

THE UNHISTORICAL JESUS

CHAPTER 4

Avalos, H. (2007). *The end of biblical studies*. Amherst, N.Y:
Prometheus Books.

If biblical studies has ended or should end, then we cannot end our treatment without evaluating the success of research into the central character of the entire Christian Bible. While the search for Abraham, Jacob, and Moses is now dead in academia, the search for the "historical" Jesus seems to be even more vibrant than at the time of Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), who is credited with initiating the modern scholarly search for the historical Jesus. According to Tom Wright, by the late twentieth century we had arrived at a so-called Third Quest for the historical Jesus.¹

The aim in this chapter is not so much to rehearse all the arguments for or against the historical Jesus. Rather, I will concentrate on any "net gains" in knowledge about Jesus since the time of Reimarus. We aim to undertake this assessment by looking at the claimed successes in different parts of the spectrum of biblical scholars, both conservative and liberal. We will show that while we have accumulated much information about first-century Palestine, there is a terminus in the amount of knowledge that we can extract about Jesus in the first century.

As is the case of the study of archaeology and history in the Hebrew Bible, the main issues with regard to the New Testament center on epistemology. In the case of evangelical apologetics, we demonstrate the failure of the supposedly more philosophically sophisticated historical methods used to combat naturalism in explaining biblical

events. We illustrate these failures by the single most important test case of the "new" antinaturalist philosophy: the resurrection of Jesus.

In the case of the liberal Jesus, we shall concentrate on the project known as the Jesus Seminar and its members in order to show that while the supernatural has been eliminated from the reconstruction of the historical Jesus, the portrayals that have resulted are so inconclusive that we still cannot say with any confidence what Jesus said or did. We will also examine more closely some of the promises of Stanley Porter, who claims to have developed new criteria that will provide "a way forward in historical-Jesus research."²

Our overall discussion demonstrates that both sides of the spectrum, liberal and conservative, are actually closer than we might suspect in their bibliolatry and religionism. Scholars on both sides usually construct portraits of Jesus that mirror themselves, in terms of theology, politics, and ethical values.³ The fact that neither side has produced any verifiable knowledge about Jesus forms yet another argument to end biblical studies as we know it.

RESURRECTING THE RESURRECTION

A relatively new and highly educated crop of evangelical apologists is now claiming to have found philosophical breakthroughs that will bring about the demise of "naturalism," which is perceived to be the primary enemy of all sound philosophy. The start of such a trend is witnessed by, among other events, the founding of the Society of Christian Philosophers in 1978.⁴ And as in the case of previous generations of evangelicals, the test case is the supposed posed miraculous return to life of Jesus after his crucifixion and burial. The

stories of the resurrection are in the Gospels of Matthew (28), Mark (16), Luke (24), and John (20).

While most academic scholars abandoned the historicity of the resurrection already by the late nineteenth century, there are still efforts to argue that attacks on the historicity of the resurrection are based on Enlightenment paradigms that supposedly now have been destroyed by more recent developments in epistemology. These attacks on naturalism are part of a new wave that is also attacking the naturalistic assumptions of the sciences in an effort to bolster religionist agendas such as Intelligent Design. That Christology and Intelligent Design are intimately linked is announced by William Dembski, one of the primary gurus of intelligent design: "So, too, Christology tells us that the conceptual soundness of a scientific theory cannot be maintained apart from Christ."⁵

Naturalism refers here to the idea that natural causes are the only valid explanations for all phenomena, including historical phenomena. In general, some scholars find it useful to distinguish between *ontological naturalism* and *methodological naturalism*.⁶ The former argues that the natural world is all that exists. The corollary of that proposition, of course, is that supernatural phenomena and entities, such as God, do not exist. Methodological naturalism, on the other hand, makes no claim about whether the supernatural exists. Rather, it argues that natural entities and causes are the only ones we can know or investigate. Accordingly, the success of any effort to establish the historicity of the resurrection is linked with the allegation that naturalism is inadequate to explain the resurrection accounts.

One champion of the antinaturalist approach to establishing the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is William Lane Craig. Craig has two doctorates, one in philosophy from the University of Birmingham (1977) and one in theology from the University of Munich (1984). He has authored or edited over thirty books and scores of

articles.⁷ He is particularly known for debating prominent skeptics and secular humanists, including the present author.⁸ His official Web site lists him currently as a research professor in philosophy at Talbot School of Theology (1996-) and as a visiting professor of philosophy at Wheaton College, Illinois (2003-).

