; that Muslims, too, are willing to bridge the gap; and that Mormon-Muslim relations are generally positive.

Over the last few decades, the LDS Church has reached out to the Muslim world in order to more fully understand Islam. “Latter-day Saint interest in the lands and people of the Near East is deep seated” observes one LDS scholar. LDS doctrine infers that the Arab people (most of whom are Muslim) are literal descendants of the biblical prophet Abraham, and are therefore entitled to the promises made to him by God. Lineage and genealogy have always been important aspects of Mormonism; therefore, peoples with similar ancestral lines are looked upon with admiration, despite perceived or actual differences in theological beliefs.

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11 Journal of Heber C. Kimball, Saturday May 31, 1834.
13 Ibid.
In October 1981, a conference was held at Brigham Young University (BYU) in Provo, Utah entitled “Islam: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestations.” The conference “included some of the ablest exponents and finest interpreters of Islam’s relationships with Christianity.” Through these proceedings, Mormons and Muslims were able to articulate important similarities and differences between their two religions. Neither group at the conference had the intention of converting one another, nor did anyone feel the need to agree on theological differences. The meeting simply drew the two unique groups together in understanding. This mutual understanding generally led to tolerance and friendship.

Several specific subjects of the conference are worth noting. Despite all of the good found in Islam, it was apparent that both Mormons and Muslims agree that there is backwardness—a digression that has slowly evolved among radical factions. How this came about and how Islam could be restored were two issues that led to healthy debate. The 1981 conference addressed this perceived backwardness of some followers of Islam, and the problems caused by radical Muslims due to their deepening hatred toward western culture and society—especially toward the United States of America. The attacks in Washington D.C. and New York City on September 11, 2001 are epic examples. Mormon reactions to these events differed from those of nation at large. Mormons across the country opened their churches to Muslims who feared their mosques were no longer safe for worship.

What caused some of Islam’s radical backwardness? Were the problems internal or external? Daniel C. Peterson, professor of Islamic and Arabic Studies at BYU, argues that “Islamic civilization was once the greatest of its day and among the greatest in human history. The seeds of its decay were sown internally, and the steps that must be taken to restore it to its historic place in world culture must be taken by the Muslims themselves.” On the other hand, Haji Alamsjah Ratu Perwiranegara cites other

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15 Palmer, Mormons and Muslims, p. 3.
16 David Haldane, “U.S. Muslims share friendship, similar values with Mormons,” Los Angeles Times, April, 2 2008.
17 Palmer, Mormons and Muslims, p. 41.
opinions about the decay of Islam through the voices of various Muslims. For example, Sayyid Jamaluddin al-Afghani (1839-1897) believed that the backwardness was external. He believed that "if the Muslims longed for the rebirth of the glory of Islam, they must first free themselves or their countries from Western domination."\textsuperscript{18} Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938), pointing to the controversy and opposition within some factions of Islam, believed that the Muslim world needed to follow the West and adopt its civilization and culture.\textsuperscript{19} Sir Muhammad Iqbal (1876-1938) infused al-Afghani and Kemal’s ideas with the notion that Islam must adopt technology and science from the West, but reject other aspects of Westernization. This view is accepted by many Muslim-Americans who live in a western society. Iqbal realized the importance of keeping up with the West through modernization, while at the same time keeping Islam pure.\textsuperscript{20} Perwiranegara concluded that most Muslims (at least in Indonesia) believed that the backwardness of Islam was due to oppression and colonization from the West, an external cause, in contrast to Peterson’s internal theory.

Omar Kader, a scholar with a unique perspective due to his Muslim upbringing and Mormon conversion, poses an interesting question: “Is the current return to Islamic fundamentalism a return to cultural authenticity more than it is a rejection of the modern West?” Kader believes that Muslims blame the backwardness of Islam on the West because their experience with Westerners has been poor at best. The first Westerners to live in many Muslim communities were construction workers. “They bring beer, brothels, and bars,” notes Kader.\textsuperscript{21} With such limited exposure, it is no wonder why Muslim perceptions of the West are negatively skewed.

No conclusion has been established that the backwardness of Islam was caused internally or externally. What this demonstrates is that the backwardness of Islam, largely due to a radical movement,

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, p. 109.
is damaging the reputation of an otherwise peaceful religion. Often, through conversation and dialogue, two groups of inherently different people can solve problems, break stereotypes, overlook the negative, and focus on the positive. The objective of the 1981 conference and other gatherings of its kind has been to educate people in general about Islam, so that rash judgments are not imposed on the religion as a whole, for the acts of so few.

During the twenty-nine years since the “Islam: Spiritual Foundations and Modern Manifestations Conference” at BYU, Mormons and Muslims have had other opportunities to work together, pray together, and deepen their understanding of one another. In August 2002, for example, less than a year after September 11, BYU held a conference entitled “Muslims and Latter-day Saints: Building Bridges.” Garry R. Flake, former director of Humanitarian Emergency Response for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, posed a common question: “Does the Church assist Muslims?” He explained that not only does the Church help Muslims, but it works extensively with different Islamic organizations. Reminiscent of the 1981 conference, Mormons and Muslims were better able to understand one another by strengthening relationships and building bridges.²²

In October 2010, Muslims in several different areas of California included their Mormon friends in the *iftār*, or fast-breaking ceremony. In order to understand this Muslim tradition, it is important to know about the five pillars of Islam—Testimony, Prayer, Almsgiving, Fasting, and *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). Each pillar represents a fundamental principle of Islam that is observed by true Muslims. For example, Testimony, or knowing that there is no god but Allah, is demonstrated daily by the Muslim people. At certain times each day, Muslims roll out their rugs, face the holy city of Mecca, and pray to Allah.

Despite the cautions presented by BYU professor Arnold Green about comparing Mormons and Muslims, there are similarities worthy of discussion. Green warned, for example, that Joseph Smith should not be considered the American Muhammad or that Mormonism is the Islam of America. To do so “is to draw an analogy that obscures and minimizes the very important differences that exist.” Green continued, “while two out of every three points of comparison are either untrue or oversimplified, the very analogy itself is an oversimplification.” He goes on to explain that the various sects found in Islam

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23 Steve Gilliland and Dr. Hathout, Senior Advisor to the Muslim Public Affairs Council, looking at the Qur’an. Photograph courtesy of Steve Gilliland.
are as different as the various denominations among Christians.\textsuperscript{24} That being said, and realizing the vast differences between Islamic traditions, there are similarities worth mentioning.

“The principle of \textit{zakat}, or almsgiving, is designed to care for the poor, to foster empathy and compassion in the community of believers, and to provide for the building and maintenance of mosques and other Islamic institutions.”\textsuperscript{25} Mormons also believe in helping the poor, and are strongly encouraged to give monthly to those in need through fast offerings. LDS members also give ten percent of their income for the building up of the Church.

The Islamic fast is done during the month of \textit{Ramadan}, at which time no food or drink is consumed between sunrise and sunset. \textit{Ramadan} is the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar, and therefore is not associated with a specific traditional calendar month.\textsuperscript{26} Fasting is also an integral part of Mormonism, where each month members are to abstain from eating or drinking for two meals or twenty-four hours. This usually occurs on the first Sunday of the month.

\textit{Hajj}, the fifth and final pillar of Islam, is a journey to Mecca, the holiest Islamic city (followed by Medina, then Jerusalem) by those who are capable. Those who return from this sacred journey are privileged to bear the title \textit{Haji}.\textsuperscript{27} Although Mormons are not required to visit a specific city or place in the world, they are supposed to visit their sacred temples as often as possible, which may be comparable to a visit to Mecca depending on where in the world one is located.

\textit{Iftar} deals with the fourth pillar of Islam, the fast. The Islamic Society of Orange County and the Islamic Center of Temecula Valley invited local Mormons to attend a feast following the long fast during the month of \textit{Ramadan}. These feasts took place in California mosques, where traditional Muslim

\textsuperscript{26} Barbara Evans O\'openshaw, “Mormons, Muslims break the fast in Southern California,” \textit{Mormon Times}, October 10, 2010.
\textsuperscript{27} Palmer, \textit{Mormons and Muslims}, p. 67.
cuisine was served after evening prayers, which LDS visitors were invited to observe. Local leaders, both Mormon and Muslim, were allotted time to address the congregation. A local Mormon leader, David Price, spoke of the importance of fasting. The religious director of the Islamic Society of Orange County, Dr. Muzammil Siddiqi, observed that fasting leads to revelation. Both groups were edified, and another opportunity for Mormons and Muslims to get to know each other on a personal level became a reality. “Southern California Latter-day Saints participated in at least ten different interfaith iftars throughout the area” in an event organized by Steve Gilliland, director of Muslim relations for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Public Affairs Council of Southern California, and Warren Inouye, director of Muslim relations in the Orange County area.

Mormons and Muslims, despite their differences, agree that a partnership can do much good. While visiting BYU, attending the Oquirrh Mountain Temple open house and Salt Lake City’s Welfare Square and LDS Humanitarian Center, Hussam Ayloush, executive director of the Southern California Chapter of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, expressed his desire to “solidify a partnership

28 Openshaw, “Mormons, Muslims break the fast in Southern California.”
29 Ibid.
30 Steve and Judy Gilliland and a Muslim family at a Ramadan Dinner. Photograph courtesy of Steve Gilliland
for good between the members of the two religions.”

Steve and Judy Gilliland of the LDS Public Affairs Council would agree. Since Ayloush’s tour, the Gilliland’s have escorted other Muslim leaders around Salt Lake City. In September 2010, Catholic and Muslim leaders toured Temple Square, Deseret Industries, a dry pack cannery, and met with prominent LDS leaders such as President Thomas S. Monson. These transparent moves—allowing non-members to view, participate, and interact in ways typically enjoyed by LDS members—built trust, confidence, and cultural awareness. People of different walks of life are less likely to falsely or ignorantly judge others when they understand another perspective.

As recently as December 4, 2010, the Islamic Center for Southern California’s youth and the Los Angeles and Inglewood LDS Church stake youth came together to provide service to their community. Gathering at the 68th Street Elementary School, nearly two hundred Mormon and Muslim youth assembled five hundred backpacks with school supplies. Others helped by face-painting and providing

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33 President Thomas S. Monson, Saghir Aslam, wife Bushra, and Steve Gilliland in Los Angeles, California. Photograph courtesy of Steve Gilliland.
34 Steve Gilliland, Personal Interview, November 30, 2010.
baloons for the elementary school students. Throughout the day, students visited booths sponsored by various agencies that serve the community of southern California. At each booth, the children learned something, after which they had a card punched. With a completed card, students received a backpack that was assembled by the Mormon and Muslim youth.35

After the backpacks were assembled, and while some of the volunteers passed them out to the school children, the Mormon and Muslim youths played “Human Bingo,” a get-acquainted mixer. They then had a discussion about similarities in belief and practices among the Latter-day Saints and those who follow Islam. They all left feeling good about what they had accomplished and the people they had met that day.36

36 Ibid.
37 Photograph courtesy of Steve Gilliland.
Other Mormon-Muslim encounters engage a wider audience than do local conferences, service projects, religious gatherings, or local tours. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan endured heavy monsoon rainfall during the months of July and August, 2010. The overabundance of water caused massive flooding that affected large populations in areas such as Baluchistan, Federally Administered Tribal Areas, Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakthunkhwa, Pakistan-Administered Kashmir, Punjab, and Sindh (see the map below). This was the worst flooding Pakistan has experienced. According to the Report on Assessment Visit by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Latter-day Saint Charities (LDSC), one third of the population of Pakistan was affected by the floods. More than 1,900 people died from causes directly related to flooding and over twenty million people were affected indirectly. Over 1.2 million houses were destroyed, leaving an estimated eight million people homeless. The United Nations estimates were similar, reporting that eight million people were in need of urgent assistance. Millions of acres of crops were destroyed and huge losses of livestock reported. Millions of Pakistani people were without food or clean water. Severe suffering continues in Pakistan today.39

38 Ibid.
Pakistan is a diverse country that includes seven different ethnic groups: Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtun, Baloch, Juhajir, Saraiki, and Hazara. Although Pakistan is ninety-five percent Muslim, a small minority of Christians, Hindus, and others make up the remaining five percent. With such a high concentration of Muslims, “Christians are still persecuted in Pakistan.” Because of such persecution, relief efforts by Western Christian nations are a unique challenge. Nonetheless, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints made its presence known through generous donations of food and water, blankets, clothing, basic medicines, antibiotics, water purification tablets, tents and shelter supplies, and money. Many of the supplies were purchased and distributed by partners of the LDS Church, through church funding, for this particular crisis. Such partners included Saba Trust, Islamic Relief USA, International Medical Corps, International Relief & Development (IRD), and The Pakistan National Disaster Management Association (NDMA). The LDS Church had also been in contact with other organizations such as the Society for Welfare, Education, & Transportation (SWET), CARE, UNHCR.

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40 Ibid.
41 Nathan D. Leishman. Personal Interview, October 10, 2010.
Working with other agencies allowed the LDS Church easier access into Pakistan. Nathan D. Leishman, Manager of Humanitarian Emergency Response for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Latter-day Saint Charities, had been involved with these types of disasters for the past ten years, and realizes how important these relationships are in helping people around the world. Saba Trust, in particular, has been instrumental in working with the LDS Church. Through this agency, church donations reached the people most affected by the horrendous floods in a timely manner. Saghir Aslam, founder of Saba Trust, has been an advocate for the LDS Church in Pakistan. He believes the LDS Church is a great organization and that it should be trusted. He is grateful for their presence and help in Pakistan during such a tumultuous time and is even tolerant of its religious presence. Although

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42 Photograph courtesy of Nathan D. Leishman.
43 Nathan D. Leishman, Personal Interview, October 10, 2010.
44 For more information about Saba Trust, visit http://sabatrust.com.
Saghir Aslam may not advocate formal proselyting in Pakistan, his relationship with the LDS Church is one of understanding and tolerance.45

Another agency that has been particularly simple for the LDS Church to work with was Islamic Relief USA.47 Leishman commented, “Islamic Relief is one of our greatest partners in Pakistan.”48 This international charity was founded in 1984 and has helped people in need all over the world. “In 1997, its humanitarian aid consultant, Diana Sufian, contacted LDS Charities to see if LDSC would help establish a medical library in Palestine,”49 knowing that the LDS Church had an extensive and very successful humanitarian program.50 Being the first non-Muslim organization to work with Islamic Relief USA, the LDS Church has since been a part of many humanitarian efforts that have created a bond that continues today.51

45 Nathan D. Leishman, Personal Interview, October 10, 2010.
46 Saghir Aslam with Saba Trust and Nathan D. Leishman with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Photograph courtesy of Nathan D. Leishman.
47 For more information about Islamic Relief USA, visit http://www.islamicreliefusa.org.
48 Nathan D. Leishman, Personal Interview, October 10, 2010.
49 “Islamic Relief USA and LDS Charities help needy,” Humanitarian Update (Summer 2003), p. 3.
50 Steve Gilliland, Personal Interview, November 30, 2010.
51 “Islamic Relief USA and LDS Charities help needy,” Humanitarian Update (Summer 2003).
Shortly after the floods, Ambassador Husain Haqqani approached Islamic Relief USA asking them to reach out to Christian organizations in the Western world for help in Pakistan. Islamic Relief USA reported that they were already working with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Islamic Relief USA then urged Haqqani to travel to Utah to thank LDS leaders for their efforts thus far and to petition for even more help. Shortly after, Haqqani visited Salt Lake City.52

Although organizations such as Saba Trust, Islamic Relief USA, and the LDS Church were working together to help the people of Pakistan, the same cannot be said about other groups that typically help with these types of calamities. “Even though this is a bigger disaster than the Haiti Earthquake and the Indonesia tsunami, aid has been slow to reach many affected by the floods.”53 Several factors have undermined the true position Pakistani people faced. Fewer deaths occurred in Pakistan during the flooding than accompanied other natural disasters within the 21st century. Because flooding tends to be more gradual than earthquakes or tsunamis, the urgent need for help did not resonate as quickly, even though “in some areas the flood stretched thirty miles wide” and recovery was “expected to take years.”54 Also, Pakistan’s political instability created an unsafe environment in which to work. The Taliban, for example, threatened to kill relief workers from the Western world.55 The lack of humanitarian response had therefore given more responsibility to the joint efforts of the Mormon and Islamic relief organizations. Below is a disaster comparison chart that illustrates the vast differences between the 2010 floods in Pakistan with other natural disasters (some of which Mormons and Muslims also worked on together). While the death rates in Pakistan are much lower than those of the other

52 Nathan D. Leishman, Personal Interview, October 10, 2010.
54 Ibid.
55 Nathan D. Leishman, Personal Interview, October 10, 2010.
natural disasters, it can be argued that where there are more survivors, more help is needed. This was the case in Pakistan.

DISASTER COMPARISON

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population Affected</td>
<td>20,251,550</td>
<td>3,500,000</td>
<td>3,200,000</td>
<td>4,800,000</td>
<td>2,273,723</td>
<td>500,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Area Affected (Sq Km)</td>
<td>132,000</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>13,226</td>
<td>440,000</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths</td>
<td>1,961</td>
<td>73,338</td>
<td>230,000</td>
<td>69,100</td>
<td>280,000</td>
<td>1,836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Injured</td>
<td>2,865</td>
<td>128,309</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>374,000</td>
<td>125,000</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homes Destroyed</td>
<td>1,884,708</td>
<td>600,152</td>
<td>250,000</td>
<td>450,000</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>200,000</td>
</tr>
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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had a profound effect on the people of Pakistan. Their generosity influenced far more than just those directly involved in the flooding.

Although the gap between Mormons and Muslims is diminishing, greater efforts from both faiths need to continue in order to do away with any divide. Mormonism’s first prophet, Joseph Smith, set a precedent for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, leaders and members alike. This precedent calls for religious tolerance, to accept all truths from others, to become friends, and to lend a hand to those in need. Many Muslim leaders share these feelings. Despite isolated issues of prejudice, hatred, and misunderstanding, Muslims and Mormons have an excellent relationship that continues to grow strong as both faiths work hand in hand, as demonstrated in areas such as Pakistan, and continue to learn from one another through inclusion, participation, and dialogue. Theological differences should not affect friendships. President Gordon B. Hinckley of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from 1995–2008, stated:

We want to be good neighbors; we want to be good friends. We feel we can differ theologically with people without being disagreeable in any sense. We hope they feel the same way toward us. We have many friends and many associations with people who are not of our faith, with whom we deal constantly, and we have a wonderful relationship. It disturbs me when I hear about any antagonisms—I don’t think they are necessary. I hope that we can overcome them…Be friendly. Be understanding. Be tolerant. Be considerate. Be respectful of the opinions and feelings of other people. Recognize their virtues; don’t look for their faults. Look for their strengths and their virtues, and you will find strength and virtues that will be helpful in your own life.57

With an ongoing encounter between Mormons and Muslims, adherence to this advice, and the precedent set by Joseph Smith, walls of misunderstanding will be torn down and in their place will be built the bridges of cultural awareness.