With regard to the resurrection, Craig argues that advances in the philosophy of history render an argument for the resurrection a reasonable one. Craig relies heavily on historical criteria developed by C. Behan McCullagh, a philosopher of history, to establish that the resurrection probably happened. Craig appraises McCullagh's work thusly, "In his book *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, historian C. B. McCullagh lists six tests used by historians to determine the best explanation for given historical facts. The hypothesis 'God raised Jesus from the dead' passes all of these tests."⁹ Since these criteria are so central to Craig's argument, they bear repetition at length as represented by Craig:¹⁰

1. *It has great explanatory scope.* It explains why the tomb was found empty, why the disciples saw postmortem appearances of Jesus, and why the Christian faith came into being.

2. *It has great explanatory power.* It explains why the body of Jesus was gone, why people repeatedly saw Jesus alive despite his earlier public execution, and so forth.

3. *It is plausible.* Given the historical context of Jesus' own unparalleled life and claims, the resurrection serves as divine confirmation of those radical claims.

4. *It is not ad hoc or contrived.* It requires only one additional hypothesis—that is—that God exists. And even that need not be an additional hypothesis if you already believe in God's existence ...

5. *It is in accord with accepted beliefs.* The hypothesis "God raised Jesus from the dead" does not in any way conflict with the accepted belief that people don't rise *naturally* from the dead. The Christian accepts that belief wholeheartedly as he accepts the hypothesis that God raised Jesus from the dead.

6. *It far outstrips any rival theories in meeting conditions 1 through 5.* Down through history various rival explanations have been offered ... Such hypotheses have been almost universally rejected by contemporary scholarship. No naturalistic hypothesis has attracted a great number of scholars.

The first item to observe is that Craig modifies the number and general nature of the criteria outlined by McCullagh. As used by McCullagh, the criteria are mostly meant to *differentiate between natural explanations, not between natural and supernatural explanations*. And while Craig confidently proclaims that the resurrection hypothesis "passes all these tests," here is what McCullagh himself says:

One example which illustrates the conditions most vividly is discussion of the Christian hypothesis that Jesus rose from the dead. This hypothesis is of greater explanatory scope and power than other hypotheses which try to account for the relevant evidence, but is less plausible and more *ad hoc* than they are. That is why it is difficult to decide on the evidence whether it should be accepted or rejected.¹¹

Further problems arise when we examine how McCullagh applies these criteria to one of his prime illustrations, the death of William II (Rufus), king of England from 1087 to 1100. According to most historians, William died mysteriously during a hunting expedition on August 2, 1100, an event recorded by William of Malmesbury and other medieval chroniclers.¹²

McCullagh undertakes an evaluation of three explanations for William's death that were discussed by an earlier historian,

Christopher Brooke. The latter raised the possibility that William II was killed as part of a conspiracy that resulted in the crowning of his brother, Henry I, three days later.¹³ These three explanations may be summarized as follows:

1. The king was killed accidentally.
2. The king was killed through witchcraft.
3. The king was killed as part of a conspiracy.

Most historians will opt for the first and third. But why do most historians, including McCullagh, not usually accept that the king was killed through witchcraft? McCullagh refers to his criterion of "plausibility" and tells us:

As for the second hypothesis, a decision about whether the evidence which it explains also renders it probable to any extent, depends upon one's view of the occult. Do dreams and portents of events which subsequently occur make it likely that evil powers are at work, or not? If the answer is that they do, then the reports of those dreams and portents do confer plausibility upon the second hypothesis; but if the answer is negative, then the reports do not contribute to its plausibility.¹⁴

So, in actuality, the "plausibility" criterion is quite subjective. McCullagh provides no criteria for preferring one view of the occult over another, or over no view of the occult at all. Apparently, if one's view is that the occult exists, then it is allowed "plausibility." If someone else believes that the occult does not exist, then witchcraft is not "plausible" at all. If we apply this criterion evenhandedly, then we could render the claims of any religion plausible or implausible. For example, if our view is that Krishna does work in the world, then explanations appealing to Krishna's actions in the world can be used. No further evidence is needed to justify having that view.

McCullagh's sixth criterion is either misrepresented by Craig or adapted without much notice that it has been adapted. McCullagh's sixth criterion states:

It must be *disconfirmed by fewer accepted beliefs* than any other incompatible hypothesis about the same subject; that is, when conjoined with accepted truths it must imply fewer observation statements and other statements which are believed to be false.¹⁵

Craig's representation of the sixth criterion ("*It far outstrips any rival theories in meeting conditions 1 through 5*") apparently now refers to how much consensus a theory has gained. Craig elaborates this criterion with this statement:

Down through history various rival explanations have been offered.... Such hypotheses have been almost universally rejected by contemporary scholarship. No naturalistic hypothesis has attracted a great number of scholars.¹⁶

Of course, such a criterion depends on which group of "scholars" one regards as authoritative. More importantly, elsewhere Craig rejects the use of "consensus" as a criterion, something reflected in his approval of historian Morton White's attack on "historical relativism":¹⁷

White charges that the most dangerous thing about historical relativism is the way in which it can be used to justify historical distortions. The ultimate result of this totalitarian fiddling with the past is envisioned by George Orwell in 1984 ... "Whatever the Party holds to be true is truth."¹⁸

If Craig is inconsistent about the validity of consensus, then he is just as inconsistent about the use of "radical dissimilarity" as a criterion for historical explanation. In a debate with John Dominic Crossan, the celebrated historical Jesus scholar, Craig argues:

In summary, there are good historical grounds for affirming that Jesus rose from the dead in confirmation of his radical personal claims. And Dr.

Crossan's denial of this fact is based on idiosyncratic presuppositions which no other serious New Testament critic accepts.¹⁹

In the very same paragraph Craig is arguing that the resurrection of Jesus is a credible event because Jesus made "radical" and unique claims. On the other hand, Crossan is not credible because he makes claims no other New Testament critic accepts. Uniqueness, therefore, is applied on a pick-and-choose basis.

In any case, Craig misrepresents McCullagh's criteria, and McCullagh's application of his criteria actually yields inconclusive results even when applied to natural phenomena. In the case of William II, McCullagh admits that his conclusion is ambiguous, and follows Brooke in admitting that "[t]he most we can say is this: If Rufus' death in August 1100 was an accident, Henry I was an exceptionally lucky man."²⁰ McCullagh adds: "It looks as if arguments to the best explanation are not much more useful than simple hypothetical-deductive arguments after all."²¹ More importantly, McCullagh, unlike Craig, understands that these criteria are not useful for deciding between natural and supernatural explanations.²²

MARIAN APPARITIONS AND THE RESURRECTION

Ironically, McCullagh's criteria, as used by Craig, are satisfied by many other events, whose historicity Craig rejects. One example is the Marian apparitions, which form the closest parallel to the Jesus apparition stories. The mother of Jesus, Mary, is dead. Yet she reportedly has appeared alive for at least a thousand years.²³ One of the most recent and dramatic series of apparitions occurred at Medjugorje in old Yugoslavia.

The first reported apparitions at Medjugorje began on June 24, 1981, when some Croatian-speaking children claimed that the Virgin Mary had appeared to them on a hill.²⁴ While many Protestants mistakenly believe that the visionaries do not claim to see something objectively present, these children emphatically affirm that they saw Mary as a fully physical and real person.²⁵ The children were met with initial skepticism and harassment from some authorities. Surprisingly, one of the most vocal skeptics was Pavao Zanic, their own local bishop, who, according to one transcript of an interview, view, declared: "In my opinion Medjugorje is the greatest deceit and swindle in the history of the Church," a statement that would be equivalent to the skepticism expressed by Jewish priests in the case of Jesus.²⁶

Despite the political conflicts caused by the apparitions within the local diocese, and despite the fact that the Catholic Church has not officially affirmed the authenticity of the visions, these supposed "witnesses" never recanted, and an extensive battery of medical tests concluded that the children were not suffering from any sort of psychiatric delusion.²⁷ In short, already these "witnesses" have been subjected to more scientific and psychological logical probing than any "witness" we can identify for the resurrection stories of the New Testament. Moreover, the number of pilgrims who have gone to Medjugorje by 1988 was placed by some at over fifteen million, which far surpasses the rate of growth of the Jesus apparition stories.²⁸

In any case, we can easily illustrate that the Marian apparitions at Medjugorje satisfy McCullagh's criteria.

1. *It has great explanatory scope.* It explains why Mary's tomb has never been found, why people all over the world see postmortem appearances of Mary, and why faith in Marian apparitions came into being.

2. *It has great explanatory power.* It explains why Mary's body has never been found, why people repeatedly see Mary alive despite her earlier presumed death and burial (or disappearance).

3. *It is plausible.* Given the historical context of Mary's own unparalleled life and claims, the resurrection or continued existence of Mary serves as a direct confirmation of those radical claims.

4. *It is not ad hoc or contrived.* It requires only one additional hypothesis—that God exists. And even that need not be an additional hypothesis if you already believe in God's existence.

5. *It is in accord with accepted beliefs.* The hypothesis "God raised Mary from the dead or keeps her alive" does not in any way conflict with the accepted belief that people don't rise naturally from the dead. The Marianist Christian accepts that belief wholeheartedly as he or she accepts the hypothesis that God raised Mary from the dead (or kept her from ever dying).