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THE PAULINE PROJECT—CHRIST UNIVERSALIZED

Martin Luther wrote that Paul’s Letter to the Romans is “in truth the most important document in the New Testament, the gospel in its purest form.” Friedrich Nietzsche, on the other hand, wrote of Paul in The Antichrist as the “dys-Evangelical,” that is, the proclaimer of bad news; and the playwright George Bernard Shaw wrote in 1913 that Paul’s theology is “the monstrous imposition upon Jesus.” Clearly, Paul has been a subject of debate among thinkers over the centuries. In the last few decades, though, historians and New Testament scholars have dug deeper into the context of Paul’s writings and suggested the heavy implications of his epistles. For instance, James Tabor, author of Paul and Jesus: How the Apostle Transformed Christianity, argues that a close look at Paul and his relationship with the twelve disciples in Jerusalem could reveal that “the entire history of early Christianity, as commonly understood, has to be reconsidered.” As for Paul’s theology, some scholars, such as Reza Aslan, argue that it is “so extreme and unorthodox, the only way [Paul] can claim to justify it is by saying that [it is] from Jesus directly himself.” What is it, then, about this apostle—this disciple of Christ—that has caused such a sundering of opinion; that has caused scholars like Tabor, Aslan, and more to draw such bold conclusions?

To answer these questions, we need to know a little bit about Jesus of Nazareth—not Jesus the Christ, but Jesus the man, the historical Jesus, the man in charge of a small but zealous group of Jews roaming around the Galilean countryside in 1st century Palestine. This is the Jesus that Paul never knew—Paul did not follow Jesus around Galilee for three years listening to his sermons, he was not in the Garden of Gethsemane when Jesus was arrested and his fate sealed; the simple, historical fact that Paul never knew Jesus has profound implications. Paul promises that he “received” his gospel not through

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1 Unless otherwise noted, all biblical citations are from the New International Version of the Bible.
3 Ibid, p. 4.
4 Reza Aslan, Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth (New York: Random House, 2013), p. 188.
men or from men, but through a direct revelation from Christ (Galatians 1:11-12). Paul had had the privileged and supreme experience of meeting the *divine* Christ, certainly surpassing the experience any of the original twelve apostles could have had with Jesus the person. God, after all, according to Paul, had set Paul apart before he was even born, so that he might preach Jesus among the gentiles (Galatians 1:15-17). But those original twelve in Jerusalem—the “mother assembly”—thought otherwise, and so begins a steep conflict between two opposing interpretations of Christ and his theological relevance. One group will largely be forgotten; the other will evolve into the most influential religion of all time.

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth. I have not come to bring peace, but the sword,” says Jesus (Matthew 10:34). The messianic fervor that encapsulated 1st-century Palestine was palpable. The Holy Land had been under Roman occupation since 37 BCE, when Herod the Great, governor over Judea, marched into Jerusalem and expelled the city of its Parthian control. By the time of Jesus’ birth, around 4 BCE, the pagan Roman Empire had made a mockery of God’s chosen people for some thirty-plus years, and there was no end in sight: Herod Antipas soon became the new client king, sure to enforce Roman rule just as rigorously as his father. The Jews were eager for change, for divine intervention; they were seized with apocalyptic expectation. The different perspectives on what the messiah, or “anointed one,” exactly entailed were multivalent among 1st-century Jews. Some thought that he would be a king, others a priest, some both. But out of the muddled ancient prophecies of Jewish tradition emerges a common consensus about what the messiah was supposed to do: he is the descendant of King David; he comes to restore Israel and free the Jews from Roman occupation, and to establish God’s rule in Jerusalem. There also emerges another consensus: the messiah is human, not divine. As Aslan writes, “Belief in a divine messiah would have been anathema to everything Judaism represents, which is why, without exception, every text in the Hebrew Bible dealing with the messiah presents him

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5 Ibid, p. 20.
6 Ibid, p. 28.
as performing his messianic functions on earth, not in heaven.” Indeed, it is this conception of messiah that Jesus must, and does, take on—one that is quite different from the Jesus Paul eventually writes about, and, therefore, quite different from the one that is commonly depicted in Evangelical churches across the world.

There are two common historical facts known about Jesus: that he was a Jew who led a popular movement in 1st-century Palestine, and that he was crucified for doing so. But these two facts can lend plenty of insight into the historical Jesus—the Jesus that Paul never knew. Jesus was charged with the crime of sedition (Luke 23:38), that is, for striving for kingly rule. He was come to establish the “Kingdom of God,”—in short, to defy the will of Rome. Contrary to popular belief, Jesus did not preach of a celestial kingdom, distinct from earthly affairs. The reason for this inaccuracy comes from the Gospel of John: to Pontius Pilate, Jesus says “My kingdom is not of this world” (18:36). As Aslan points out, however, in the original Greek, this is perhaps better translated as, “My kingdom is not a part of this order/system of government”—in other words, my kingdom is unlike any other kingdom on earth. In fact, the immanent coming of the kingdom of God is probably the central unifying theme of Jesus’ brief ministry; it is, after all, one of the first things he preached: “Repent,” Jesus says soon after John baptizes him, “the Kingdom is near” (Mark 1:15). Jesus declaring a new king is coming to establish his reign on earth is audacious, to say the least. Jerusalem was under strict and violent Roman occupation; Jesus’ caution that the Kingdom of God is near is equivalent to him saying that the end of the Roman Empire is near.

From a Roman perspective, those in charge may have understood Jesus’ message as a call for revolution. As Obery Hendricks confirms in his lecture “What Jesus Shall We Teach?,” “a sober,

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7 Ibid, p. 32.
8 Ibid, p. xxx.
9 Ibid, p. 117.
10 Ibid, p. 118.
unsentimentally honest, historically informed reading of the gospels gives us another picture of Jesus, and he is a political revolutionary. Yes, Jesus was a political revolutionary.”¹¹ Indeed, that is exactly what Pilate thought he was. Crucifixion was common for the Romans because it was a reminder of what happens when someone challenges the power of Rome; and that is why crucifixion was kept for the most treacherous of crimes: rebellion, sedition, banditry—as Aslan states, “If one knew nothing else about Jesus of Nazareth save that he was crucified by Rome, one would know practically all that was needed to uncover who he was, what he was, and why he ended up nailed to a cross.”¹² Perhaps Jesus’ mission is best summed up in one line as he defied his executioners: “You have no authority over me unless it had been given you from above” (John 19:11). The Jewish God above—the God of Moses, the God of the Temple—this is the only God that Jesus ever knew. It was the God that he read about in the scriptures, it was the God he based his whole ministry on, it was the God he died for, and it was the God he urged his disciples to continue to follow.

One of those disciples happened to be Jesus’ brother. Little is known about James the Just. This is in large part because James has been so intentionally marginalized by the Christian canon that even some of the most devout Christians might not be too familiar with James’ one book out of the twenty-seven in the New Testament (recall that Paul has thirteen). But we need look no further than Paul’s letter to the Galatians for evidence of James’ prominence in the early church. In chapter 1, verses 18-19, Paul says, “Then after three years [(three years after Paul’s conversion)] I went up to Jerusalem to visit [Peter], and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother” (Galatians 1:18-19). Already in the mid-30’s, and it is evident that James is a major figure in Jerusalem, someone whom it was important for Paul to see. It may even point to James being the

¹² Aslan, Zealot, pp. 155-56.
second most important man in the church. In addition to Paul’s letters, we can look outside of the Bible for evidence of James’ early leadership role. Hegesippus, a Jewish-Christian writing in the early 2nd century CE, writes, “The succession of the Church was passed to James the brother of the Lord, together with the apostles” (Church History 2.1.2). Clement of Alexandria, writing in the late 2nd century CE, quotes Eusebius when he says, “Peter and James [the fisherman] and John after the Ascension of the Savior did not struggle for glory, because they had previously been given honor by the Savior, but chose James the Just as the overseer of Jerusalem” (2.1.3); again, “James…is recorded to have been the first elected to the throne of the oversight of the church of Jerusalem” (2.1.4). So, what does this say about James the Just, the brother of Jesus who was elected to take over this tiny sect of Jews? What are his beliefs about Christ, and how do those beliefs compare with what Paul taught?

Paul’s preaching, as discussed above, was based solely on his spiritual meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus, while the twelve apostles and their new leader James had very much walked and talked with the physical, historical Jesus. It is these two groups that were fighting to spread the appropriate message that Jesus preached. But Jesus himself, in the Gospel of Thomas, explicitly states that James should be the one to continue the movement that Jesus founded: the disciples said to Jesus, “We know you will leave us. Who is going to be our leader then?” Jesus replied, “No matter where you go you are to go to James the Just, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being.” If James remained faithful to the Torah, as Paul did not, and Jesus and James were brothers in flesh and affection, then Jesus, too, must have wanted his followers to remain faithful to the Torah. So, how does what James says compare to what Paul says, the self-proclaimed apostle (Galatians 1:15-17)?


James says: “What does it profit, my brothers, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? … So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead” (James 2:14, 17)

Paul says: “The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ all and on all those who believe” (Romans 3:22)

James says: “For whoever looks into the perfect Torah, the Torah of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing” (James 1:25)

Paul says: “a ministry of death, chiseled in letters on a stone tablet” (2 Corinthians 3:7)

James says: “For whoever keeps the whole Torah but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (James 2:10)

Paul says: “Christ is the end of the Torah” (Romans 10:4)

It is important to keep in mind that whether or not James himself wrote the letter attributed to him is up for debate. Still, James’ letter lacks a single teaching that is characteristic of the Apostle Paul and it draws nothing at all from the traditions of Mark or John. Further, the beliefs regarding Christ and his role in Judaism found in James’ letter aligns almost perfectly with the beliefs that James and the twelve disciples held onto following Christ’s crucifixion: faithful adherence to the Law of Moses, the exaltation of James and the denigration of Paul, and a Christology of “adoptism”—a belief that Jesus was the natural born son of Joseph and Mary and was “adopted” by God as his Son upon his baptism by John. If Paul’s contradicting James isn’t enough, there are times in Paul’s Letter to the Romans when he contradicts Jesus: Paul writes, “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13); Jesus says, “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord Lord’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 7:21). Paul writes, “Christ is the end of the Torah” (Romans 10:4); Jesus says, “Whoever

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relaxes one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least into the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:19). Paul is taking much of what Jesus taught to his closest disciples, shedding it from Jewish tradition, and transforming it into his own teaching.

How was it, then, that Paul—a Diaspora Jew who converted to the Jesus movement almost ten years after Jesus’ death—was able to transform this tiny Jewish sect anchored in Jerusalem, left in the hands of Jesus’ brother, into a universal ministry? How was it that Paul’s view of Jesus as the divine, pre-existing Son of God, who sacrificed himself on the cross for the sins of the world, resurrected to heaven—all anathema to traditional Jewish teaching—became the central message of Christianity? The answer is grounded in Paul’s departure from Jewish theology—particularly those of the conservative Pharisees, the very theology that Jesus himself largely endorsed—and subsequent establishment of what will become the foundation of Christian identity for the next two thousand years.

For Paul, the Torah’s jurisdiction lasted from Moses to Christ. During his ministry, then, one was no longer under the Torah, but released from its bondage (Galatians 3:23–4:10). A statement like this was inconceivable to James, Peter, and John; while these disciples certainly welcomed Gentile converts, the converts were still fully expected to be observant of Jewish custom—especially the Torah of Moses. But Paul makes a bold move: he moves everything—the entire Torah and Judaism as a whole—from literal to allegorical, from earth to heaven. Israel is no longer the physical nation, the promised land chosen by God; rather, the “true Israelites” are those who are “in Christ,” having been “circumcised in heart” (Philippians 3:3).17 The Torah of Moses has, in fact, been superseded: all of those in Christ, whether Jew or Gentile, are under a new Law—the Law of Christ (Corinthians 9:20–21). Paul does not say that the law is sin (although there are times where he seems to suggest it), but that the law administers a recursive system of transgression of law and subsequent guilt, confession, and shame—that the Torah of Moses enslaves us to sin. As philosopher Alain Badiou writes, “The Christ event has

17 Tabor, Paul and Jesus, p. 211.
purchased our freedom from the law and made us free, now children of God and no longer slaves of sin.”

The “Christ-event” for Paul is an event that ushers in a new universality of truth, and he feels that it is his mission to let this truth known to all, especially the Gentiles, before Christ returns.

What kind of universalism, though, is it that Paul teaches? Among philosophers and historians, there are two common arguments as to how Paul envisioned his universal ministry: the process of grafting truth, or the process of subtracting truth. Did Paul believe that he was “grafting” the Gentiles onto the one tree of truth, on to “the tree of Israel,” and that Christ is the fulfillment of an exclusively Jewish promise? Or did Paul see himself as “subtracting” truth from local differences or identities, implementing a universal truth where there is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, slave nor freeman? In other words, is there one universal tree of truth—or one true tree; one truth without identity or one true identity? It seems that Paul is not merely trying to advance Judaism, or graft Gentiles onto the root of Jesse; rather, Paul is subtracting particular, arbitrary identities in order to reveal a universal truth without identity, a universal truth that everyone can discover if they believe in Jesus Christ. “The Pauline project,” says Caputo, “is the universality of truth, the conviction that what is true is true for everyone, and the proper role of the subject is to make that truth known.”

Indeed, Paul’s universality is not the assimilation of Greek citizen into Jewish custom, or the Gentile in the truth, but rather subtracting the Jew and the Greek from the truth, a universal truth without identity. It is a truth that is true for all, a truth that collapses the prevailing paradigms of the period and ushers in an apostle who proclaims a universal order: it is a truth that transcends history and community. Slavoj Zizek, in his book The Perverse Core of Christianity, writes, “Paul’s universe is no

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20 Ibid.
21 Badiou, Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism, pp. 21, 81.
longer that of the multitude of groups, that want to ‘find their voice,’ and ‘assert their particular identity, their way of life,’ but that of a fighting collective grounded in the reference to an unconditional universalism.”

This is all, remember, because of the Christ-event. The disciples in Jerusalem did not see the crucifixion of Jesus to be emblematic of a whole new Christ-God, God made flesh. Rather, James, John, and Peter thought that Jesus’ crucifixion was indicative of the God of Israel—the God of Moses—soon establishing His reign on earth and freeing the Jewish people from Roman occupation. But Paul, on the other hand, subtracts the universal truth from Jewish identity and instead shifts truth to a universalism without ethnic identity, separate from the Jewish community. Badiou writes that Paul wants to “drag the Good News out from the rigid enclosure within which its restriction to the Jewish community would confine it…and to never let it be determined by available generalities, be they statist or ideological.”

Paul, in fact, refers to his former Jewish life as “rubbish” (Philippians 3:8). Paul’s prior Jewish beliefs—the same beliefs that he had been so zealous for, “blameless,”—were not “merely modified, updated, or amplified: they were wholly recast in the light of the ‘mystery’ of the gospel he received.”

Paul’s move to suggest that there is a human that is God or that is worthy of worship, that transcends local differences and particularities and embodies a universal truth for all, is a move that, in itself, separates Judaism from Paul’s version of Christianity. But he pushes further. Paul claims that Jews who do not believe in Christ are living according to the flesh, and that they have been replaced by a new and true truth according to the Spirit: Paul says, “we are the true circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and put no confidence in the flesh” (Philippians 3:3). Further, Paul believes that the Torah of Moses was not intended to be permanent, but rather has served its temporary purpose as leading both Jews and

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23 Badiou, Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism, p. 15.
24 Tabor, Paul and Jesus, p. 181.
Gentiles to the universalism that the Christ event has ushered in.\textsuperscript{25} “Now before faith came,” writes Paul, “we were confined under the Torah, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So the Torah was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian” (Galatians 3:23-25).

“Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing,” says Paul (1 Corinthians 7:19). Universality knows no bias: Paul does not care to make a distinction among his followers, between sympathizer gentiles and “true converts,” circumcised and initiated. For Paul, truth is not a matter of degree—either one participates in truth, or remains foreign to it.\textsuperscript{26} Christ’s resurrection—the event—has declared the truth, rendering “prior markings obsolete,” thus dissolving any previous privileged relation to the Jewish community; as Badiou writes, “although the event depends on the site (Jerusalem) \textit{in its being}, it must be independent of it \textit{in its truth effects.”}\textsuperscript{27} In other words, the event exceeds its contingent sit.\textsuperscript{28} Paul’s universal truth is one without content: ethnic and cultural differences, the opposition between Greek and Jew that was the prototype in Paul’s time and in the empire as a whole, are no longer significant in regards to the truth.\textsuperscript{29} There are differences, but in order for both Gentile and Jew to grasp truth, universality must elude particularity. “Differences,” Badiou writes, “can be transcended only if benevolence with regard to customs and opinions presents itself as an indifference that tolerates differences.”\textsuperscript{30} The truth is without exception, tolerant of all, with no inscription of difference to the subjects which it addresses itself: the truth is only truth insofar as it is for all.\textsuperscript{31}

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\textsuperscript{25} Ibid, p. 181.
\textsuperscript{26} Badiou, \textit{Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism}, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid, p. 23. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, p. 95.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid, p. 57.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid, p. 99.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, p. 76.
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Unfortunately, however, Paul’s universalism has at times been misrepresented and then attacked as such. For example, Paul is commonly (and unfairly) charged with being a primary source of hundreds of years of Christian misogyny. At times, this charge seems justified—how, then, can this reconcile with Paul’s universality? Paul, of course, is writing in the ancient world, a time when the subjugation of women was the status quo. What we find, then, is Paul at once conceding to the status quo yet doing so in a way that will not hinder his movement of universalization. Badiou calls this technique “subsequent symmetrization”: Paul initially affirms the common perceptions of the roles of female and male, then immediately neutralizes his claim by a subsequent mention of its reversibility. For Paul’s universal mission to remain true, both the initial and subsequent passages must be cited; otherwise, it is evident why Paul has become the false target for the origins of Christian misogyny.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul writes, “The wife does not rule over her own body, but the husband does” (7:4). A husband’s authority over his wife was common knowledge in the ancient world, thus Paul gives us his initial, conceding claim; a claim that, certainly, is not appropriate from our current perspective. But the text continues: “And likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does” (1 Corinthians 7:4). Paul pushes forward his universal claim by reminding his audience of the reversibility—the arbitrariness—of the present order. In Badiou’s words, Paul is “making universalizing egalitarianism pass through the reversibility of an inegalitarian rule.” It is this act of balancing that allows Paul to acknowledge differences—in this case between the sexes—in order for those differences to become indifferent through the process of universalization, through the process of becoming one with Christ. Another example of Paul’s subsequent symmetrization in 1 Corinthians: Paul begins, “I give charge…that the wife should not separate from her husband” (7:10) This statement taken by itself implies that the husband alone reserves the power to separate from his wife. But the subsequent

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32 Ibid, p. 104.
33 Ibid. Emphasis in original.
statement must also be cited: “and that the husband should not divorce his wife” (1 Corinthians 7:10). Once again, Paul neutralizes his initial inegalitarian claim with an egalitarian one, emphasizing the reversibility of the hierarchies that are present. Finally, Paul writes that “the chief of every man is Christ, the chief of a woman is her husband, and the chief of Christ is God” (1 Corinthians 11:3). A statement like this seems to have its roots in Genesis, where it is written, “man was not made from woman, but woman from man.” But Paul remains faithful to his binary creed. Only three lines later, he writes, “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is not born of woman” (1 Corinthians 11:11). Through the resurrection of Christ, differences are now indifferent; the universality of truth has collapsed them.

Moreover, one of the most frequently cited passages in Paul’s letters to support claims of inequality and misogyny is also found in 1 Corinthians, when Paul says “any woman who prays or prophesies with her head unveiled dishonors her chief” (11:5). But, as Badiou points out, a woman’s long hair indicates a kind of natural character of veiling, and thus a woman’s hair acts as an artificial symbol that emphasizes the acceptance of the difference between sexes: Badiou writes, “…she must veil herself in order to show that the universality of this declaration includes women who confirm that they are women. It is the power of the universal over the difference as difference that is at issue here.” Admittedly, if this constraint is applied only to women, then it is still obviously sectarian; but once again, without exception, Paul follows his initial claim with a subsequent claim that highlights its reversibility. Paul says, “any man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his chief” (1 Corinthians 11:4)—thus, it is just as shameful for a woman to have short hair as it is for a man to have long hair. For universality to become actualized—for differences to become indifferent—differences between sexes must be testified to and traversed, culminating in “symmetrical, rather than unilateral, constraints within

34 Ibid, p. 8.
the contingent realm of customs.” Recognizing differences and their ability to carry the universal that has come upon them enables the universal to corroborate its function in reality. Paul writes, “If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute and the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is being played on the flute or harp?” (1 Corinthians 14:7).

However, there are other avenues of opposition to Pauline universalism. Returning to the original bifurcation of Pauline universalization—that of grafting or subtracting—historians such as Dale B. Martin argue that Paul is grafting Gentiles on to one truth rather than subtracting truth from a particular local identity. They, too, have solid ground for such a standpoint. In Romans chapter 1 verse 16, for example, Paul says that the blessings of the gospel are for “the Jew first” and only then to the Greek. Paul also regularly uses the terms gentiles or “nations” to refer to only those outside of the church. Paul, however, is not writing in a vacuum; indeed, Paul is a politician, synonymous, at that time, with a rhetorician. He knows his audience, and he knows that he is pushing fragile boundaries, dangerously close to becoming entirely ostracized by the Church in Jerusalem. It is not Paul that wants to graft truth, but James, John, and Peter. Jeffrey Butz clearly states that “it cannot be stressed enough that Jesus and his earliest followers were thoroughly Jewish in their beliefs and practices.” It is only natural, then, that those first believers of Jesus expected that anyone wishing to follow Jesus would become Jew—that they become a part of Israel, the one tree of truth. While Paul may appeal to Jews in some of his writing, he makes it abundantly clear that “as we all die in Adam, we all will be made alive in Christ” (1 Corinthians 15:22)—Christ is the second Adam, Christ is the new Law; the law of faith working through love (Galatians 5:6).

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39 Bütz, The Brother of Jesus, p. 74.
It is love, under the condition of faith, of a declared conviction, that gives the faithful subject his consistency; a literal law, “chiseled unto a stone tablet,” is not the vehicle to arrive at a universal truth, addressing truth to everyone. Faith deploys the power of self-love to others, to everyone. “Love,” Badiou writes, “is pricelessly what faith is capable of.” For Paul, Jew and Gentile alike are imperfect, disobedient; but God, through the resurrection of Christ, will do what the apostle cannot: he will redeem the entire creation, both the physical and the cosmos; the universality of truth will expose itself to local differences and identifies, and, through their division, show that they are able to embrace the truth that flows among them. For Paul says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3: 27-28).

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40 Badiou, Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism, p.87.
41 Ibid, p. 90.
Bibliography

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THE MILLENNIAL PRESS—SHAKERS AND THE PROGRESSIVE PERIODICAL
(1871–1899)

“A Shaker ought to use good paper, good ink, a good pen, and have good thoughts, well digested.”
—The Shaker Manifesto (May, 1882 12.5, p. 110)

“A good newspaper, I suppose, is a nation talking to itself.”
—Arthur Miller, 1961

On a crisp October morning in 1878, the editor of the monthly periodical The Shaker Manifesto, Elder George A. Lomas, brooded over the sharp declines in membership and sudden financial pitfalls that now beleaguered the United Society. That year alone membership at the Pleasant Hill community had plummeted from 385 to 234 members, and, just weeks before, the Tyringham, Massachusetts, settlement closed after reporting only seventeen members. Lomas had just finalized the proofs of the Shaker monthly featuring his column entitled “Just For a Change,” in which he put forth a highly peculiar request to the editors of major “worldly” newspapers. Lomas writes:

“In view of the slanderous persecutions some of our contemporaneous communists are receiving; and of the grand, good openings these are making both for religious inquires and financial markets, will not the N.Y. Times or some paper of equally large circulation abuse the Shakers a little or a great deal? We believe it would be good for a change; as nearly all men are “speaking too well of us,” and we are feeling the “woe” of stagnation. Please, knights of the press, be more impartial, and let us have share of the apparently bitter dose.”

Lomas’ petition to the “knights of the press” is rather amusing, especially in light of the striking connection he draws between the “woe of stagnation” and the absence of anti-Shaker religious persecution in American journalism. Just several decades before, there was no dearth of the abuse Lomas now sought; for over a century, believers endured the incessant invective of journalists, public ridicule,

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1 My heartfelt thanks to Chief Librarian, Mr. Chuck Rand, of the Sabbathday Lake Shaker Library, Maine, for patiently retrieving all requested materials of the Shaker periodical for study. I am most grateful to Dr. Randall Balmer, Mandel Family Professor in the Arts and Sciences at Dartmouth College, for his invaluable insight and encouragement.
3 The Shaker Manifesto, 10.8, October 1878, p. 247.
violence, and vandalism incited by the popular press. But as America plunged into postbellum industrialization and urbanization, society began romanticizing the Shakers as a superannuated people; their communities—impeccably tidy, picturesque, solitary—were regarded as crumbling monuments of a bucolic utopian experiment on the brink of inevitable decline. Lomas, an adroit wordsmith, knew the printed word’s power in whipping up public outrage and storms of speculation but, most importantly, its remarkable ability to pique public curiosity through controversy. It is his droll plea for negative publicity that suggests the quondam vitality of the United Society was, in part, indebted to years of standing in the blinding glare of the censorious, anti-Shaker press. Indeed, throughout the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Shakers had learned to turn the attention of negative media to their advantage by attracting inquiries and curious visitors to their communities, and Lomas’ desperate request to the Times editors to administer a “bitter dose” of much-needed obloquy expresses a similar effort to excite public curiosity in Shakerism.


The decades before the 1871 inauguration of the United Society’s periodical marked a momentous era in American publishing history which print culture historians have aptly termed “radical religious journalism.” Firebrands of Jeffersonian individualism, these freethinking journalists employed the press to emphasize the importance of independence in matters of religion and politics: obedience to erudite authorities, they insisted, crippled individual volition in religious and political matters. Fiercely opposed to social hierarchy, radical journalists favored the brassy and bold rhetoric of public opinion to stimulate a liberal, pluralistic religious democracy grounded in principles of political and religious self-determination.

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“To the puffers, the bawlers, the babblers and the slang-whangers,” bellowed Washington Irving in 1807, “I have seen...that awful despot the people, in the moment of unlimited power, wielding newspapers in one hand, and with the other scattering mud and filth about....” Irving could hardly believe the radical changes occurring within American journalism. To be sure, journalism of the early Republic was undergoing extraordinary, unprecedented changes, namely due to the rise of a particularly intriguing text: the religious newspaper. Religious periodicals were “virtually nonexistent in 1800,” says historian Nathan O. Hatch, but had proliferated at such a remarkable rate that, by 1830, torrents of Methodist, Adventist, Anti-Mason, and Universalist newspapers had flooded the stalls of street vendors. For instance, William Miller and his congregation of Adventists circulated over four million articles of religious print over a period of only four years. The American public was bombarded with a welter of periodicals, tracts, pamphlets, bulletins, broadsides, handbills, proclamations, and flyers, supplying the ammunition for what Mormon leader Joseph Smith risibly dubbed “this war of words.”

As the number of periodicals climbed steadily from ninety in 1790 to 370 in 1810, more and more newspapers could not slake the thirst of America’s expanding reading public. Hatch frames this critical juncture in American publishing history as a sharp transition from the outmoded conventions of pre-18th century publications—“learned, circumspect, oriented to authority figures”—to a period marked by the din of competing voices, ideas, and sects, “each campaigning for public support with the printed word.” The energy galvanizing the religious press, says Hatch, “sprang from an explicit faith in reason and popular opinion”—that is, “…Americans could easily declare that common folk could challenge their

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9 Hatch, *Printing and Society in Early America*, p. 252.
betters without violation of conscience, that the working out of democracy was a sacred cause.”10 In the context of these early 19th century radical religious texts Shaker periodicals, too, would compete for reader attention within the cacophonous, ever-expanding marketplace of American publishing.

Illustrating how the public’s increased control of print technology drastically altered the landscape of American religion, Hatch references the impressive career of a largely unknown American journalist, Elias Smith. Entitled *Herald of Gospel Liberty*, Smith published America’s first religious newspaper in September 1808 exhorting “ordinary” citizens to think for themselves by breaking free from religious elites, institutionalized education, and tradition—all of which, he insisted, sustained historic patterns of class disparity and immured the American people in “mental bondage.”11 This biweekly periodical served as the soundboard for Smith’s campaign, tuned harmoniously to the chords of dissent, popular opinion, and the far-flung voices of common folk. “It may be that some may wish to know why this paper should be named, *Herald of Gospel Liberty,*” declares Smith in the debut issue, “[but] this kind of liberty is the only one which can make us happy, being the glorious liberty of the sons of God which Christ proclaimed…”12 Smith drew his inspiration from the work of Bostonian radical Benjamin Austin Jr., who, in 1803, raised a warning voice against citizen gullibility endemic to frontier America: “Its [sic] degrading to an American to take every thing on trust, and even the young farmer and tradesman should scorn to surrender their right of judging either to *lawyers* or *priests.*”13 Fortifying the belief that the public did not need patronizing religious and political authorities to guide them to “truth,” Smith’s periodical reminded its common readers that they possessed a God-given, intrinsic intelligence to discern their own claims of religious truth.

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10 Ibid, p. 252.
Animating Smith’s radical press was a simple philosophy contending that a publicly governed publishing establishment was essential to stimulating popular enlightenment. Tinged with acerbic wit, Smith’s columns delivered lyrics extolling religious blasphemy and incendiary editorials holding members of the privileged class—especially doctors, lawyers, and the clergy—the butt of their aspersions. One sneering ditty entitled “Priest-Craft Float Away” chants: “Why are we in such slavery, to men of that degree; / Bound to support their knavery when we might all be free; / They’re [sic] nothing but a canker, we can with boldness say; / So let us hoist the anchor, let the Priest-craft float away.” Unmooring the vessel of privileged clergy to the riptides of public scrutiny was the message of artful parodist and Rogerene Quaker Timothy Waterous, a frequent contributor of the Herald whose columns contrast hardscrabble, transient life on the frontier from the opulent lifestyle of ecclesiastics. Waterous’ brazen rhetoric shares Smith’s enthusiasm for dissenting public opinion: “As truth is no private man’s property, and all Christians have the right to propagate it, I do also declare, that every Christian, has a right to publish and vindicate what he believes.” Of “unmistakable Enlightenment vintage,” the Herald was a stentorian voice among early American religious periodicals as its powerful messages of self-determination, peppered with defiant humor, empowered readers to carefully scrutinize religious conventions in a way that valorized individualism and rational thought.

With Smith’s editorial gumption, The Herald wielded considerable political and social clout; for several years after its debut circulation, irritated readers who skimmed its impious columns, including Congregationalist minister and Yale president Timothy Dwight, arrogantly dismissed newspaper reading as lowbrow recreation. Yet the vituperations of privileged clergy and academic elites did little

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14 Timothy Waterous, The Battle-Axe and Weapons of War: Discovered by the Morning Light, Aimed for the Final Destruction of Priestcraft (Groton: Conn., 1811); quoted in Hatch, Printing and Society in Early America, p. 268.
15 Elias Smith, The Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels and Sufferings of Elias Smith (Portsmouth, N.H., 1816); quoted in Hatch, Printing and Society in Early America, p. 264.
16 Hatch, Printing and Society in Early America, p. 257.
to squash public interest in these stirring texts; in fact, by 1816, the Herald had secured 1,500 subscribers—a considerable number for the time—and continued garnering the contributions of an aroused citizenry. Given its fierce subversion of convention, this so-called religious press did not appear to be remotely theological; indeed, at times it reads as a vulgar, anarchic pamphlet conjuring images of an obstreperous crowd of dissenters demanding power. But the driving ambition of Smith’s editorial campaign was to establish a “democratic religious culture in print” that upheld a discourse of self-determination that would equip readers to confront authority and determine their own religious and political destinies. Perhaps the most forceful impact radical religious journalism would have on the evolution of Shaker newspapers was its fearless call for social progress and nationwide introspection.

The ideological climate of America at the 1871 inauguration of the Shaker periodical was one of simmering optimism for a modernized, industrial future; “Progress” writes Stein, “was the watchword of the day,” and this national ferment for secular progress was markedly evinced in religion, in which, Stein continues, “efforts to push beyond traditional creeds and practices toward universal truths and values created controversy…[and] attracted many who had rejected the established orthodoxies.”

Given the far-reaching influence of religious periodicals and a public readership distrustful of religious authority, how believers employed print technology would be of crucial importance for ensuring Shakerism’s survival as the nation moved swiftly into the 20th century.

By forging robust connections between razor-sharp rhetorics of dissent and bold expressions of public opinion, the rich contributions of radical religious journalism provide a dynamic historical context for charting the rise of the Shaker periodical. During the decades in which Americans witnessed the turbulent growth of the religious newspaper, the Shakers had established nineteen prosperous, economically self-sufficient communities throughout the United States. Despite this hard-earned

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18 Ibid, p. 252.
success, believers and their way of life had been mercilessly lampooned in the popular press. In 1862, for instance, there appeared in *Vanity Fair* perhaps one the most scurrilous and popular anti-Shaker pasquinades. Composed by the Maine-born humorist, Charles Farrar Browne, but narrated by his pseudonym-persona Artemus Ward, the poor itinerant entertainer ventriloquizes Brown’s coarse humor through a prose typified by crude solecisms and grammatical gaffes. In his story, *The Shakers*, Ward’s peregrinations lead him to overnight in a Shaker community. Lost in the storm, Ward “observed the gleams of a taller candle” and is taken in by a Shaker eldress “upards of 40 and homely as a stump fence.”\textsuperscript{20} Finishing his meal, he ogles two Shaker women: “Direckly thar cum in two young Shakeresses, as putty and slick lookin gals as I ever met…they was charmin enuff to make a man throw stuns at his granmother if they axed him to.” Ward asks the women “‘my pretty dears, ear I go you hav no objections, hav you, to a innersent kiss at partin?’ “ To which the women respond: “‘Yay,’ they said, and I YAY’D…[and] esoomed my jerney.”\textsuperscript{21} Depicted as promiscuous and wavering in their religious vows, Browne’s disparaging portrayal of Shaker women reinforced public opinions traducing the sect’s purported claims to celibacy. Accompanying Browne’s squib was a cartoon illustrating the farceur seated smugly between two young Shaker women, kissing one while the other coyly turns her face away from the momentary, proscribed embrace. Imaginative expressions of anti-Shaker ridicule, such as Browne’s, were animated by certain rhetorical features of early 19th century religious journalism, particularly a prose exposing instances of religious hypocrisy and transgression. Browne’s mordant caricatures, and others of its ilk, were reprinted in widely circulated magazines across the nation, garnering admiration from his readers for their unsparing humor.

That the combative ethos of American journalism had any bearing on the United Society to establish its own religious periodical is certain, but as the nation’s interests remained fixed on


\textsuperscript{21} Browne, *Complete Works*. 
recuperating from the Civil War, stimulating industry, and westward expansion, the growing need for a print campaign that would excite public curiosity and celebrate Shaker identity was felt most acutely in these years of community decline. In 1871, Elder George A. Lomas founded *The Shaker*, which, Stein documents, served as “the most significant missionary initiative undertaken by the society....” Its missionary scope aimed to educate potential converts through discussion of “Shaker life, habits, economy, success, theology, prophecy, inspirations, revelations and expectations.” “Our object,” Lomas plainly states, “is to disseminate truth far and near. Think it will be what we most desire it should be—a home educator.” Taking his cue from lingering traces of religious journalism, Lomas promoted *The Shaker* as “most radically religious monthly in the world.” Interspersed throughout the eight-page quarto were poems, Shaker recipes, hymns, and humorous op-ed pieces, but the centerpieces were lengthy theological expositions. Articles entitled “WHO ARE THE SHAKERS?” and “WHAT ARE THE SHAKERS?” served as straightforward question and answer columns that aimed to dispel prevailing canards and misconceptions of Shakerism, especially those bruited about in Browne and other detractors’ articles. “Not shrill or ill-tempered in their statements,” observes Stein, *The Shaker* delivered its messages with equanimity, serving to foster a lively discussion between Shaker intellectuals and critics of the society’s theological and political ideology. Lomas and his contributors were highly attentive and knew that if the periodical were to attract converts, it would not be through editorial retaliation, dramatic sermonizing, or the dissemination of abstruse theology. Essentially, Shaker writers shifted from the stylistic hallmark of Elias Smith’s religious journalism of the first half of the century, which relied on

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23 *The Shaker*, 2.9, (September 1872), p. 71.
the cannonry of invective and satire to stimulate public opinion, and found a fresh rhetorical vitality in homespun humor and mellow discussion.