6. *It far outstrips any rival theories in meeting conditions 1 through 5.* Down through history various rival explanations have been offered. Such hypotheses have been almost universally rejected by contemporary Marian scholarship. No naturalistic hypothesis has attracted a great number of Marian scholars.

Indeed, Craig's application of such criteria is arbitrary and could lead to declaring as "historical" the supernatural claims of many other non-Christian religions.

We now briefly respond to some of Craig's more common arguments, which we summarize as follows:²⁹

1. *We cannot otherwise explain the empty tomb.*

As the Elvis phenomenon demonstrates, occupied tombs don't always prevent stories of empty tombs (or at least stories that the supposed occupant was never there at all). Moreover, the empty tomb story cannot be verified by any independent source outside of the Bible.

2. The disciples were willing to die for their testimony in the resurrection, which presumes that their testimony is true.

We actually do not know whether the disciples were willing to die for anything. Besides, a willingness to die for beliefs does not make those beliefs true.

3. There was no preexisting resurrection tradition, and so the resurrection can be presumed to be linked to an authentically new event. False. Mark 6:16 portrays Herod as invoking a resurrection belief in order to explain supposed sightings of John the Baptist, who had been beheaded. Besides, all traditions (e.g., Marian apparitions, St. George's resurrection traditions) are, by definition, not preexisting traditions at their inception.³⁰

4. Eyewitnesses listed in 1 Corinthians 15 guarantee that such appearances occurred.

Empirical evidence shows that large groups of people can report seeing nonoccurring events. Marian apparitions have been reportedly witnessed simultaneously by millions of people, but most evangelical apologists do not see that as proof that Mary is alive.³¹ Besides, the claim of five hundred witnesses is found in a letter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 15:6), who lived over seven hundred miles from the supposed events, and so could not easily verify the truth of the claim in the first place.

5. The time between the claimed event and the stories is too short for legendary development.

Usually, such a claim is based on dubious statistics about how long it takes for legends to develop as well as very biased views of what constitutes a "legend." We know that highly developed stories can be promulgated and disseminated within hours or days of the supposed events (as was the case with Elvis stories).

6. The biblical sources have otherwise been proven reliable.

Not true, or it depends on how one interprets certain passages. Luke, who is often regarded as the author of Acts, has a particular habit of mislocating burial places. Acts 7:15-16 indicates that the tomb of Abraham is in Shechem, while Genesis 25:9-10 (see also Genesis 23:19-20) places Abraham's tomb near Hebron. Moreover, Acts 13:27-29 indicates that it was the residents of Jerusalem, not the disciples, who placed Jesus in a tomb, something that contradicts other Gospels, which insist that it was Jesus' own disciples who buried him (e.g., Matthew 27:57-61).

7. The social disregard for women's testimony renders it unlikely that biblical authors would have chosen women as witnesses, and so we can presume the women's testimony to be an authentic tradition.

The use of supposedly unreliable witnesses in stories of extraordinary events is one of the most persistent literary devices in the world. Thus, in Virgin of Guadalupe apparition traditions, an Indian peasant is the primary witness in events dated to 1531 in Mexico.³² In the movie *Independence Day* (1996) one finds an alcoholic character being a prime initial witness to the arrival of extraterrestrial aliens.

8. Secular historians don't apply the same critical standards to non-Christian Christian figures such as Augustus Caesar.

No secular historian argues for the historicity of any supernatural claim made for Augustus Caesar (who was also called "Son of god") or any other figure, Christian or not.³³ Contemporary government documents and many inscriptions attest to the existence of Augustus Caesar in the first century, whereas not a single item for Jesus can be securely dated to the first century, including supposed references to Jesus by Roman historians such as Tacitus or Josephus.³⁴

In fact, stories of resurrections or their variants are generated more frequently than most people might believe (e.g., St. George, the Virgin Mary, Elvis). Apologies for the resurrection are still largely based on naive views about how quickly traditions of extraordinary events can originate and develop substantive followings. The idea that Jesus would resurrect is no more extraordinary than the development of the idea that St. George resurrected, or that Elvis is still alive. These traditions fulfill varying psychological, social, and political needs. Otherwise, we cannot trace the story of Jesus' resurrection any earlier than New Testament manuscripts of the third century CE despite the great desire to believe that those manuscripts represent traditions of the first century.