Just how successful were the newspaper’s missionary efforts in drawing converts and establishing a readership outside the narrow ambits of Shaker communities? 7,000 issues of the January edition were circulated, boasted Lomas in March 1871, and “subscriptions come in rapidly.”27 A useful index for measuring the periodical’s popularity is the voluminous epistolary correspondence reprinted in the editorial columns. Supposedly The Shaker enjoyed immediate popularity. One anonymous subscriber writes, “The greatest thing the Shakers have ever done for the world is the publication of The Shaker.”28 Another admires the periodical as a panacea for the sins of a spiritually ailing nation: “We do not believe there is a more radically religious monthly in the world—radical, so far as going down to the foundation of human woes and loss, illustrating their cause, effect, and remedy, and aiming at the elevation of the whole human race.”29 The United Society’s official publication even inspired the editors of the New York Herald and New York Sun to print in January 1874: “WANTED. Men, women and children can find a comfortable home for life, where want never comes, with the Shakers, by embracing the true faith, and living pure lives. Particulars can be learned by writing to the Shakers, Mt. Lebanon, N.Y.”30 Remarkably, within five days of the national posting, the Mt. Lebanon editors received 135 letters expressing interest in the Shaker life.31

Not all readers, however, found the “sweet manna” of The Shaker palatable. The Mt. Lebanon editors reprinted the amusing letters of indignant readers in an EXCERPTS FROM LETTERS column, all of which were received from subscribers outside the Shaker community. One concerned parent’s

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28 The Shaker, 2.7, (July 1872), p. 56.
29 The Shaker, 2.12, (December 1872), p. 96.
subscription inquiry reads: “My son is greatly interested in the Shakers. As I cannot let him go to them, it will be a pacification for him to have The Shaker.” A woman, determined to peruse its pages surreptitiously, wished the monthly be delivered to a private address: “Please change my P.O. address from — to —; my husband don’t like The Shaker, while I do, and will have it.” Such messages not only suggest that The Shaker hosted a devoted readership outside the community, but that its worldly readers provoked friction among those who regarded Shaker doctrines with suspicion and even outright disdain. Crucially, the establishment of The Shaker fit the temper of the times: as membership and public curiosity in the United Society flagged, industrial breakthroughs in paper-making allowed the United Society to acquire print technology that promoted its participation in religious journalism. Simultaneously regarded as a source of preternatural nutrition for the soul and a print menace that brought discomfiture to the secular order, the diverse reception of The Shaker suggests that its missionary reach extended beyond that of a contained, minor publication, and one that would strive tirelessly to leave its imprint on the American religious landscape.

“Shake all that you can”: Shaker Politics and Editorial Strife

Not all believers, however, promoted the principles underpinning Lomas’ editorial program. While they lauded his successful establishment of a national Shaker publication, the progressive camp, led by Shaker intellectual Frederick W. Evans, viewed the newspaper’s stringent missionary objectives and disproportionate emphasis on Shaker-centered issues as a discursive tool maintaining the society’s tradition of fierce isolationism. Sharply contrasting from conservative attitudes, progressive Shakerism, writes Stein, shifted from “…simply condemning the world and trying to flee from it, [to] many Shakers now wish[ing] to change things for the better. They came to see themselves as agents for the

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32 The Shaker, 2.7 (July 1872), p. 56.
33 The Shaker, p. 56.
34 Shaker and Shakeress, 5.12, (December 1875), p. 89.
transformation of American society.”\textsuperscript{35} While Evans’ coterie of freethinking Shakers supported the view that the newspaper ought to be employed as a vehicle for initiating national social transformations—such as women’s rights, race issues, and land reform—which promoted the collaboration of believers and outside Americans, conservatives like Lomas recoiled from these changes, remaining stubbornly intransigent in their support of community seclusion they understood to preserve Shaker customs. Progressives argued that these conventions were positively inimical to realizing the millennial kingdom in America and would ultimately drive the sect to extinction. Such discord positioned the society’s newspaper at the center of an ideological tug-of-war in which progressive and conservative Shakers heaved vehemently to and fro according to their views concerning community decline and the inauguration of the millennial age.

In early November 1872, just as Lomas was preparing to commemorate The Shaker’s third anniversary, fires razed the wagon houses, three barns, and sheds of the South Family buildings of the Watervliet community. Lomas likely lamented his new circumstances. The Mt. Lebanon Trustees asked him to resign his position as chief editor to supervise the cleanup and reconstruction of the scorched village; further, he feared possible editorial revisions that would compromise the periodical’s conservative underpinnings. The December 1872 issue of The Shaker announced: “SPECIAL NOTICE. The present editor retires to the position of Publisher; and the present, able head of the Novitiate of Orders—Elder F. W. Evans—becomes its Editor, AND TO WHOM ALL SUBSCRIPTIONS SHOULD BE ADDRESSED.”\textsuperscript{36} As a frequent contributor and board member of The Shaker, Evans was familiar with Lomas’ conservative editorial perspective, and it is no surprise that his initial days as chief editor occasioned a succession of bold revisions espousing the views of progressive Shakerism. First, he renamed the periodical Shaker and Shakeress and divided the first half of the paper for male Shaker

\textsuperscript{35} Stein, The Shaker Experience, p. 304.

\textsuperscript{36} The Shaker, p. 96.
writings and the latter four pages reserved exclusively for female contributions. He also appointed Antoinette Doolittle, eldress of the North Family at Mt. Lebanon, as “Editress,” a neologism coined to underscore “our fundamental idea of duality in the Divine government of the universe, and also in our Society organizations.”

In his first issue as editor, Evans articulated a rousing message: “We invite all progressive minds and classes, and all truth-loving, religious persons, from the most scientific rationalist to the revivalist, to take the Shaker and Shakeress, and help us to inaugurate the blessed era of universal virtue…the construction of a true Christian order…a new millennial earth.”

Triggering these gender-related emendations was the “intelligent discussion” taking place in the “outer world” concerning “women’s rights, duties, privileges,” notes Evans, therefore synching the society’s publication with those vigorously debated political issues headlining worldly American newspapers.

This is not to say Lomas rejected the contributions of women writers; in fact, he and other male editors published the writings and epistolary correspondences of Shaker women with alacrity. Evans’ publishing record, however, reveals a certain affinity for the literary imagination of Shaker women, especially poetry conflating progressive gender reform and grand visions of the millennial kingdom. For example, Cecelia Devyr’s poem, “Motherland,” rallies Shaker and worldly women to condemn in unison America’s political and religious hypocrisy: “Daughters of the nation listen!…They [the Founding Fathers] said, ‘All men are equal, / with inalienable rights;’ little dreaming of the sequel, / That has filled the land with blights.”

Devyr bemoans “the demon, slavery” and “the hells that priests created,” beseeching womankind to work towards “a declaration, / That will make all women free!” With undertones of imminent rapture, the Shaker choir crescendos in the forceful toppling of the American flag: “Droop’d the flag, the stars were broken…Is there yet no hope for nations? / Must all constitutions

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37 Shaker and Shakeress, p. 1.
38 Shaker and Shakeress, 3.1, (January 1873), p. 82.
39 Shaker and Shakeress, p. 1.
40 Shaker and Shakeress, 5.2, (February 1875), p. 15.
fail?” Devyr hopes for a humane government that “Soon will bring true order forth... / [and] Build ‘new heaven and new earth.’” The poem is strikingly redolent of Waterous’ hard-hitting verses featured in “Priest-craft Float Away” as Devyr employs an equally trenchant rhetoric when promoting controversial views of human equality. Splitting Shaker and Shakeress into equal sections grounded the United Society’s progressive gender ideals in a concrete visual reality, serving to both heighten the visibility of gender equality in America and provide a larger platform for the voices of Shaker women.

Before joining the United Society in 1830 and crystallizing his reputation as the vociferous gadfly of Shaker progressivism, Evans distinguished himself as a fierce political agitator and publisher of radical religious texts. With his older brother, George Evans, he successfully launched the labor-reform and abolitionist journals Workingman’s Advocate (1829) and Young America! (1844). Born in Leominster, Worcestershire, England, in 1808 as the son of a working-class father and an aristocratic mother, Evans emigrated to New York City in 1820. Inspired by Emersonian rhetorics of nationalism, equality, and romantic visions of Western expansionism, he wrote incisively in support of worker’s rights and poverty reduction. Among his secular publications of this period was a remarkable volume expressing Elias Smith’s spirited message of self-guided reason. Like the Herald of Gospel Liberty, Evans’ The Bible of Reason (1828) branded ecclesiastics and institutionalized education as the adversaries of religious autonomy, making a vehement “appeal to the public opinion on the urgency for reclaiming their rights.”

This gritty book censured the “artifices of the clergy to uphold its influence,” to the promoting “Freedom of the press; the clergy its opposers—Infringement of rights by religious tests and Sunday ordinances.”

His conservative counterpart’s publishing record, however, was less than scintillating. Spending the first ten years of his life in New York City, Lomas joined the Shaker Village at Watervliet, New York, in

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41 Shaker and Shakeress, p. 15.
42 Benjamin F. Powell, The Bible of Reason, or, Scriptures of Modern Authors, (New York: George H. Evans, 1828), pp. 3-4. Evans published the book with the aid of his older brother.
1850. Before founding *The Shaker*, Lomas taught school, instructed choir, composed church hymns, and meted out several minor pamphlets defending Shaker doctrine. Though fellow Shakers and editors, the men’s simmering ideological differences would eventually bubble over in controversy.

French sociologist Henri Desroche’s astute assessment of Evans’ life as a Shaker accents how his varied engagement with radical political journalism shaped his editorial vision for *Shaker and Shakeress*: “Unlike so many of the society’s uncultured or narrow-minded members, Evans had read, traveled, and absorbed vast blocks of modern culture from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,” therefore, Desroche elaborates, by “realizing the element of myth and nonsense in the notion of a sudden worldwide conversion to Shakerism, he [Evans] tried to resolve their problem by a reflective conversion of Shakerism of the world.”

Seen from this perspective, Evans’ approach to initiating “reflective conversion” ushered in a period of journalistic inquiry prompting believers and worldly readers alike to mobilize national social reform. Close readings of Evans’ periodical reveal that its discourses grafted American public health concerns, particularly hygiene, diet, and self-care, into the larger narrative of Shaker eschatology. Articles published under Evans’ administration promulgated that Americans (i.e. non-Shakers) ought to fear for the wellbeing of their bodies since they cared little for the health of their souls, which, in turn, evoked a powerful eschatological principle conflating not only physical wellbeing and the spiritual-moral health of the nation, but American nation-building and the realization of the millennial era.

As Americans scurried to lay the bricks of expanding cities under the miasma of factory pollution, Evans was convinced that the nation had morphed into a well-oiled machine of rapacious consumption, exploitation, and waste. The bodies and souls of Americans, he feared, had come to resemble the blackened, smog-choked metropolis of industrial America. Framing national public health issues within the contexts of Shaker eschatology was an audacious editorial move on Evans’ part because it equated

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physical health concerns with the nation’s wavering degrees of moral fitness. Deeply troubled by these developments, he mounted a critique of American trends of consumption and materialism, declaring that the *Shaker and Shakeress* would agitate reforms concerning “peace, temperance, hygiene, and physiology, and woman’s suffragists and land reformers.”

Beginning with dietary health and American food culture, Evans expresses: “I quite agree with the God of Israel, that the first step in the work of human redemption is to make and eat good bread” and doubted “whether really good men and women—Christians—can be raised upon poor bread, made of adulterated materials and chemically corrupted by leaven.”

His article, “BREAD,” polemicized popular bread-making techniques that corrode the body: “The Americans have been termed a toothless, dyspeptic nation. They might be termed a physic-taking nation, as, instead of ‘throwing that article to the dogs,’ it is adopted as food, by the nation at large, and taken daily. This is no more wonderful than it is horrible.”

“Superfine bolted flour,” he continues, incorporates “wheat [that] is ground to death” which, after long-term use, “decomposes animal tissue and disintegrate bones and teeth.” By identifying the corrosive ingredients lurking in certain foods, Evans and Doolittle sought to address an unenlightened public in how to care for the physical and spiritual state of the body.

Essential to advancing social progress in America, remarks Evans, was the elimination of these “unphysiological foods and drinks” and the sedulous cultivation of organic food sources that would nourish a healthy, superior human population.

Listed among these “extravagant, health-destroying” foodstuffs were “brain-maddening Spiritous Liquors,” “nerve-destroying Narcotics” (tobacco, opium), “Condiments, Tea and Coffee,” and “Foul Air” (a growing problem for urban dwellers). Evans justified his

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44 *Shaker and Shakeress*, p. 81.
46 *Shaker and Shakeress*, 3.11, (November 1873), p. 81.
47 *Shaker and Shakeress*, p. 82.
48 Ibid, p. 81.
49 *Shaker and Shakeress*, 5.12, (December 1875), pp. 89-90.
claims with a simple, oft-repeated axiom: “The bread of a people determines largely the character of that people.”

Significantly, Shaker theology had focused on the mysterious workings of the human soul and regarded the body as the reservoir of dark impulses and desires that needed to be controlled by the soul; although soul and celibacy remained the bedrock of Shaker doctrine, discussions focusing on the earthly perfection of the body dominated Evans and Doolittle’s newspaper. This decisive shift in theological emphasis raised awareness of the self-destructive habits of consumption. For example, Evans’ article “THE TEETH” discusses the “evils” of “artificial substitutes for the extracted natural teeth,” proposing that “slow eating would be a most excellent thing for Americans, who are in the habit of bolting their food in five or ten minutes, and then run to the doctor to complain of indigestion.”

Another column, “SANITARY INFLUENCE OF SUNLIGHT,” reports the then-recent findings of Russian medical experts on “the effect of light as a curative agent,” which calls for “sunny homes, where sunlight and fresh air play through the spacious halls” and “where the windows are thrown open to all healthful influence.” Shakers and non-Shakers alike, he insisted, must “obtain the quota of pure oxygen necessary for keeping lungs in the most healthful condition, [for] the people of God should be as clean as the air they breathe, as in the food they eat…” Informed readers, Evans noted, would recognize that this urgent call for pure air was adumbrated in Mosaic law, a warning that toxic vapors would fill the lungs of those “disobedient to his laws and statutes.”

Healthy teeth, fresh air, and salubrious doses of sunlight aside, Evans’ vigorous health campaign also made a persuasive case for what many Shaker and outside readers considered his most radical reform: vegetarianism. In his amusing and wildly controversial article “Stomach and Conscience,” Evans

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50 Shaker and Shakeress, 4.1, (January 1874), p. 81.
51 Shaker and Shakeress, p. 82.
52 Shaker and Shakeress, 5.12, (December 1875), p. 89.
53 Shaker and Shakeress, p. 84.
outlines his understanding of “millennial health” by making several shocking claims connecting appetite-hunger with national moral corruption:

The good of the present generation and the welfare of the future, are subordinated to appetite… the existence of chattel slavery, in America, gave rise to, terminating in a destructive, uncivil war, come into operation in all contentions and struggles between stomach and conscience, than have occurred, and will hereafter occur, in any new degree of progress, in Nations, in Societies, or even individuals.54

At the core of all human tribulation—calamities of war, political corruption, slavery—is an overpowering “appetite-created mentality,” argues Evans, in which people are hopelessly “enslaved by their stomachs.”55 In this way, he continues, flesh-eaters are not to be distinguished from the senseless military commanders and political functionaries who sent thousands of men to perish on the battlefields of the Civil War. To prevent future human catastrophe, he sketches a simple vegetarian ethic he hopes American Christianity will, in time, embrace—one asserting that if Americans, especially powerful political figures, “would change their diet, discontinue the use of domestic animal foods” and adopt “Horticulture, like the people of Vineland,” then they would “approximate the diet of the Israelites in the wilderness” and vanquish, once and for all, its “innumerable social ills.”56 This equation of sorts pronounces that if Americans close their abattoirs and quell the carnivorous rumblings of their stomachs, their appetites would gradually come to resemble the Nazarenes, “who ate no flesh [and] drank no wine,” and advance the establishment of the millennial kingdom.57 “Flesh meat,” Evans continues, “is almost exclusively, the food of the wild Indian, in his primitive state.”58 Turning to Old Testament scripture to substantiate his views, his article “DIALOGUE” transcribes a conversation between two characters, one cast as an unenlightened Flesh-eater and the other as the sagacious Shaker Vegetarian.

54 Shaker and Shakeress, 4.9, (September 1874), p. 65.
55 Shaker and Shakeress, p. 65.
56 Ibid, p. 65.
57 Ibid, p. 65.
58 Ibid, p. 65.
“What reason do you have for rejecting (as food) flesh, fish, eggs, butter cheese, and grease?” inquires the Flesh-eater. The Vegetarian responds: “See Genesis 1:29; and Numbers 11:13 and 33. The Prophet Isaiah (66:3) said: “He that killeth an ox, is as if he slew a man.” Even if scripture did not address it as directly, the grave ethical conundrum anchoring Evans’ vegetarianism was abhorrence of the “killing of dumb animals, who cannot plead their own rights.” That a daily massacre of this voiceless and vulnerable population has gone overlooked, he says, confirms that Americans were being carried along the currents of senseless consumption, and emphatically maintained that “the food question is the soul question. A change of dietetics, is a change of the social system, for better, or for worse.”

Evans’ remarks were, in a word, startling. This line of thinking was too radical for some of his followers in the progressive wing, but behind this reform linking stomach and soul was not the blatherskite of an eccentric vegetarian; in fact, it was a larger perceptive insight into the inner workings of the national psyche and the perils of over-indulgence, grasping how people not only become enslaved to patterns of mass-market consumption, but come to embody the insidious cultural values, appetites, and desires that impede true physical and spiritual wellbeing.

Evans and Doolittle’s you are what you eat theology received both applause and acrimony from readers. One fervent supporter of Evans’ food program, Oliver Prentiss, states in an editorial: “We are on the ascending grade, with ETERNAL PROGRESS inscribed on our banner…The change [vegetarianism] has been gradual—not by compulsion—in accord with the increased resurrection from the earthly to the heavenly.” Another enthused correspondent from the New Enfield, New Hampshire, community writes “DEAR ELDER FREDERICK:—…I have born my cross, against flesh meats…and

59 Shaker and Shakeress, 3.10, (October 1873), p. 76.
60 Ibid, p. 76.
61 Shaker and Shakeress, 4.9, (September 1874), p. 65.
am enjoying comfortable health.”\(^{63}\) Later in 1890, Ernest Pick’s article “VEGETARIANISM and the MILLENNIUM” articulated that “only fruits, grains, and vegetables” can end civilization’s perpetuation of “the horrible cruelty and suffering inflicted in slaughterhouses and stock-pens…All is ready for this new form of truth!...for as goes the West, so goes America; and as America goes, so goes the future world.”\(^{64}\) Despite scriptural underpinnings, many believers dismissed Evans’ health reforms for two major reasons: first, they quarreled that his millennial views were steeped in a grueling, unattainable quest for perfectionism—so unattainable that spartan diets and constant surveillance of consumption wearied his adherents; second, breakthroughs in 19th century medicine and science reminded people that, regardless of one’s diet and physical condition, disease and age were inescapable.

Shaker conservatives snorted disdainfully at Evans and Doolittle’s dedication to national social progress, firmly maintaining that seclusion and tradition trumped worldly interaction. A spate of angry letters from Groveland and South Union believers addressed to the Central Ministry, Mt. Lebanon, objected to these radical views.\(^{65}\) The most vocal gainsayer of Shaker progressivism and longtime contributor to *Shaker and Shakeress*, Elder Harvey Eads of South Union, Kentucky, published a collection of essays in *Shaker Sermons: Scripto-Rational*, in an effort to clarify essential Shaker teachings he argued Evans and progressives had obscured. Hardly surprising, Lomas enthusiastically championed the volume, stating in the proem that “This BOOK OF SERMONS scarcely needs a preface…the reader will feel the hallowed influences of one who has been with the Christ.”\(^{66}\) Both celebrating Shaker traditions and extolling isolationism, Eads recapitulates the doctrines of “Virgin Purity, Non-resistance, Equality of

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\(^{63}\) Shaker and Shakeress, 5.10, (October 1875), p. 75.
\(^{64}\) The Shaker Manifesto, 20.8, (August 1890), pp. 175-176.
\(^{65}\) Stein, The Shaker Experience, p. 491.
\(^{66}\) Eads, Shaker Sermons, p. III.
inheritance and Unspottedness from the word,” pointing out where Evans and his followers “drifted out to sea without chart or compass.”

As opposition to the Shaker and Shakeress mounted and Eads’ sermons rallied conservatives to throttle progressivism, the Central Ministry, in late 1875, ordered Editor Evans and Editress Doolittle to vacate their chairs. Evans’ closing remarks in the last issue were decidedly terse, leaving readers with a simple injunction: “Cease to do evil.” To do so, the editors itemized, for the last time, the “Seven Individual and Society Evils” of the “anti-Christian Babylon” known as America: under “SOCIETY EVILS” they listed, “Holding land, as private property, forever, War, Slavery, Male Domination, Usury, Spiritualism”; listed under “INDIVIDUAL EVILS” was the list of dietary perils that destroy the body. Lomas was promptly restored to his former position as editor. The editorial discord that splintered Believers into progressive and conservative camps, and the struggle to gain control of the influential newspaper, revealed the zealous question of concern: what were believers to do in the shadow of modernization and membership decline? Should they, as Evans so fervidly promoted in Shaker and Shakeress, compromise tradition by becoming vocal agents of social transformation in America? Conservatives had responded with an emphatic no, dislodging Evans and Doolittle from Lomas’ old office, but their answer did little to ensure that Shakerism would survive beyond the waning decades of the 19th century.

Over the previous three decades, the voice of the United Society had grown hoarse against the competing claims of religious intolerance, industrialization, and encroaching secularism. Evans and Doolittle had shifted from Lomas’ myopic missionary goals in hopes of heightening the sect’s presence as a force of national social reform, but, ultimately, were marginalized by the conservative majority.

68 Shaker and Shakeress, 5.12, (December 1875), pp. 89-90.
69 Shaker and Shakeress, pp. 89-90.
Conflicts of ideology represented in *The Shaker* and *Shaker and Shakeress* were fundamentally the results of differing eschatological viewpoints: while the eschatology of Shaker reformers viewed the discourses of Charles Finney’s Social Gospel critical to stimulating millennial progress, conservatives blamed membership decline and the unraveling of tradition on worldly interaction. Though editorial head-butting between the camps never completely subsided following the dissolution of the *Shaker and Shakeress*, an active journalism under Lomas’ direction would play a role in the intellectual life of late 19th century Shakers.

As a publication maintained by a religious minority, Evans and Doolittle’s editorial campaign stamps a truly significant era in the larger trajectory of American religious print culture as the imaginative adaptation with which they re-conceptualized the publication fearlessly stirred readers to think critically about their moral responsibilities in the larger American nation-building narrative. As to efface any foul trace of progressivism, Lomas promptly reverted the newspaper back to its original single-section format and title, *The Shaker*. He explains that his revisions should “amplify rather than detract dual principles, in all things which the name *Shaker and Shakeress* could imply…THE SHAKER will illustrate the fruits of such a belief by the presentation to the world of a brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ.”\(^70\) Although the periodical would remain in print, Lomas’ successor, Elder Henry C. Blinn, was forced to terminate the publication in December 1899, lamenting that “Times have changed. Money is scarce and the several Societies have suffered with the laboring classes in the common distress.”\(^71\) That conservative readers and editors silenced the voice of progressives regrettably betrayed the principles of the radical religious print tradition from which the Society’s publication sprang, withdrawing from a practice of democratic journalism that vowed to represent the heteroglossia of the community and plurality of opinion. In their obstinacy to embrace social change, hardbound Believers stunted the

\(^70\) *The Shaker*, 6.1, (January 1876), p. 4.

intellectual growth of the periodical and prevented it from flourishing into a national democratic platform that could have possibly secured Shakerism’s position at the forefront of American social conscience, furnishing instead a monolithic text that served little more than the manifesto of a shrinking, disillusioned religious sect resigned to vanish in self-isolation. To be sure, such deformities in Shaker print culture suggest that the religious periodical was more similar to secular political publications than religious journalists of the 19th century would have liked to admit—with its feuding readers and heavy-handed editors having stumbled into the pitfalls of censorship and infighting, it was an equally unstable text that had locked the free dissemination of public opinion in an editorial stranglehold. Though financial restraints and dwindling membership were evident factors, the periodical’s failing vision of Elias Smith’s democratic religious journalism contributed forcefully to its demise—principles apparently too progressive, too brazen even for *The Shaker*, “the most radically religious monthly in the world.”

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Bibliography


**Complete Volumes of Shaker Periodicals**


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There have been recent efforts to introduce Bayes’ Theorem, or at least Bayesian reasoning, to the Humanities and Social Sciences. Bayesian methods are becoming increasingly important in Philosophy of Religion, as evidenced by Richard Swinburne, Robin Collins, William Lane Craig and Herman Philipse. Aviezer Tucker has argued that the professional study of history would benefit from a Bayesian approach. Richard Carrier has recently argued for the general use of Bayes’ Theorem, and also notes that the methods already used by historians are essentially Bayesian. I have also argued for the broad adoption of Bayesian reasoning, as well as for its use in Biblical and Religious Studies, adding to the growing voices in opposition to the increasingly-maligned Criteria of Authenticity, which are oft-used in historical Jesus studies. Simultaneously, there have been recent efforts by so-called mythicist scholars (those positing that Jesus was an entirely fictitious figure) to bring their brand of Jesus scepticism to the mainstream.

The more conventional Jesus historicists (those positing that Jesus’ historicity is a certainty) have responded in kind. Some scholars argue for a moderate position, criticizing the mainstream Jesus

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1 While this article was in review, such an undertaking was completed. See Richard Carrier, On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason For Doubt (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014). My (positive) review of this book is expected to be published by the Journal of Religious History in December, 2014.
historicists for their poor methodology and ad hominem argumentation. This paper intends generally to steer clear of this debate, and focuses on soberly critiquing the sources used to establish information about the historical Jesus at a very high level, employing the skepticism and privileged status quo that Bayesian reasoning encourages. This brief survey might be of interest to scholars on all sides of the historicity debate, with the historicists claiming that the sources undoubtedly establish a historical Jesus, and the mythicists claiming that the sources are too problematic to be considered reliable. These sources will be examined for these problems and some judgment passed on how significant the issues are.

The focus will be on sources from within one hundred years of Jesus’ death (Jesus putatively having been born around 4 BCE and having died around 30 CE)—an approach used by biblical scholar Bart Ehrman. He argues that writings after that time “almost certainly cannot be considered independent and reliable witnesses,” though he acknowledges that that could also be the case with the sources from within one hundred years. These sources usually include hypothetical sources, the Pauline Epistles, the Canonical Gospels, extra-biblical references to Jesus made among the works of Flavius Josephus, and potentially other early, non-Christian authors.

Critiquing the non-extant, hypothetical sources

Before critiquing the sources, it is worth identifying what scholars do not have access to. There are no primary sources (contemporary and eyewitness sources) for the life of the historical Jesus. Primary

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11 Ibid, p. 50.

sources are vital to historians, not only as they provide direct evidence, but also serve as the benchmark by which secondary sources are measured. Unfortunately, biblical scholars do not have access to primary sources, arguably rendering all of their conclusions about the historical Jesus as susceptible to doubt. That there are no primary sources for Jesus is generally accepted by ardent historicists.

Bart Ehrman acknowledges the relative historical silence on Jesus: “What sorts of things do pagan authors from the time of Jesus have to say about him? Nothing.”

Possibly as a response to this problem—and potentially accentuating it—biblical scholars have come up with a novel solution, the creation of early hypothetical sources. Ehrman provides the perfect example, in that he apparently solves the problem of having so few early sources on Jesus, by non-eyewitnesses long after the events in question, by simply inventing as many early sources as he desires. He claims that the canonical Gospels stem from “numerous” earlier written sources (from about the 50s CE), and an “enormous” amount of yet earlier oral traditions. Ehrman divides the book of Acts, claiming that it provides two independent witnesses. He believes that any time there is a different (in a later Gospel as compared to an earlier Gospel) or paraphrased story, he has convincing evidence of an earlier and independent account (which is assumedly reliable and trustworthy), which “obviously” must have even earlier sources behind them that go right back to Jesus. He overlooks the possibility that the same story is evolving over time, or that later writers are merely repeating the stories in their own words (and inventing details as they go along), and seems quite content to make such assertive claims using

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16 Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, pp. 77-97.

17 Ibid, p. 117.
non-existent sources. Ehrman’s brand of historical methodology, heavily reliant on non-extant sources, provides no certainty on the historical Jesus.

When it comes to these and other hypothetical or otherwise non-extant sources (such as oral tradition and the Q source), they cannot be verified, dated, or scrutinized and so cannot seriously be used as sources for reliable and accurate information on the historical Jesus. In any case, with the relatively early texts of Paul and the more complete narratives of the Gospels, it would be appropriate to focus more effort on analyzing the New Testament texts—on analyzing and scrutinizing sources that are actually available. It must be considered, however, that the sources scholars do have access to are not primary sources and cannot be compared to primary sources, and so ought to be analyzed with caution and skepticism. Another problem with the extant sources is the lack of autographs. With no access to the originals of these documents, historians cannot rule out that important changes were made, nor can they state composition dates with absolute certainty. Considering that the non-extant sources are hypothetical and their contents are either unknown or derived from later, extant sources, they could not be submitted as evidence in a Bayesian analysis.

Critiquing the Epistles

Paul provides the earliest surviving Christian writings, with 1 Thessalonians usually dated to 49 CE, and his later works appearing around the early 60s CE. The Pauline Epistles are not primary sources for information on Jesus’ life; they are not contemporaneous with the events of Jesus’ life, and Paul, by his own admission, cannot be considered an eyewitness to the historical Jesus. The following verses from the Pauline epistles reveal how Paul knows the information he shares (Galatians 1:11-12, 1 Corinthians 15:3-4):

11 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by

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19 Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, pp. 117-118.
revelation from Jesus Christ. 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures…

Not only does Paul never mention his possibly reliable, first-hand accounts, his only named sources are the Old Testament Scriptures and his claimed direct channel to the divine. Paul does not know of the few events of Jesus’ life he mentions as a result of having witnessed them. It could even be concluded that he did not come to know of these events by learning from those who were closest to Jesus (such as his apostles or relatives), as Paul clearly mentions his sources and dismisses human sources. Paul did not have a pleasant relationship with Peter, presumably one of the most credible and sought-after eyewitnesses, as he “opposed him to his face” (Galatians 2:11). As Bayesian methodologies greatly oppose supernatural explanations, Paul’s admission in Galatians chapter 1 is enough, if genuine and truthful, to cause scholars to express reservations on all his (few) comments on the historical Jesus. Of course, if the passage is not genuine, there is good reason to doubt the integrity of the text, and if it is not truthful, there is reason to question Paul’s motives and doubt his reliability as a disinterested and objective historian. Scholar of religion James Tabor (University of North Carolina) also notes Paul’s spurious sources:

This mean the essentials of the message Paul preaches are not coming from those who were with Jesus, whom Paul sarcastically calls the “so-called pillars of the church,” adding “what they are means nothing to me” (Galatians 2:6), but from voices, visions, and revelations that Paul is “hearing” and “seeing.” For some that is a strong foundation. For many, including most historians, such “traditions” cannot be taken as reliable historical testimony.²⁰

It may be asked why scholars should assume that Peter and James could have taught Paul anything worthwhile about the historical Jesus; historians know of the prominent role they played largely because of the Gospels, which appear later in the historical record, and thus could be elaborating Paul’s more minimal story. It is interesting then to consider what it is that Paul says about Jesus, without reading the

Gospels (which were composed later) into Paul’s writings. Religious scholar William Arnal also calls for such an approach, noting that the canonical Gospels and Acts (an even later document) have affected how early Christians and biblical scholars view the Pauline Epistles and Paul himself, arguing that Paul could be understood to be a somewhat independent evangelizing Jew rather than a Christian.\(^\text{21}\)

It is noteworthy that Paul, supposedly being converted and writing so soon after Jesus’ death, obtains all his information of Jesus from the Old Testament and his direct link to his god rather than from eyewitnesses or his own observations. Paul also has very little to say about Jesus’ time on earth, such as explaining when the crucifixion happened; the Gospels do the work of filling in the blanks, attempting to explain Jesus’ life story.\(^\text{22}\) Paul seems completely disinterested in a recent, historical Jesus, as if such a concept would be secondary to Paul’s primary message. Some passages from these epistles (such as in Hebrews, which is actually anonymous) could hint that Jesus has not been on earth in recent history (Hebrews 8:4, Philippians 2:5-11):

\begin{align*}
4 & \text{If he were on earth, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law.} \\
8 & \text{And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!} \\
9 & \text{Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,} \\
10 & \text{that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,} \\
11 & \text{and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.}
\end{align*}

The first passage implies that Jesus had not actually been on earth, while the second implies that he was only named Jesus after his death, which clearly contradicts the more traditional claims derived from the Gospels. This indicates a very different view of Jesus, such as a heavenly, celestial or non-literal Jesus, which is exactly what the mythicists argue for.\(^\text{23}\) This theory is not necessarily without precedent;


\(^{23}\) It is a controversial idea that Christianity could have initially come about without a historical Jesus. Arthur Droge points to the example of Luddism as a movement that lacked a historical founder, and which stemmed from ‘many origins’. He also
the 2nd-century Church Father Irenaeus seems to hint at the existence of Christians with such unorthodox beliefs in section 1.7.2 of his Against Heresies: “For they declare that all these transactions were counterparts of what took place above.”

Accounts of the Docetists confirm that early belief in Christianity did not necessarily rely on belief in a literal or fleshly historical Jesus. Furthermore, the Ascension of Isaiah is a relatively early document that clearly lays out a salvific, but not necessarily earthly, Jesus. Interestingly, the Pauline Epistles are generally dated substantially earlier than the Gospels, which leaves open the possibility that the more succinct Pauline Epistles provide the more accurate picture of Jesus. Given that Paul’s knowledge of Jesus comes from the Scriptures and his direct channel to the divine rather than first-hand eyewitness accounts, he can almost certainly be written off as a reliable and primary source of evidence for the historical Jesus. New Testament scholar Gerd Lüdemann (University of Göttingen) agrees: “In short, Paul cannot be considered a reliable witness to either the teachings, the life, or the historical existence of Jesus.”

Paul may have met James and Peter, but never claims them as sources. Given that he also never claims to have received this information from anyone who may have witnessed the events of Jesus’ life (potentially eliminating the possibility of primary sources), his status even as a reliable secondary source is questionable. Either Paul is indeed speaking straight from the Old Testament and from supernatural sources as he claims (leaving open the possibility of non-literal accounts), or he does utilize other sources.


and is simply not being truthful. Either way, the credibility of his work is very much compromised. In any case, it is agreed by Jesus historicists and mythicists that the Pauline Epistles have very little to say about Jesus’ teachings and deeds. This even applies when discussing topics that Jesus had supposedly already dealt with.

When Paul recommended celibacy (1 Corinthians 7:7-8), he could have quoted Matthew 19:10-12. When he indicates that Christians should pay their taxes (Romans 13:1-6), Paul could have referred to traditions appearing in Mark 12:17. When discussing circumcision (Romans 3:1, Galatians 5:1-12), Paul could have referred to Jesus’ own circumcision in Luke 2:21. When Paul (and also Peter) promotes obedience to the Roman authorities who generally punish only the wicked (Romans 13:3, 1Peter 2:13-14), he does not reference what they did to Jesus. Doherty points out that instead of scoffing at the Jews who were demanding miracles (1 Corinthians 1:22), Paul could have mentioned the multitude of miracles that Jesus supposedly performed.28 Ehrman acknowledges the greater issue that there are instances where Paul actually seems to be quoting Jesus without giving him due credit—though Ehrman concludes that Paul is paraphrasing later documents; a surprising and perhaps presupposed conclusion.29 Gerd Lüdemann comments:

One must record with some surprise the fact that Jesus’ teachings seem to play a less vital role in Paul’s religious and ethical instruction than does the Old Testament…not once does Paul refer to Jesus as a teacher, to his words as teaching, or to Christians as disciples. In this regard it is of the greatest significance that when Paul cites “sayings of Jesus,” they are never so designated; rather, without a single exception, he attributes such sayings to “the Lord.”30

Critiquing the Canonical Gospels

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28 Doherty, Jesus: Neither God Nor Man, p. 67.
29 Ehrman, Did Jesus Exist?, p. 127.
Younger than the earliest Pauline writings, the Gospels were written around forty or more years after the theorized death of Jesus,\(^{31}\) which could eliminate the possibility of them being written by eyewitnesses long after the fact, considering life expectancies in the 1\(^{\text{st}}\) century CE. The Gospel authors are anonymous, so it cannot simply be presumed that they are eyewitnesses or reliable historians.\(^{32}\) The only Gospel which even gives a clue as to who may have written it is the Gospel of John, “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20-24), which still does not provide a name or a list of the author’s credentials or previous works, and is the latest of the four canonical Gospels. The importance of knowing the author in regards to determining reliability and potential bias, and perhaps the genre of the work, need not be seriously questioned.

The Gospel writers do not claim to be using trustworthy primary sources and do not name them; neither do they show skepticism with these hypothetical sources nor demonstrate critical methodology (Bayesian or otherwise). Even if they did, scholars do not have access to primary sources, and thus have no way to determine, with certainty, if the Gospels are truly reliable. Bart Ehrman describes the Gospels as few, relying upon each other, written decades after the alleged events, problematic, contradictory, biased, and written by anonymous authors who were not eyewitnesses. He says that the Gospels are not the kind of sources historians would want in establishing what probably happened in the past.\(^{33}\) These issues cast doubt on many aspects of the historical Jesus, considering that the Gospels are the main sources used in historical Jesus research.

In his book *Lost Christianities*, Ehrman mentions that the Gospels lack first-person narrative and lack any claim of being companions of eyewitnesses.\(^{34}\) He goes on to say that most scholars have

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\(^{31}\) Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, p. 235. Note that much of Ehrman’s work is sound. My main criticism of him is his use of non-existing sources to support his otherwise unsubstantiated claim that there must have been a historical Jesus.


\(^{33}\) Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, p. 42.

\(^{34}\) Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, p. 235.
abandoned the Church-given identifiers of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, clarifying that the Gospels are anonymous works. When it comes to the third-person narratives, readers could be forgiven for thinking that the Gospel writers seem more like omniscient narrators (akin to authors of fiction), even when they speak of events in Jesus’ life when he was alone—such as the temptation in the wilderness or the prayer at Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-42, Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 22:45). This could be a crucial issue; if the stories in the Gospels are not intended to be interpreted literally, sifting through them with criteria to determine what could be authentic and historical may well be an exercise in time-wasting, and scholars (and also believers) might inadvertently overlook the true meaning and purpose of the Gospels in the process.