SELECTIVE SUPERNATURALISM

Throughout the writings of Craig, we are told that naturalism is the enemy. However, it does not take long to see that Craig is a naturalist himself. In fact, the problem with all the antinaturalist Christian philosophers is that what they mean by "antinaturalism" *is the use or allowance of supernatural explanations only for the events they favor.* Consider Matthew 27:50-54:

And Jesus cried again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit. And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom; and the earth shook, and the rocks were split; the tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe, and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

One would think that this account would be regarded as historical by Craig because he generally deems the Bible to be historically reliable. Yet he does not see this report as historical. In fact, he agrees with the assessment of another scholar, Robert J. Miller, a member of the liberal Jesus Seminar, who denies the historicity of this event.³⁵ Craig states: "Dr. Miller's interpretation of this passage strikes me as quite persuasive, and probably only a few conservative scholars would treat the story as historical."³⁶

So why is this report of a resurrection not regarded as historical, but yet the one about Jesus, found just one chapter later, is regarded as historical? Craig tells us that it is because of the "apocalyptic" language of Matthew 27:52-53. Craig comments:

For he [Dr. Miller] has argued that the passage should not be taken literally precisely because of the apocalyptic language coloring the story. But the empty-tomb narrative is remarkable just for its simplicity and lack of apocalyptic embellishment.³⁷

Matthew 27:52-53 exposes Craig's inconsistent definition of a "fact." Aside from not defining clearly why that passage is "apocalyptic" in genre, Craig leaves unexplained why he does not regard claims reported in an apocalyptic genre as "facts." Nor does Craig explain why

all of Matthew or Mark cannot be seen as apocalyptic, thereby also rendering the story of Christ's resurrection no more a "fact" than what is found in Matthew 27:52-53. A more likely reason that Craig does not regard that story as a "fact" is simply that scores of resurrected people walking all over Jerusalem should have left some notice in non-Christian records. Craig is dolorously aware that there are no such records.³¹

The new antinaturalism is not much more sophisticated or newer than what Reimarus faced in the eighteenth century. Any supposed defeats of positivist and naturalist epistemologies are an illusion. Yet Craig's epistemology has much in common with the antiminimalists such as Dever. Although Dever is by no means a supernaturalist, both he and Craig wish to use words expressing the highest degrees of certainty (e.g., Dever's "know," "datum"; Craig's "facts") for claims that cannot be verified directly. Both often accept this simplistic equation: "the claim that X is a fact" = "X is a fact," specific examples including the claim that there was an empty tomb and that Solomon built the gates at Gezer.

THE LIBERAL ACADEMIC JESUSES

The liberal academic Jesuses differ from the evangelical Jesus by the fact that no supernatural explanations are invoked. Yet the religionism has not disappeared completely. In cases where a more frankly secular view is espoused, it cannot really be deemed successful or to have advanced much beyond Reimarus. But before we look at why current Jesus research has not advanced much beyond the eighteenth century, we must provide a brief sketch of Reimarus's life and work.

Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768), a Christian scholar from Hamburg, Germany, is often credited with producing the first modern critical inquiry into the "historical Jesus" in an anonymous work called the Wolfenbuttel Fragments, which appeared in 1774 through 1778.³⁹ His positivism is very much in evidence when he justifies our right to be skeptical of the resurrection:

Now, if all the apostles who, of course, had seen and heard Jesus' earlier miracles ... were still skeptical and doubtful about such an important event, how much less should we be reproached today for being doubtful and skeptical since we cannot experience all the things with our own senses but must accept it seventeen hundred years later from the reports of a few witnesses?⁴⁰

Reimarus is not afraid to say that narratives could be invented out of pure imagination, especially when it came to miracles. Thus, in assessing Luke's narratives of miracles, Reimarus remarks, "Thus it is with all these miracles. Nothing is easier than for the writer than to imagine them. It is no more trouble to him to put down three thousand than three hundred, his pen governs earth and orders all nature ..."⁴¹ Yet the ease with which anyone can write complex stories is often still doubted, as we have seen in the case of Dever and other scholars who have a very limited view of the human imagination.

In particular, Reimarus set out systematically to examine critically three types of Christian arguments for the resurrection: (1) The evidence of the Roman guard; (2) Christian testimony; (3) Old Testament prophecies. Following English deist thinkers (e.g., John Toland), Reimarus argued that nothing contrary to reason should be held as historically established, and he placed special emphasis on internal contradictions in evaluating historicity.⁴² He detailed a series of contradictions in the accounts that demonstrate how hopelessly confused the Gospels are.

Reimarus's overall conclusions, moreover, would spell not only the end of biblical studies but also of Christianity as he knew it. Note his remarks: "How then can anyone want the whole world and all mankind to base their religion, faith, and hope of salvation at all times and in all places upon the testimony of four such varying witnesses?"⁴³ If so, then we are doomed to failure in the search for the historical Jesus, and all later historical Jesus research mostly is an effort to refute Reimarus or to salvage whatever remains.