With regards to the miraculous and supernatural claims found in the Gospels, such as the virgin birth (some scholars may prefer the term divine conception), and Jesus’ walking on water (Matthew 1:18-25, 14:22-36), many scholars find them to be problematic. Ehrman asserts that history can only deal with what is most likely, while miracles are, by their very nature, unlikely.35 Robert Price and many other scholars make use of the principle of analogy. Price describes this as a historical method whereby claims that are not analogous to what scientists and scholars currently know of the world, such as the laws of physics, can be dismissed by the historian.36 Hector Avalos introduces the idea that the Gospels cannot be assumed to contain accurate and reliable historical information due to the abundance of legendary material contained therein.37 Philosopher Stephen Law concurs, framing his “contamination argument” whereby sources contaminated with obviously ahistorical information should be viewed with suspicion—even when it comes to the more natural and mundane portions of the text.38 A Bayesian framework is

35 Bart D. Ehrman and Michael Licona, *Debate - Can Historians Prove Jesus Rose from the Dead?* (Matthews, NC: Southern Evangelical Seminary, 2009), DVD.
in alignment with these scholars’ comments, heavily discounting supernatural and other implausible claims and the sources asserting them.

While the Gospels are anonymous, meaning historians cannot be sure of the authors’ reliability or motives, their supernatural claims makes it easy for critical scholars to see them as being far from secular and sober authors of history, whilst having no intention to evangelize. If these supernatural claims are indeed false, and historians remain critical and consistent, it is reasonable to avoid accepting them as gospel, especially when there are no extant primary sources to determine the accuracy and validity of these works. Many scholars have commented on mythic parallels between Jesus’ story as told in the Gospels and the stories of earlier gods and mythical heroes. Such parallels include the dying-and-rising god motif; like Jesus, Osiris’ death is also associated with the full moon (John 19:14), and tradition holds that he returned on “the third day” (Luke 24:7 cf. Isis and Osiris 39–42). While Jesus preached the so-called golden rule (Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31), so too did the Buddha and Confucius. And like Jesus (Matthew 5:43–47), Laozi also encouraged the loving of enemies (Daodejing 49).

While even secular scholars today might counter-intuitively downplay the significance of these parallels, important and influential early Christians not only admitted to these similarities, but attempted to convert pagans to Christianity by making reference to such parallels, and assumed that demonic forces keen on confusing believers were responsible for them. There are also a number of similarities between

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Philo’s Logos figure (which appears in the literature before any mention of Jesus Christ), and the heavenly Christ portrayed in the Pauline Epistles. For example, this Logos figure is variously described by Philo of Alexandria as the “firstborn son of God” (Romans 8:29 cf. On Dreams, That They are God-Sent 1.215), the celestial “image of God” (2Corinthians 4:4 cf. On the Confusion of Tongues 62-63), God’s agent of creation (1Corinthians 8:6 cf. The Special Laws, I, 81) and God’s high priest (Colossians 1:18, Hebrews 4:14 cf. On Dreams, That They are God-Sent 1.215). While not necessarily eliminating a historical core behind the Jesus story, it should be of interest to determine just how much of the Gospel story could have been borrowed from earlier and contemporary writings. The more that can be dismissed from the Gospel story as being inauthentic, the more reason there is to question whether that which remains must be a true and accurate account of actual historical events.

Mark is considered to be the earliest of the four Gospels, with Matthew and Luke borrowing heavily from it. John appears later and could thus be borrowing from all of the Synoptic Gospels. Given this information, and the fact that the Gospels are anonymous, it would be over-reaching to claim that a particular saying or action of Jesus is authentic because of multiple independent attestation. Considering the dependence on Mark, it is noteworthy that this Gospel has clear Evangelical intent. The very first verse of Mark’s Gospel labels the work as the “good news” (euangélion) rather than as an accurate and objective historical account. Historian Richard Carrier also raises the possibility (and perhaps the need to be cautious) that all sources dated after the Gospel of Mark could have been tainted by it, and that this simply cannot be ruled out. It is clear that there are question marks over the Gospels’ reliability, as admitted by David Noel Freedman:

44 Ehrman, Did Jesus Exist?, p. 48.
When it comes to the historical question about the Gospels, I adopt a mediating position—that is, these are religious records, close to the sources, but they are not in accordance with modern historiographic requirements or professional standards.  

Ehrman also points out the biases and contradictions of the Gospel authors:

It is also true that our best sources about Jesus, the early Gospels, are riddled with problems. These were written decades after Jesus’ life by biased authors who are at odds with one another on details up and down the line.

Gager also declares the Gospels to be unreliable sources for the historical Jesus:

The Gospels are the final products of a long and creative tradition, and the earliest Gospel (for most Mark, for some Matthew) is customarily dated about forty years after the death of Jesus. During these years not only was old material reworked, expanded, collated, and reinterpreted, but new material was regularly interpolated. Eschatological pronouncements of Christian prophets, ex post facto predictions, Old Testament proof texts, and ethical maxims were attributed to Jesus and thereby “authorized” for believers.

To briefly summarize on what scholars lack with regards to the evidence of Jesus’ historicity: the Gospels make mention of Jesus’ humble birth, teaching of elders, teaching of multitudes, healing of the sick, casting out of demons, raising of Lazarus from the dead, being raised from the dead by God, glorious entry into Jerusalem, clashes with the Roman and Jewish authorities, death, triumphant return, and many other wonderful and much-cherished stories. Of all this, and other details of Jesus’ life, miraculous or mundane, there is not a single secular, contemporary, eyewitness account. Perhaps this is why Robert Funk, noted biblical scholar and co-founder of the Jesus Seminar, said the following:

49 The Jesus Seminar sought to gather scholarly and also lay opinions on the authenticity of various sayings and deeds of Jesus.
As an historian, I do not know for certain that Jesus really existed, that he is anything more than the figment of some overactive imaginations.... In my view, there is nothing about Jesus of Nazareth that we can know beyond any possible doubt.50

Before making a passing reference to the remainder of the biblical texts, and moving on to analyze the extra-biblical sources, the issue of the Gospels’ genre should be briefly discussed. It is not a foregone conclusion that the canonical Gospels are historically reliable biographies. Given the anonymity of the Gospels (among other problems), it may never be known with certainty what genre they fall into, how reliable the authors were, what the authors’ intentions really were (apart from their seemingly obvious Evangelical intent), and, crucially, whether they intended readers to take them at face value. There is no complete agreement over what genre the Gospels actually fall into.51 Many biblical scholars assert that the Gospels are largely fictional.52 Crossan concurs, and criticizes the idea that oral tradition is accurate and can be relied upon.53 Such criticism is not limited to non-believers; early Christian theologian Origen, who seemed to favor allegorical readings, acknowledges that the Gospels contain discrepancies and need to be understood “spiritually.”54

The only Gospel that arguably makes some attempt to indicate source material is Luke (Luke 1:1-4), and that is a far cry from Philostratus’ relatively lengthy discussion of the reliability of sources on

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Apollonius of Tyana. The anonymous author of Luke claims to have “carefully investigated everything from the beginning” (Luke 1:3), though a literal rendering of the Greek ἀνωθεν (rendered in the NIV as “from the beginning”), is “from above.” Given the subject matter, such as the supernatural claims of Luke’s Gospel, it would be appropriate that this Gospel’s author is claiming that his knowledge of Jesus comes from his direct channel to the divine. If, like Paul, Luke’s source is actually revelation “from above” or “from Heaven” (cf. James 3:17), his credibility as a historian is highly questionable. Instead of demonstrating his sound historical methodology, Luke’s introduction betrays his belief in the supernatural and his clear Evangelical intent.

Compared to the earlier works by Paul who provides the earliest sources of information about Jesus and the Gospels (which offer the most complete accounts of his life), the remainder of the New Testament (namely the apocalyptic book of Revelation and the General Epistles) offers very little in the way of useful information on the historical Jesus. It is possible that, in general, later religious writings (both biblical and extra-biblical) could simply be borrowing from and embellishing on the information in the Gospels and the writings of Paul. As with the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles, there are no extant primary sources with which to validate the few claims made by the remainder of the New Testament. One example of the lack of information on the historical Jesus among the General Epistles is provided by the epistle of James (possibly the brother of Jesus, though he never claims to be).

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55 Philostratus, a known author, claims to have gathered information on Apollonius from a number of sources, including: letters and treatises from the hand of Apollonius himself, a history of Apollonius written by Maximus of Aegae, and memoirs written by Damis and furnished by Julia Domna, the wife of Roman Emperor Septimius Severus. Philostratus even goes so far as to mention his scepticism over Moeragenes’ four books about Apollonius. By comparison, the anonymous Gospel accounts of Jesus only offer Luke 1:1-4 where no specific (and non-supernatural) sources are cited, and where scepticism and criticism is generally found wanting. See Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana: Books 1-4*, trans. C. P. Jones (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 1.2-3.

56 Note that Luke does not discuss his methods, name his sources, or show any scepticism with the various claims made about Jesus. Luke also fails to clarify his credentials, or even his identity. Combined with his evangelical intent and his belief in the supernatural, he clearly does not have the makings of an excellent historian.

James fails to provide details for the historical Jesus, including his death; he also seems uninterested in Jesus’ alleged resurrection. Religious Studies scholar Matt Jackson-McCabe recognizes this and alludes to James placing far greater importance on the parousia (presence or arrival) of the “heavenly Christ.” Not only does James’ portrayal of Jesus in one of the earliest Christian writings leave open the possibility that his Jesus is primarily a heavenly or celestial figure, he also provides insight into the fragmentary nature of early Christianity. These Jamesian Christians seem less interested in Christ’s ultimate redemptive act for all of mankind and more interested in national restoration, “the reestablishment of a twelve-tribe kingdom” by a vengeful heavenly being.

Critiquing the extra-Biblical sources

The following extra-biblical (and generally non-Christian) sources share a number of characteristics that raise doubt as to their reliability as evidence for the life of Jesus. All these sources are secondary sources. They are written decades to centuries after the events of Jesus’ life by non-eyewitnesses. Many of these authors were born after Jesus’ death. Furthermore, there are no extant primary sources to compare them with and to validate them, so modern historians cannot be absolutely certain about their reliability and integrity. Some of these sources may have been susceptible to pious fraud. Modern historians also do not have access to the original autographs, so cannot be absolutely certain about which parts are authentic and which are forged. Even if genuine, these sources merely re-iterate what is already known from the Gospels, or simply repeat what a Christian contemporary believed.

That Christians would spread stories of Jesus in the late 1st and early 2nd centuries and beyond would not be particularly surprising. There are other potential sources not examined in this article, such as the so-called Gnostic Gospels and writings of the early Church Fathers, but they are generally seen

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as being inauthentic or very late; the main Christian sources remain the canonical Gospels. The one exception may be the Gospel of Thomas, which appears to be a sayings document rather than an actual narrative of Jesus’ life, and interestingly manifests no interest in Jesus’ salvific death and resurrection, which are generally seen as key to the Christian faith. Ehrman goes as far as to agree that, generally, extra-biblical sources contain nothing that cannot be taken from the earlier sources, such as the canonical Gospels. Scholars offer other arguments that raise more questions about these sources’ reliability, which shall be surveyed below.

Josephus

Among the works of Josephus, scholars find two disputed passages on Jesus. First, from Josephus’ *Antiquities of the Jews*, is the so-called Testimonium Flavianum:

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvelous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.

This is such a powerful passage that would seemingly confirm Jesus’ status as the Messiah, that it sounds almost too good to be true. Many scholars have expressed their doubts. With references to Jesus such as “if indeed one ought to call him a man” (alluding to his divinity) and “He was the Messiah,” it

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60 Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, pp. 98-104.
63 Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, p. 97.
would seem that Josephus not only confirms Jesus’ historical presence, but was a Christian believer also. Any doubt is dispelled with his allusion to the resurrection. One obvious problem is that Josephus was a Pharisaic Jew, and the Jews were slandered by Jesus as the “children of the devil” (John 8:44). It is highly unlikely that a historian, let alone a Jewish historian, would hint that Jesus was divine, that he was resurrected, and would call him “Messiah.” Many scholars see this passage as fraudulent, in whole or in part. One reason is that early Christian theologian Origen, writing after Josephus, claimed that Josephus did not believe Jesus was the Christ. Historians might also expect Origen to make use of this Josephus quotation, if it existed during his lifetime. Other early Christian apologists, such as Justin Martyr, also fail to quote this passage, which does considerable damage to its reliability when viewed through a Bayesian lens. Highly respected Josephean scholar Louis Feldman discusses the historical silence surrounding the Testimonium Flavianum:

The passage appears in all our manuscripts; but a considerable number of Christian writers—Pseudo-Justin and Theophilus in the second century, Minucius Felix, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Julius Africanus, Tertullian, Hippolytus and Origen in the third century, and Methodius and Pseudo-Eustathius in the early fourth century—who knew Josephus and cited from his works do not refer to this passage, though one would imagine that it would be the first passage that a Christian apologist would cite.

If this passage contains Christian interpolations to some extent (agreed upon by both mythicist and historicist scholars), it might not be surprising if the whole passage was fraudulent, especially considering the relative historical silence. The precedent has already been set that the text was tampered with, raising serious questions as to its reliability. Ehrman also suggests that the removal of the entire

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passage makes the surrounding text flow more smoothly and that the first person to quote it is Eusebius of Caesarea, a 4th century Christian bishop. This could be significant as Eusebius was arguably tolerant of pious fraud (Preparation for the Gospel 12.31), and by his own words raises questions as to his reliability as a historian (Church History 8.2.3): “Hence we shall not mention those who were shaken by the persecution…. But we shall introduce into this history in general only those events which may be useful first to ourselves and afterwards to posterity.” Given that Eusebius is the first to make mention of the Testimonium Flavianum, it is no wonder why some scholars would not only suspect that the passage is entirely fraudulent, but that it was Eusebius himself who fabricated it. A second passage from the works of Josephus that mentions Jesus is also from Antiquities of the Jews.

Upon learning of the death of Festus, Caesar sent Albinus to Judaea as procurator… Possessed of such a character, Ananus thought that he had a favorable opportunity because Festus was dead and Albinus was still on the way. And so he convened the judges of the Sanhedrin and brought before them a man named James, the brother of Jesus who was called the Christ, and certain others. He accused them of having transgressed the law and delivered them up to be stoned…. King Agrippa, because of Ananus’ action, deposed him from the high priesthood which he had held for three months and replaced him with Jesus the son of Damnaeus.

Apart from the phrase “called the Christ,” this passage does not seem to offer any useful information on Jesus. The Jesus mentioned need not necessarily be Jesus of Nazareth. After all Jesus (or Joshua) and James (or Jacob) are very common Jewish names, and there are quite a few people named Jesus mentioned in the works of Josephus. In fact, soon after the “called the Christ” reference, Josephus

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69 Ehrman, Did Jesus Exist?, pp. 60-64.
makes mention of “Jesus the son of Damnaeus,” who became the high priest. It could be (or is even more likely) that this is the Jesus referenced earlier, as some mythicists speculate, and this would explain why James’ brother is mentioned; the high priest being a noteworthy figure. Hoffmann is one mainstream biblical scholar who also believed “called the Christ” is a Christian interpolation and that this passage merely discusses Jesus bar Damnaeus. The usefulness of this passage hinges on the authenticity of the phrase “called the Christ.” Interestingly, even if “called Christ” was genuine, there is no necessary link to Jesus of Nazareth; there were many Jesuses in 1st century Palestine, and perhaps a few of them claimed to be or were perceived as being Messiahs. It cannot be reasonably assumed that any Jesus or Joshua who is called a Messiah or Christ must relate to the allegedly historical figure of Jesus of Nazareth—since a purely historical Jesus of Nazareth (sans miracles and divinity) is a virtually insignificant historical figure, barely mentioned, if at all, in contemporary or near-contemporary historical accounts.

Given that this book does show signs of tampering (that is, in the Testimonium Flavianum), it would not seem all that unlikely, or difficult, that two (but very important) words were inserted into the text by an over-eager Christian scribe. Perhaps it was included in an early copy as a speculative footnote, and was later incorporated into the body of the text. This is made all the more possible by the fact that all copies of these Josephean works have their origins in the medieval period, at the earliest. It is interesting to note however that the phrase “called the Christ” is less assertive than the “was Christ” of the first passage. This would seemingly conflict with the Testimonium Flavianum, but would also perhaps be a more likely statement from a non-Christian, possibly supporting its authenticity. It is also interesting to note that the second Josephean passage on Jesus is of less importance than the first. If the first passage

74 Doherty Jesus: Neither God Nor Man, p. 572.
75 Note that – unlike most Christian believers – critical and scholarly Jesus historicists typically assume that Jesus was a relatively insignificant figure, which would go some way to explaining the lack of primary sources. Surely the high priest is more worthy of mention than yet another relatively insignificant itinerant apocalyptic preacher.
is genuine, the second is far less detailed and noteworthy. If the Testimonium Flavianum is fraudulent, it is also possible that the second passage is fraudulent. Indeed, with the possible or likely fraudulent nature of the first passage, the second passage potentially raises questions as to who Josephus thinks this Christ is, given that he had otherwise not mentioned him.

There is also some measure of doubt as to Josephus’ reliability as a historian, given his sympathy towards supernatural concepts. Josephus retells a story about how Onias prayed for rain, with his god positively responding (Antiquities 14.2.1). Josephus goes on to claim that he witnessed Eleazar drawing out a demon from a possession victim’s nostrils (Antiquities 8.47). It is also noteworthy that while scholars understand Josephus could not have been an eyewitness to any event of Jesus’ life, he fails to mention his sources for his information on Jesus. If authentic in the first place, it may never be known whether Josephus received accurate information from official government records, or whether the information is simply hearsay from Christian believers. If it would have been rare for ancient historians such as Josephus to name their sources, scholars need to accept this limitation and accept the resulting uncertainty rather than lower the standards of evidence and critical thinking for convenience.

**Tacitus**

In his *Annals* (15.44), Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus makes a possible reference to Jesus:

> To dispel the gossip Nero therefore found culprits on whom he inflicted the most exotic punishments. These were people hated for their shameful offences whom the common people called Christians. The man who gave them their name, Christus, had been executed during the rule of Tiberius, by the procurator Pontius Pilatus.77

It is the phrase referring to Christus and his death under Pontius Pilate that is of great interest. It could be that this phrase (or even the whole passage and its context) could also be a later Christian interpolation. While some scholars could argue that this passage must be genuine because it does not

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portray Christians and Christ in a totally positive manner, there are reasons to have doubts over the authenticity or legitimacy of this passage. It is interesting that the name Jesus is never used, and that this is Tacitus’ only reference to Jesus. It is questionable if a non-Christian historian would refer to this person as Christ rather than the more secular Jesus of Nazareth. A Christian scribe, however, would have no issue in calling him Christ. Given that Jesus is not specified, there may also be a small possibility that this could refer to another Christ or messiah-figure. Though *Annals* covers the period of Rome’s history from around 14 CE to 66 CE, no other mention is made of Jesus Christ.\(^78\) This passage is also ignored by early Christian apologists such as Origen and Tertullian, who actually quote Tacitus in the 3rd century.\(^79\)

Like Josephus, Tacitus was born after Jesus’ alleged death, so could not have been an eyewitness to the events of Jesus’ life. He could merely be repeating what a Christian believer is claiming. Richard Carrier theorizes that Tacitus may have received this information from his colleague, Pliny the Younger, who had received it from Christians.\(^80\) Ehrman also somewhat dismisses Tacitus’ witness as Christian hearsay.\(^81\) Also of interest is that this supposed reference to the death of Jesus is made in Book 15 (covering CE 62-65) rather than in Book 5 (covering CE 29-31). Though Tacitus supposedly claims the death of Christ happened during the reign of Tiberius, he makes no mention of Jesus in the book covering the reign of Tiberius; he only makes this one comment among the books covering the later reign of Nero.

Furthermore, most information from Book 5 and the beginning of Book 6 (covering CE 32-37) is lost.\(^82\) The *Annals* is suspiciously missing information from around 29 CE to 32 CE, a highly relevant

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\(^78\) Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?,* p. 54.
\(^79\) Doherty *Jesus: Neither God Nor Man,* pp. 596-600.
\(^81\) Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?,* p. 56.
\(^82\) Cf. Tacitus (Annals), pp. 179-182.
timeframe for those that believe (historically or religiously) in Jesus. It is equally suspicious that the only section missing in the space dedicated to Tiberius’ rule happens to coincide with what many Christians would consider to be the most historically noteworthy event(s) to occur during Tiberius’ reign. Robert Drews theorizes that the only plausible explanation for this gap is “pious fraud;” that the embarrassment of Tacitus making no mention of Jesus’ crucifixion (or associated events such as the darkness covering the world or the appearances of resurrected saints) led to Christian scribes destroying this portion of the text, and perhaps later fabricating the Book 15 reference. Richard Carrier further argues that Tacitus’ later discussion on Christianity (in his coverage of 64 CE) gives historians confidence that this gap cannot be merely explained by the removal of embarrassing claims made about Jesus (with the silence potentially being the most embarrassing point of all), and points to missing (relevant) books by Philo and another suspicious gap in Cassius Dio’s Roman History.

Despite Cassius Dio (a Roman historian of the 2nd and 3rd centuries) having elsewhere discussed King Herod’s death, Roman History is missing the years from 6 BCE to 2 BCE. Carrier theorizes that Christian embarrassment over the lack of mention of Jesus’ birth (and associated events such as the Massacre of the Innocents) led Christians to remove this portion of the text. Historians can speculate as to how coincidental it could be that historical works preserved in the hands of Christians would be specifically missing years coinciding with Jesus’ birth and death (and the Bayesians among us will be justifiably suspicious that it is a handful of anonymous and less reliable texts that do discuss these supposed events); these sections would presumably be the most precious and protected. Justin Martyr, when supposedly arguing with Trypho, curiously fails to mention the Tacitean passage (as well as the

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83 Indeed, many would consider Jesus’ atoning death and resurrection to be the most significant events of all time.
85 Richard Carrier, personal communication, June 7, 2012.
Josephean passages), relying instead on “doctrines that are inspired by the Divine Spirit.” Finally, Josephus and Tacitus bestow scholars with the earliest non-Christian references to Jesus. Unfortunately, the best manuscripts date to the Middle Ages, so it cannot be known just how much Christian scribes may have manipulated them during the intervening centuries:

As with Josephus, so with Tacitus our observation must be tempered by the fact that the earliest manuscript of the *Annals* comes from the 11th century.

**Thallus (and Phlegon)**

The 9th-century Byzantine historian George Syncellus allegedly quotes 3rd-century Christian chronicler Sextus Julius Africanus—whose works are lost—who allegedly quoted 2nd-century historian Thallus—whose works are also lost. According to Syncellus, Julius (*Chronography* 18.1) said the following:

> On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his *History*, calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun… Phlegon records that, in the time of Tiberius Caesar, at full moon, there was a full eclipse of the sun from the sixth hour to the ninth…

Thallus, of whom little is known, allegedly mentioned a “darkness” which Christians may like to think refers to the darkness around the time of Jesus’ death (Mark 15:33). Historians do not know what Thallus said (for example, if he mentioned Jesus), if he said what Julius supposedly claims he said, if Syncellus is accurately reporting Julius’ words, or when Thallus may have said it. This is at least a third-hand report, appearing centuries after Jesus’ death, and so offers no convincing information about Jesus.

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89 Cf. Doherty *Jesus: Neither God Nor Man*, p. 643.
Julius also supposedly comments on Greek historian Phlegon (reported among the works of Syncellus and Origen), which generally shares the same issues as with the Thallus passage.91

**Pliny, Suetonius and Mara bar Serapion**

There exist a handful of indefinite reports that add very little to the debate over Jesus’ authentic sayings and deeds. In his 2nd-century discussions with Emperor Trajan, Roman author Pliny the Younger (CE 61-ca.112) made some references (book 10, letter 97) to Christians, such as the following:

They affirmed the whole of their guilt, or their error, was, that they met on a stated day before it was light, and addressed a form of prayer to Christ, as to a divinity…92

Praying to what seems to be a divine Christ (or any other activity directed towards such a Christ) says nothing of whether this divine Christ existed or not, any more than worshipping a god in any other religion would prove the existence of that god. As with the Tacitean passage, the identity of the Christ is not made explicit. Jesus historicist Bart Ehrman acknowledges that Pliny does not provide evidence that confirms the historical Jesus.93 From Suetonius’ (CE ca.70-ca.130) *Life of Claudius*:

Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from Rome.94

Chrestus is a Greek-derived proper name meaning “good,” so does not necessarily have to refer to Jesus. What word is actually used here is controversial due to the numerous variant manuscript readings. Jobjorn Boman discovered that the majority of early manuscripts indicate a proper name, while the few manuscripts that allude to the title Christ are typically late, noting that “it can be concluded that the occasional Christ-spellings in the MSS most likely are the conjectures by Christian scribes or scholars.”95

He also found, while surveying the writings of medieval chroniclers, that “most Christian works—

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91 Cf. Doherty *Jesus: Neither God Nor Man*, pp. 647-651.
93 Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, p. 52.
Haimo, Reginon, Herman, Orderic, Flores Historiarum, Godfrey, Magnus(?), Sicard, Alberto, Riccobaldo and all the above-mentioned annals—allude to the Suetonian sentence without connecting it to Christ or Christianity.” Also, while many early Christians were undoubtedly Jews, Christians are not specified in this passage. In any case, this passage offers little to no information about the historical Jesus.96 From A Letter of Mara, Son of Serapion, by Syrian philosopher Mara bar Serapion, scholars find:

For what benefit did the Athenians obtain by putting Socrates to death, seeing that they received as retribution for it famine and pestilence? Or the people of Samos by the burning of Pythagoras, seeing that in one hour the whole of their country was covered with sand? Or the Jews by the murder of their Wise King, seeing that from that very time their kingdom was driven away from them?97

There is no reference here to a Jesus or a Christ, but only to an unnamed “wise king.” Furthermore, the historical philosophers Pythagoras and Socrates are specifically named, unlike the unknown “wise king.” This passage also seems to blame the Jews for murdering this figure, while the canonical Gospels claim that it was the Romans who killed Jesus (Mark 14–15)—although “the Jews” could also be seen to be responsible (Matthew 27:12). Doherty also questions the likelihood that a pagan writer such as Mara would place the seemingly insignificant Jesus on the same level as “household names” such as Socrates and Pythagoras.98

The Talmud

There are a number of references to various characters called Jesus in the Jewish Talmud (specifically from the Gemara), which may or may not reference Jesus of Nazareth. Given that the Gemara is among the latest of all these sources (around the 5th and 6th centuries), and is a religious text that possibly makes use of other religious texts (such as the canonical Gospels and the Old Testament

96 Ehrman, Did Jesus Exist?, p. 53.
98 Doherty Jesus: Neither God Nor Man, p. 655.
scriptures), it offers little to no useful information with regards to the historical Jesus. One factor that may support the Talmud’s use is an unflattering portrayal of Jesus, rather than no Jesus at all; though that would depend on knowing that these are indeed references to Jesus of Nazareth. This cannot be known with certainty as Jesus is a very common Jewish name, found often in the Talmud and among the works of Josephus, with one example being Jesus bar Gamaliel (*Antiquities* 20.9.4).

**Conclusion**

None of the sources used to establish Jesus’ historicity or to provide authentic historical material regarding Jesus’ sayings and deeds are beyond scrutiny. All of the sources offer multiple challenges to historians. Many of the sources show clear signs of allegory, interpolation, fraud, myth, and subjectivity. The non-extant and hypothetical sources that supposedly precede the Gospels cannot be accurately dated or scrutinized, so ought not to be seriously considered as useful for historical Jesus research. The authors of the majority of the Epistles, mainly Paul and James, give very little reason to the historian to accept their testimony as historically accurate, or even as referring to an earthly Jesus. Even if the authors were reliable, the Epistles offer paltry information on the historical Jesus, especially when contrasted with the Gospels. The Gospels are anonymous, demonstrate clear Evangelical intent, contain considerable ahistorical and mythical material, contradict each other, influence each other, and appear decades after Jesus’ lifetime.

Except for the references among the writings of Josephus and Tacitus, the extra-biblical sources are very late. All these sources demonstrate some element of fraud or ambiguity, and generally do not tell us any more about Jesus than what is already known from the Gospels. None of the sources stem from Jesus’ own time. None of the sources come from proven eyewitnesses. These issues allow significant justifiable doubt on what Jesus said, what he did, who he really was, and if he even existed at all. There

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99 Ehrman, *Did Jesus Exist?*, pp. 66-68. I should clarify that the Talmudic references offer no useful information regarding Jesus as traditionally interpreted by mainstream historicists. It could prove valuable in arguing for a radically different Jesus, as mythicists might do.
should be no issue, then, in noting that Jesus’ ahistoricity is an epistemic possibility, and therefore expressing some reservations over his historicity is reasonable. From a Bayesian perspective, the earliest sources’ portrayal of Jesus in an entirely supernatural manner, and the complete lack of contemporary and secular accounts of Jesus, do considerable damage to any hypothesis that asserts the existence of a historical Jesus. The issues raised herein do not necessitate that the sources are of no use, or that Jesus did not exist historically; the critic will note that history deals not in certainties, but with probabilities. It is thus all the more pertinent for biblical historians to be transparent with their theories by employing Bayesian methodologies. The problems with the sources used in historical Jesus research render the possibility of authenticating any aspect of Jesus extremely difficult, if not impossible. Price speculates that the sources should point historical Jesus scholars in the direction of “complete agnosticism:”

One wonders if all these scholars came to a certain point and stopped, their assumption being, “If Jesus was a historical figure, he must have done and said something!” But their own criteria and critical tools, which we have sought to apply here with ruthless consistency, ought to have left them with complete agnosticism, which is where we have ended up.100

It is not within the scope of this article to argue for Jesus’ historicity or ahistoricity. The issues discussed do seem to indicate, however, that entertaining the idea of Jesus’ ahistoricity is not an exercise in madness, as many historicists would assume. Given the problematic sources that historical Jesus scholars have access to, and the failings of many of their methods, it seems appropriate to call for a thorough, and Bayesian, analysis of the evidence in order to determine if Jesus’ historicity or ahistoricity is more probable. Indeed, just such a task has been completed by independent historian Richard Carrier, whose recent book on the matter is currently being analyzed by scholars. If, in the future, similar reviews of the methodologies and sources of historical Jesus research would lead to a very skeptical, agnostic position, New Testament scholars might wonder what would become of their field and their jobs.

Such a move, however, could lead to new and honest research into the origin (or origins) of the Christian faith, and the development of the various Gnostic traditions. Furthermore, a positive implication could be that the focus of research by biblical scholars moves from unnecessarily and unsuccessfully authenticating various unlikely sayings and deeds to the intended messages of the teachings. These scholars may even find a home among Religious Studies departments, whose personnel are well aware that orthopraxy is often far more relevant to religious adherents than orthodoxy. Just as the Daoist need not exalt Laozi, or the Buddhist believe in the Buddha, the Christian’s religion need not be grounded in a literal Christ, or even an earthly and historical Jesus.

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101 Gager and Flusser also allude to the importance of the teachings, which have “the potential to change our world.” See John G. Gager, “Scholarship as Moral Vision: David Flusser on Jesus, Paul, and the Birth of Christianity,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 95, no. 1 (2005): 66.; Hector Avalos also encourages Biblical scholars to focus on solving worthwhile “problems.” See Avalos *End of Biblical Studies*, p. 314.
Bibliography


Raphael Lataster: Questioning the Plausibility of Jesus Ahistoricity Theories


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“I have committed my life to Jesus Christ and I can work for Him in prison as well as out.” These were the last words spoken by Chuck Colson as he left the District Court on the 21st of July 1974—words indicative of the profound transformation that he had only recently undergone. Up until 1973, Colson had pursued a life of ambition and worldly success, becoming a lawyer and, after what can only be described as a meteoric rise to power, Special Counsel to President Richard Nixon. But in the 1970s, it became abundantly clear that Colson, in his rise to success, had also lost his sense of fair play when he was indicted for his role in the Watergate Scandal.

But amidst the hubbub of Watergate, he was introduced to C.S. Lewis’ Mere Christianity by his close friend, Tom Philips, and became an Evangelical Christian, joining a Washington-based prayer group. Colson enjoyed a spiritual revival, and though he felt innocent of conspiring to cover up the Watergate Scandal, he also felt a desire to be truthful, ultimately choosing to enter a plea of guilty to an obstruction of justice charge based on his prior attempts to defame Daniel Ellsberg, the military analyst who had leaked the Pentagon Papers. But throughout this entire ordeal, the press continued to cast doubts on the sincerity of his conversion; Tom Braden, in The Washington Post, bitingly suggested that Colson was “making one of the great sacrifice plays of history.” Indeed, it would take much more than a couple of months spent in prison to change the public’s view of Colson.

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1 Thank you to Professor Young, who helped me to shape and refine my ideas and who has served as a mentor throughout the semester. Jasmine and Denise, you have been excellent conference partners who have forced me to complicate my thoughts and deepen my arguments. To my fellow Christians at Princeton Faith and Action, thank you for discussing ideas with me. Finally, thank you to my roommates for reading over my final draft.


4 Colson, Born Again, pp. 174-180.


Colson entered prison in July of 1974, spending most of his time in Alabama’s Maxwell Correctional Facility; there, he began to identify failures in the prison system as a whole, particularly with regards to the lack of a rehabilitative focus for prisoners. Spurred by his newfound religious sentiments, he formed a prayer group at Maxwell and became convinced that he was meant to serve God by developing a prison ministry. After being released from prison in January of 1975, Colson went on to found Prison Fellowship the following year, with the goal of seeking to “disciple inmates who will stand as living monuments of God’s grace.”

However, despite what can only be described as a liberal attitude toward social reform, Chuck Colson is often remembered as an outspoken social conservative who espoused traditional family values. Indeed, while his death in 2012 certainly inspired a slew of obituaries focused on Prison Fellowship and on Colson’s social policies, it also inspired articles that focused on Colson’s legacy as a Religious Right powerhouse. The latter association is one undoubtedly influenced by Colson himself, who constantly wrote and spoke about the correctness of the Religious Right movement. Similarly, scholarly sources have tended to approach Colson’s views on prison reform in two distinct ways. On the one hand, many sources have identified Colson’s views as being part and parcel of the New Right Evangelicalism of the

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7 Colson, Born Again, pp. 310-411.
8 Ibid, p. 430.
10 In this essay, the terms fundamentalist and New Right Evangelical are used synonymously, as these terms both refer to theological attitudes. The term Religious Right (understood to be the Christian Religious Right) is used when appropriate, but note that Religious Right is a collection of political factions, characterized by support for socially conservative policies. Furthermore, also note that Religious Right policies are often fundamentalist in nature.
20th Century, a movement that upholds traditional family values and anti-gay, anti-abortion views; these sources have tended to gloss over the fact that Colson’s support for rehabilitative justice is anything but fundamentalist in nature. On the other hand, many sources have dwelled on New Evangelicalism—a recent Evangelical trend—and its institutional support for social justice issues such as prison reform; however, these sources have tended to ignore how New Evangelical concepts on social justice are startlingly similar to Colson’s views on prison reform. While these two schools of thought are not directly contradictory, it is only by distinguishing between Colson’s fundamentalist beliefs and his attitudes toward prison that we are able to truly understand his legacy. Although many of Colson’s attitudes are in fact typical New Right Evangelical ideals, his views on prison reform and on applying the Christian worldview to social issues should be viewed instead as an important precursor to New Evangelical ideas; in a sense, Colson should be viewed as a transitional figure who exhibited both New Right Evangelical and New Evangelical views, but who did not fall entirely into one or the other category.

At first glance, it seems evident and justifiable that Colson was a perfect example of a fundamentalist; after all, Colson viewed himself as a champion or at least a member of the Religious Right movement, arrayed against such concepts as abortion and sexual deviance. In his rousing essay Political Exile, Colson himself argues that in “a socially liberal era,” committed to “abortion rights...[and] to adding sexual orientation to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act” and to other such

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14 In this essay, the terms New Evangelicalism and Emergent Church movement are used synonymously, as they are in Marcia Pally, The New Evangelicals: Expanding the Vision of the Common Good (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2011).

“threats to religious liberty,” it is necessary to build up “faith communities” and to continue to “adhere to biblical orthodoxy.” Clearly, Colson viewed himself as opposed to the socially liberal policies of the 21st century and emphasized the need to continue adhering to Religious Right values. Indeed, in an article in *The Christian Post*, Colson argued that “there is no such thing as a ‘gay child,’” that “we are all designed to be heterosexual” and that parents “can lessen the chances their children will grow up homosexual,” firmly voicing the fundamentalist view that homosexuality is, at the very least, undesirable. The values that Colson supported—values that emphasized the need to preserve the traditional family unit—are those identified by the religious historian Seth Dowland as hallmarks of the Christian Right agenda and clearly contrast with socially liberal policies that take a much less involved stance in society.

However, while many of the ideals that Colson espoused fit comfortably with New Right Evangelical doctrines, his views on prison reform can only be described as exceptional and out of place. In his autobiography, *Born Again*, Colson empathizes with the prisoners around him, arguing that the prison system destroys a prisoner’s sense of personal identity and spawns “contempt for the law, even among those receiving deserved punishment.” Furthermore, after seeing what prayer and trust in God could do for the individuals around him, Colson became convinced that God had put him in prison so that he could devote the rest of his life to bringing the Word of God and rehabilitative change to prisoners across the nation. Colson, because of his prison experiences, was able to understand prison reform in a way that many other New Right Evangelicals could not; it was only in prison that Colson

began to see justice from the prisoner’s perspective, rather than from the perspective of a lawyer, a civil servant, or a member of the general public. And it was only in prison that Colson realized the need to address prisoners as individuals—individuals not too different from members of the general public; by seeing prisoners as human rather than as statistics, or as a faceless bloc, Colson was motivated to approach prison reform in a truly rehabilitative way.