Of course, there were many other attempts to discern the historical Jesus after Reimarus, including the well-known ones by David Friedrich Strauss (*The Life of Jesus*, 1835) and Albert Schweitzer (*From Reimarus to Wrede: A History of Research on the Life of Jesus*, 1906).⁴⁴ Schweitzer is widely credited with declaring the search for the historical Jesus virtually to have ended in his time. A few of his remarks bear repeating:

There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the Life of Jesus ... Whatever the ultimate solution may be, the historical Jesus of whom the criticism of the future, taking as its starting point the problems which have been recognized and admitted, will draw the portrait, can never render modern theology the service which it claimed from its own half-historical, half-modern, Jesus. He will be a Jesus, who was Messiah, and lived as such either on the ground of literary fiction of the earliest Evangelist, or on the ground of a purely eschatological Messianic conception. In either case, He will not be a Jesus Christ to whom the religion of the present can ascribe, according to its long-cherished custom, its own thoughts and ideas as it did with the Jesus of its own making.⁴⁵

Despite his own advocacy for a Jesus that was concerned with the end of the world, Schweitzer saw clearly that historians were powerless to reach beyond the sources available.

Of course, there are scholars who are more openly secular humanist, and are willing to depart from the religionism that permeates historical Jesus studies. One example is Robert M. Price, a fellow of the Jesus Seminar, who provides a devastating critique of historical Jesus studies in his *Deconstructing Jesus*—and we share many of his conclusions.⁴⁶ Earl Doherty's *The Jesus Puzzle* outlines a plausible theory for a completely mythical Jesus.⁴⁷ Burton Mack and Gerd Ludemann also have done much to erode our confidence in the more religionist versions of historical Jesus research.⁴⁸ Our purpose is not to slight them, but rather to show that the predominant schools of historical Jesus research in academia have still not superseded Reimarus, who had a perfectly reasonable hypothesis centered on empirico-rationalism.

THE JESUS SEMINAR

So have we really improved on Reimarus? It is true that we have gained much new information about Judaism in the first century and Christianity in the first and subsequent centuries, especially in the aftermath of the discovery of the DSS and numerous "lost Gospels." But even John Dominic Crossan, one of the most recognized members of the Jesus Seminar, admits to the chaos that is historical Jesus scholarship today. Note his remarks, which also serve as a historical summary of historical Jesus research in the last four decades:

There is a Jesus as a political revolutionary by S. G. F. Brandon (1967), as a magician by Morton Smith (1978), as a Galilean

charismatic by Geza Vermes (1981, 1984), as a Galilean Rabbi by Bruce Chilton (1984), as Hillelite or proto-Pharisee by Harvey Falk (1985), as an Essene by Harvey Falk (1985), and as an eschatological prophet by E. P. Sanders (1985) ... But that stunning diversity is an academic embarrassment. It is impossible to avoid the suspicion that historical Jesus research is a very safe place to do theology and call it history, to do autobiography and call it biography.⁴⁹

We might also mention Kathleen Corley's feminist portrait of Jesus, given how androcentric Jesus research has been.⁵⁰

As we shall show, the Jesus Seminar, overall, is not different in that regard. As mentioned previously, Tom Wright declared in 1986 that there had begun a third quest for the historical Jesus. According to Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, two observers of historical Jesus studies, this third quest is marked by (1) sociological instead of theological interests; (2) the location of Jesus within Judaism; and (3) the use of noncanonical texts to reconstruct his life or the earliest traditions about his life.⁵¹

If one looks at Reimarus's work, we see that he certainly would satisfy the first two features. Reimarus is very interested in the sociology of the early Jesus movement. Reimarus repeatedly stresses the need to know about contemporary Judaism, as in his description of the method used to determine the meaning of Jesus' parables about the kingdom of heaven: "[H]ence, there is no other way for us to find out what Jesus' intention was concerning the kingdom of heaven than to concern ourselves with the usual meaning of this phrase among the Jews of the time."⁵²

As for the third quest's location of Jesus within Judaism, Reimarus already had him so located. In fact, Reimarus sees Jesus as very much a Torah-observant Jew. As Reimarus phrases it:

I also wanted to make clear that Jesus neither sought nor commanded the abolition of the ceremonial law, nor did he himself introduce new ceremonies monies ... He variously bears witness to this in his life: he zealously attends service in the synagogues and the temple, he hears Moses and the prophets read on the Sabbath according to the ancient custom, he travels to Jerusalem for the great festivals, especially Passover but also for the feast of Tabernacles and Dedication as the law requires ... But he also insists in general that he has not come to abolish the law but to fulfill all righteousness ness [Matthew 5:17].⁵³

Of course, Reimarus did not know of some of the Gospels that have been discovered in the twentieth century, but he still would satisfy the third quest's principle of looking at noncanonical texts to help reconstruct the life of Jesus. Reimarus cites the Jewish Targums in his discussion, as well as the *Jalkut schimoni*, which contained medieval Jewish interpretations, to examine the possible meanings of Messianic references by Jesus.⁵⁴ Even if the sources he used were late or not appropriate, his principle of looking outside of the canonical texts was present.