But Colson’s appreciation for rehabilitative justice contrasts starkly with New Right Evangelical attitudes toward prison reform, which have been thoroughly analyzed by religious and communications scholars as well as by sociologists. Anne-Marie Cusac, a Professor of Communications and award-winning journalist, explores the cultural evolution of prison reform in the United States, arguing that the 1970s and 1980s featured “the rise of belief in [the] evil criminal who will not reform.” The language of 20th-century commentators, according to Cusac, suggested that any attempt to rehabilitate and reintegrate criminals would not work because of an inherent, incurable wickedness that plagued these criminals. Interestingly enough, Colson himself seems to have been cognizant of just how much his views on prison reform differed from typical Evangelical attitudes toward criminals; in an interview with Sojourners magazine, a Christian publication, Colson identified and argued against the Evangelical, law and order attitude that if you “crack down on criminals, you’re going to stop crime,” noting how opposed many Evangelicals were to his ideas on rehabilitative prison reform. So on the one hand, the majority of Evangelicals as well as members of the general public in the latter half of the 20th century espoused politics of mass incarceration and believed the criminal to be incurable and a grave threat to society. On the other hand, Chuck Colson, at the same time, was advocating a rehabilitative approach

toward prisoners and argued against mass incarceration; these views made him an outlier with respect to the rest of the New Right Evangelical Movement.

But while Colson’s views on prison reform set him apart from other New Right Evangelicals, they are startlingly similar to the views ingrained in New Evangelicalism, which has emerged only recently. However, while literature on New Evangelicals tends to focus on the newfound appreciation for social justice issues, that same literature has tended to ignore Chuck Colson and his attitudes toward rehabilitative prison reform; it is only when we view two of Colson’s attitudes as a precursor to New Evangelical ideas, however, that we can begin to more fully understand his tremendous legacy and realize that New Evangelicalism is not as entirely new as the name might suggest. New Evangelicals differ from the Old Guard of the 20th century in several important ways; in particular, Colson’s support for rehabilitative prison reform and his conviction that a Christian worldview had to be applied to all facets of society were ahead of his time and prefigured what was to come in New Evangelicalism.

One defining characteristic of New Evangelicalism is widespread support for applying a Christian worldview to different aspects of society. This New Evangelical value has been well documented by media sources and is seen as a significant break from the concerns of New Right Evangelicals. Jim Wallis, Editor-in-Chief of Sojourners, argues that while “conventional wisdom still says that liberal Christians have a social conscience and Evangelicals do not…reality is changing…and Evangelicals are exhibiting a growing conviction and conscience.”24 While the New Right Evangelicals of the 20th century were focused on debating the morality of issues such as homosexuality and abortion, the New Evangelicals, argues Wallis, are characterized by a focus on applying their values to such social issues as “poverty, race, and the environment.”25 This shift in values is significant because it heralds a newfound Evangelical involvement in society and, as Wallis’ piece demonstrates, is changing the public

25 Ibid.
perception of Evangelical Christianity for the better. Frances Fitzgerald, in *The New Yorker*, takes Wallis’s argument further, suggesting that the Emergent Churches are characterized by a focus on social justice, but adding that they actually pose the “first major challenge to the religious right in a quarter of a century.” While this argument is contentious and somewhat sensationalist—after all, many New Evangelical ideals are rooted in New Right Evangelical values—it illustrates the point that the New Evangelical focus on applying Christianity to such demographics as prisoners, sex workers, and drug users represents a break from the New Right Evangelical focus on the morality of issues such as homosexuality.

But characterizations of this newfound focus on the Christian worldview are markedly incomplete, for they fail to link the New Evangelical concern for social welfare to Colson’s own ideas; this goes beyond giving credit where credit is due—linking aspects of New Evangelicalism to Colson sheds light on the roots and rise of New Evangelicalism. That Colson, like the New Evangelicals of today, believed in applying a Christian worldview to society is most clearly demonstrated in his book, *Justice That Restores*. Christians, Colson argues, have a “cultural commission or cultural mandate” to “obey God’s command to be fruitful, to fill and subdue the earth;” focusing on justice, he goes on, is the best way of fulfilling this mandate, of renewing culture. And the only way to escape chaos is to accept God’s “physical and moral order;” taking the biblical worldview and applying it to social issues is the only way to achieve any measure of “true justice.” In both the case of New Evangelical doctrines and in the case of Colson’s personal ideology, there exists a core belief that Christians have a specific responsibility to extend their influence into social issues. Colson’s focus on prison reform employs the same logic as the New Evangelical focus on human rights issues, on sex workers and on addicts; all of

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these cases stem from a desire to go beyond mere evangelism and belief in God and extend instead to cover all facets of society. Therefore, Colson, who worked mostly in the 20th century, should be viewed as a precursor to the New Evangelicals specifically with regards to the principle of applying a biblical worldview to social issues; consequently, the New Evangelical emphasis on this Christian worldview is by no means revolutionary, for Colson was advocating precisely this idea in the 20th century, long before the rise of the Emergent Churches.

Furthermore, Colson’s attitude toward rehabilitative justice specifically was pioneering. The 20th century view on the criminal, held both by the public and by Evangelicals, favored mass incarceration and punitive measures, which contrasted with Colson’s goal of providing spiritual care for the individual. Prison Fellowship, with its goals of evangelizing prisoners and restoring families, emphasizes the prisoner’s innate capability for goodness, rather than the innate evilness that the majority of 20th century commentators identified. According to a University of Pennsylvania Study, Prison Fellowship’s focus on prisoner reentry and on rehabilitative measures has paid off. The first batch of prisoners to go through the InnerChange Freedom Initiative (IFI)—an initiative organized by Prison Fellowship—had a recidivism rate of eight percent, compared to a just over twenty percent recidivism rate of the matched comparison group. The drastically lower recidivism rate found among graduates of the Prison Fellowship programme indicates that Colson’s spiritual, rehabilitative approach to prisoners was far more successful than other approaches used at the time.

Evangelicals have started to realize the merits of Colson’s approach only recently. In fact, attitudes toward prison reform have changed only in the 21st century, as proven by a seminal piece of American legislation, the Second Chance Act of 2007, which called for the development of

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“comprehensive strategic reentry plans” and was meant to drastically reduce the recidivism that 21st century commentators thought to be a result of punitive prison approaches. The Second Chance Act is reflective of a newfound focus on individual prisoner care as well as of shifting Evangelical concerns—David Green, a criminologist, argues that George Bush, who proved instrumental in helping to pass the Act, was greatly influenced by his Evangelical speechwriter, Michael Gerson, a supporter of rehabilitative justice; Bush, for his part, once “told journalists of his hope that his presidency would usher in a Third Great Awakening,” emphasizing the revivalist nature of Bush’s theology. It is probable that Bush’s ideas on prison reform were influenced by Gerson’s focus on social justice—a focus reflective of the social values of the New Evangelicals. Furthermore, this Evangelical shift in attitude appears to have occurred not only among politicians, but amongst individual groups and community organizations as well. Indeed, a June 2013 Evangelical Leaders Survey conducted by the National Association of Evangelicals noted that “almost all Evangelical leaders (95 percent) have visited a prison” and that many have become “engaged in prison ministry;” furthermore, leaders tend to visit prisons “through different parachurch organizations including…Prison Fellowship.” Thus, as a whole, Evangelicals have moved away from aligning themselves with punitive justice and law-and-order attitudes to publically supporting Colson’s vision of rehabilitative justice. That political reforms have been enacted only in the 21st century and that Evangelicals have begun to relinquish their support for punitive justice only recently indicates just how avant-garde Colson’s ideas on justice were.

Nevertheless, it is a mistake to view Colson as purely falling into the New Evangelical camp; while his attitudes toward prison reform are particularly well-received today, the Religious Right values that Colson supported—traditional family values—are in decline among today’s Evangelicals. The

34 David A. Green, “Penal Optimism and Second Chances: The Legacies of American Protestantism and the Prospects for Penal Reform,” in Punishment & Society, p. 139.
Public Religion Research Institute determined that while only fifteen percent of white Evangelical seniors supported same-sex marriage, fifty-one percent of white Evangelicals under the age of thirty-five supported same-sex marriage, indicating that younger Evangelicals tend to espouse more socially liberal views than older Evangelicals, at least toward gay marriage. This shift in values has also been accelerated by the shifting views of important Evangelical figures; Joel Osteen, an American televangelist, argued on the Piers Morgan show that while homosexuality is a sin, Osteen was accepting of homosexuals and would attend a homosexual marriage out of respect. This view, that homosexuality should at least be allowed, represents a shift from the hardline opposition of Christian fundamentalists espoused by such figures as John Macarthur; indeed, while Osteen accepts and respects homosexuality, Macarthur argues that the rise of homosexuality, in all of its evil and darkness, has led to hate against God. Clearly, the values that the New Evangelicals cherish today are already quite different from the policies and ideas that Colson and other Religious Right Evangelicals espoused in the 20th century.

Thus we cannot simply view Colson as purely being part of the Old Evangelical movement or of the New Evangelical movement. To fully understand his tremendous legacy, we must instead view Colson as a transitional figure; while many of Colson’s attitudes and beliefs can only be described as fundamentalist or as New Right Evangelical in nature, his views on prison reform were out of place and must be interpreted as a precursor to the New Evangelical focus on social policies. This, in turn, creates several implications. Perhaps the best way of viewing Colson is to not label him either as a New Right or New Evangelical, but to realize that Colson was indicative of larger social changes, of the evolution of New Right to New Evangelicalism; this evolution, still continuing today, has not been an all-in-one event, but rather has featured a gradual shift in social values. Colson, whose ideology was a synthesis of

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37 “Joel Osteen Interview on Piers Morgan Tonight.” In Piers Morgan Live. CNN. January 26, 2011.
Old and New, can thus be seen as a transitional figure, as a symbol of that gradual evolution of Old to New Evangelicalism. At the very least, we can conclude that New Evangelicalism is not quite as utterly new as its name might suggest; after all, Colson was arguing for rehabilitative justice and for applying the Christian worldview to all facets of society long before the emergence of New Evangelicalism. Finally, while it is evident that the influence and popularity of New Right and fundamentalist views are declining among today’s born again Christians, the fact that New Evangelicals are carrying out Colson’s vision—of bringing Christ to the troubled in society—indicates that Colson’s legacy will be carried on by the Emergent Churches, even after the decline of traditional, fundamentalist Evangelicalism.
Bibliography


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† THE IDEAL—ONE POSSIBILITY FOR THE FUTURE OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY †

Scholars in the area of religious studies face a conspicuous challenge if and when they desire to employ the concept of identity: Given the overabundance of theories and the notorious difficulties in articulating a consistently acceptable definition, is identity still relevant for the nature and scope of contemporary research on religious phenomena? In *Religion, Identity, and Change*, anthropologists Simon Coleman and Peter Collins inadvertently, yet incisively, encapsulate the dilemma. They show that each identity theory fits into one of two classifications: primordial or situationalist.¹ The former is essentially the view of identity that suggests historical continuity. On the other hand, those theories of identity labeled situationalist often make antithetical statements about societies and human nature, emphasizing the inconsistency of identity and the tendency for certain personas to emerge out of specific scenarios. In other words, observing and analyzing identities requires recognition of the situations that engender them.

If these two types are understood broadly—allowing the primordial to include any identity theory or definition for which continuity is central, and situationalist theories being those founded on the premise that identity is contextually contingent—many of the most popular theories, both old and new, find their place. Taken in turn, each category illuminates one pole on the spectrum that extends between assumption and observation, what is thought to be true and what is seen to be true. Perhaps this does not constitute an irresolvable impasse, however. If religious identity is understood to be an ideal, a latent possibility rather than a realized actuality, we may be closer to bridging the chasm between the primordial and the situational.

**The Primordial**

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The primordial view of identity may entail continuity between community and individual, past and present, et cetera. Often this is the sort of identity intended by those pushing for recognition of a certain ethnicity or nationality; uniformity/homogeneity is paramount. Yet, this category also encompasses many of the most popular ideas from religious studies’ past. In 1965, for instance, the sociologist Robert Bellah suggested,

…the central function of a religion is to act as a cultural gyroscope, to provide a stable set of definitions of the world and, correlative, of the self…It is this stability, continuity, and coherence provided by commitment to a set of religious symbols (or perhaps better to what they symbolize) that give religion such a prominent place in defining the identity of a group or person. Identity is a statement of what a person or a group is essentially and, as it were, permanently.²

During the 1960s and 70s, scholars of religion began to address the relationship of the individual to his or her religion. One of the underlying assumptions, of course, was that humans strive for stability. Thus, Bellah adds that “identity does not change except under very severe pressure.”³ Orrin Klapp, Bellah’s contemporary, addresses this same drive for consistency in Collective Search for Identity:

[Identity is] a functioning system of three variables: 1) what a person thinks about himself introspectively, 2) what he projects or sees imaged or accepted in the eyes of others (his social identity); and 3) his feelings validated when “real to me” and when shared with others.⁴

Here, identity is conceived as the overlap of these three components. Continuity is assumed, this time imagined as the nucleus of a Venn diagram where the three constituent circles are labeled: self-definition, social identity, and emotional concord between self and others.

It is significant to note that definitions of identity similar to Klapp’s persist in religious studies. Social anthropologist and theologian Douglas Davies only recently defined identity as “the intersection point of self-understanding, of the views others have of us, and of a society’s preferred values and associated emotions.”⁵ In this sense, identity is the product of personal negotiations with society, but the

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³ Ibid.
emphasis remains on the success of such negotiations rather than the interminable discord caused by changing circumstances.

The Situational

Social psychologist Steven Hitlin poignantly summarizes the situationalist position: “Decades of social psychological research can be boiled down to one insight: if we want to predict someone’s behavior, we are better off knowing where they are rather than who they are.” Likewise, sociologist Sheldon Stryker incorporates similar conclusions into his concept of identity salience: “Identity salience is defined as the probability that identity will be invoked across a variety of situations, or alternatively across persons in a given situation.” The resounding consensus is that “persons have as many identities as distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and play roles” (Stryker et al. 2000: 286). For sociologist Mark Chaves, this directly affects the scientific study of religion. His recent comments on the religious congruence fallacy explain why. Chaves defines religious congruence as “consistency among an individual’s religious beliefs and attitudes, consistency between religious ideas and behavior, and religious ideas, identities, or schemas that are chronically salient and accessible to individuals across contexts and situations.” Scholars commit a fallacy, then, when they ignore the ubiquity of incongruence and mistakenly “connect religiosity to what look like logically related outcomes.” After all, “striving for congruence is not an essential feature of religion—unless we declare it such by definition.”

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8 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid, 9.
Religious identity, then, is not a cohesive expression or definition of one’s social and sacred values, roles, and actions. Instead, religious identity may transform over time, receive fresh articulation given new situations, or may struggle with or against alternative identities throughout the daily life of the actor. The various understandings of identity offered by those in the situationalist camp necessarily focus on this competition and the presence, or not, of corresponding behaviors. The continuity and stability noted by Bellah and others is empirically invalidated by the myriad of supporting studies offered by these contemporary social scientists.

The Ideal as Potential Solution

Sociological theories, however, frequently employ the term ideal in order to underscore the social foundations of religious beliefs as well as the function of religion in society. In his ideal-society theory, Harold Fallding maintains the veracity of an objective ideal outside of human experience, an “ideal possibility, a potential, within every encounter, relationship and society which constitutes it from the beginning, and which can guide its unfolding and judge it at the end as having realized or forfeited its opportunity.” In response to this objective potentiality, humans establish their own life-possibility, or ideal form of existence. Writing in the late 19th century, Georg Simmel concurs by describing the social origins of religion in terms of a community’s claims and benefits on the one hand and the individual’s ethical-social duties on the other; these interact in such a way that a concept of the Absolute is necessarily and naturally posited in order to provide objectivity to both. Thus, “The relations between people…find their substantial and ideal expression in the idea of the divine.”

In The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, Émile Durkheim similarly asserts that religion expresses a “collective ideal” which is the result of “the school of collective life that the individual has

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learned to idealize.”14 It should also be noted that Durkheim carefully states, “…it is an arbitrary simplification to see only the idealistic side of religion—in its way, it is realistic.15 Religion reflects society, both through abstract idealizations and integrations of reality. This resembles Hans Mol’s observation of a tension between the ultimate meaning offered by religions and the moral codes therein. Succinctly expressed, “The relevance of a moral system lies in its capacity to be concrete rather than eternal. The relevance of a meaning system lies in its capacity to be eternal rather than concrete.”16 For Mol, this is evidence of the dialectical nature of society and its institutions; there is incessant oscillation between adaptability and stability.17

For us, Mol’s statement serves as a window into one possibility for retaining identity as a salient analytical tool. Moral codes and meaning systems are the two sides of the religious coin. The former illuminates the observed incongruence of religious patterns (the failure to achieve the ideal morality) while the latter sheds light on the presence of primordial notions (as myths and rituals reinforce an ideal history and self-definition). If, sociologically speaking, religions are idealizations of social living, then perhaps it is appropriate to view religious identities as idealizations as well. In other words, the relationship between belief and behavior is not one of cause and effect, but they both have the potential to evoke identity because they are both a form of the ideal. The meaning system posits historical continuity; the moral system delineates the congruent from the incongruent as community members enjoy varying degrees of success in abiding by the rules and espoused values of the collective.

15 Ibid, 315.
Identity is not only a nebulous term in everyday parlance; it is an almost insurmountable obstacle in academic study. Though there may be legitimate cause for concern, the notion of identity generally, and religious identity in particular, should not be abandoned. In a sense, we are striving to end the game of tug-of-war between those in the vein of Rudolph Otto or Mircea Eliade and those who eschew interpretation in favor of dry data collection. In striking fashion, the same tension permeates the dichotomous categorizations of identity theories adumbrated by Coleman and Collins. Primordial definitions stem from efforts to capture *emic* conceptions of identity while situational approaches derive from empirical, *etic* studies.

These two categories may be integrated in our view. It is possible to approach religious identity as an ideal put forward by religion. In this sense, it purports to infiltrate the group’s values, attitudes, memories, and ethics. It extends historical continuity, stability, and order but leaves room for religious incongruence by persisting as a sacred cloak covering all experiences: moral successes and failure, congruence and inconsistency. Perhaps the question, then, is not whether and to what extent self-identified Muslims (or Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, etc.) act in ways consonant with their religion’s beliefs but how they use their religion to interpret both the moments when they do and do not exhibit such congruence. As investigators of religious phenomena, we should remember that identities are invoked separately from any actions performed. With this in mind, it may be easier to see both the import of identity for the believers themselves as well as some of the minutiae of their religious systems.
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