The Jesus Seminar also bears all the features identified as part of the third quest, and so it is reasonable to see how successful their criteria and results have been. Briefly, the Jesus Seminar began in 1985 under the auspices of the Westar Institute. It was founded by Robert Funk, who served as president of the Society of Biblical Literature in 1975. Thirty scholars met in the initial year, but eventually some two hundred members, called "fellows," became part of the seminar. The epistemology follows in the positivist tradition, judging by this statement:

The Fellows of the Seminar are critical scholars. To be a critical scholar means to make empirical, factual evidence—

evidence open to confirmation by independent neutral observers—the controlling factor in historical judgment.⁵⁵

The seminar members met to discuss the Gospels verse by verse (or saying by saying) and they developed a color-coded voting system, which one member described as follows:⁵⁶

red: That's Jesus!

pink: Sure sounds like Jesus.

gray: Well, maybe.

black: There's been some mistake.

Since most seminar fellows are professors, it was decided to assign "grade-point averages" to make the final decisions after a vote.⁵⁷ The weighted averages produced by the vote were then converted into a percentage scale, with the highest number, indicating the most certainty among members, being 1.00.

red: .7501 and up

pink: .5001 to .7500

gray: .2501 to .5000

black: .0000 to .2500

For more specifics on the criteria of historicity used by the Jesus Seminar, we turn to one of their primary publications, *The Five Gospels*. Note this statement:

In sorting out the sayings and parables attributed to Jesus, gospel scholars are guided by this fundamental axiom: Only sayings and parables that can be traced back to the oral period, 30-50 C.E., can possibly have originated with Jesus. Words that can be demonstrated to have been first formulated by the gospel writers are eliminated from contention. Scholars search for two different kinds of proof.

They look for evidence that particular formulations are characteristic of individual evangelists or can only be understood in the social context of the emerging Christian movement. Or they search for evidence that sayings and parables antedate the written gospels.⁵⁸

However, it does not take long to see that these criteria used by the Jesus Seminar are fundamentally flawed.⁵⁹ They simply have traded one sort of dogmatism for another.

Note, for example, that the above general criteria are supported by three "rules of attestation," the first of which is "[s]ayings or parables that are attested in two or more independent sources are older than the sources in which they are embedded."⁶⁰ As with Dever, there is an appeal to "two" witnesses as some sort of minimum magic number. Moreover, the false assumption here parallels that of the search for an "original text" in that it assumes that by reconstructing some earlier source behind later ones, one has come closer to the "original" Jesus. In fact, in such a case one has simply uncovered an earlier tradition about Jesus, but that earlier tradition is not necessarily "less invented" (or "more authentic") than some later source.

Second, even attestation by two "independent" sources really proves nothing more than the existence of a "tradition," rather than the existence of the actual words or deeds of Jesus. That is to say, if Source X and Source Y agreed that Jesus said Z, then all you have proved is that two independent sources agree that there was a tradition that "Jesus said Z." This did not mean that Jesus actually said Z any more than two similarly "independent" sources prove that King Arthur did or said anything we have recorded.

All this is dependent, in turn, on the seminar's premise that there was "an oral period" that spanned from 30 CE to 50 CE, when the first texts about Jesus were supposedly written. Of course, this would mean that

any written tradition reconstructed still has at least a twenty-year gap to fill with sources whose veracity cannot be verified by us, and probably not by any of the persons who were recording events at which they were not present.

If we look at a specific text, we start seeing the subjectivity of specific judgments. Consider Matthew 5:38-41 in the Jesus Seminar's translation:

38. As you know, we once were told, "An eye for an eye," and "A tooth for a tooth." 39. But I tell you: Don't react violently against the one who is evil: when someone slaps you on the right cheek, turn the other as well. 40. When someone wants to sue you for your shirt, let that person have your coat along with it. 41. Further, when anyone conscripts you for one mile, go an extra mile. 42. Give to the one who begs from you; and don't turn away the one who tries to borrow from you.⁶¹

According to the editors, Jesus did not say what is in verse 38. However, he did say everything (except "But I tell you") in verses 39-41. In verse 42, only the first clause is certain according to the Jesus Seminar, and the second one ("and don't ...") is less so. And how were the degrees of certainty decided? The editors tell us that

[t]he aphorisms in 5:38-41 are case parodies with a very narrow range of application. In contrast, the aphorisms in 5:42 are universal injunctions: give to everyone who begs and lend to all who want to borrow—everywhere, where, at all times. These sayings are short and pithy, they cut against the social grain, and they indulge in humor and paradox. The person who followed them literally would soon be destitute. It is inconceivable that the primitive Christian community would have made them up, and they appear not to have been part of the common lore of the time.⁶²

All this is quite confusing. The instructions in 5:38-41 are described as having a "very narrow range of application" in contrast to the instructions in 5:42, which are universal injunctions. But if such a contrast were the reason for the higher degree of certainty given to the universal injunctions, we cannot tell from the actual color given to those portions. The same red color, indicating the highest certainty, is found in portions of 5:38-41 and in 5:42, and so what "narrowness" and "universality" have to do with any decision seems irrelevant.

Second, it is not clear that the injunctions in 5:38-41 are not universal. Why doesn't the injunction about turning the cheek in verse 39 apply "everywhere, at all times" just as much as the one about giving to the one who begs in verse 42? And why is the last clause of verse 42 given a lesser degree of certainty even though it seems just as universal as the first clause in that same verse?

Moreover, the entire exercise is premised on having a very clear psychological logical and personality profile of Jesus. But how do we know what Jesus might have been thinking in the first place except through the texts that the Jesus Seminar has predetermined to derive from Jesus? After all, one reason given is that it is "inconceivable" that the primitive church would have made these sayings up. But we have no information on what the early Church members, who might have penned these words, could conceive or not. So what data is being used to judge the "conceivability" of any idea for these church members?

Let's look also briefly at Mark 2:1-12, which relates the famous case of a paralytic who had to be lowered through a roof of the house where Jesus was staying because the crowds outside the house were so large. According to the Jesus Seminar translation, Jesus' first words to the paralytic were (v. 5), "Child, your sins are forgiven."⁶³ Jewish scholars present were said to have been astounded by such a pronouncement, as they believed only God had the power to forgive sins. But Jesus

responded in verse 10 that he had said this "so that you may realize that [on earth] the son of Adam has authority to forgive sins."⁶⁴

The Jesus Seminar judges that Jesus did not use a term such as "Son of Adam" or say anything about forgiving sins. Actually, they have a contradictory conclusion. On the one hand, Jesus' claim seems bold enough that "it is just possible that Mark 2:10 preserves early tradition."⁶⁵ On the other hand, the editors ultimately decided that

[t]he early church was in the process of claiming for itself the right to forgive sins and so would have been inclined to claim that its authorization came directly from Jesus as the messianic figure, "the son of Adam." In that case, v. 10 would be the product of the Christian storyteller, who is reading the convictions of the later community back into an incident in Jesus' life.⁶⁶

There are problems with the reasoning leading to both conclusions. First, the idea of a healer forgiving sins is not as bold as the seminar suggests. In fact, in the DSS we find a text called "The Prayer of Nabonidus," which is named for a Babylonian king of the sixth century BCE. In that text an exorcist heals Nabonidus, and the latter may be interpreted to say that "an exorcist forgave my sin. He was a J[ew] ..."⁶⁷

Second, the reasoning used to reject the authenticity of the saying is also based on numerous and circular suppositions. For instance, what sources are used to evaluate what the church was "in the process of claiming" between 30 and 50 CE? More importantly, why can't we use this same rationale to evict from the Gospels almost any saying of Jesus? That is to say, anything Jesus said could have been the product of a Christian storyteller who wanted to bolster particular creeds that his faith community was "in the process of claiming."

It would be futile to multiply examples because they are all based on similar principles. The Jesus Seminar has predetermined what Jesus or

the early church thought, and then they have simply selected those verses that accord with what the Jesus Seminar thinks that Jesus thought.⁶⁸ So despite no supernaturalism in their assumptions, the members of the Jesus Seminar are no different from fundamentalists who pick and choose proof texts to bolster their image of Jesus. All they have done is create a Jesus in their own image, as Robert Price, and Albert Schweitzer before him, acutely argued.

STANLEY PORTER'S NEW CRITERIA

It is not uncommon for scholars to think that they have made advances over the previous generations. Scholarship probably would not survive without that hope. One of the most historically informed scholars today is Stanley E. Porter, and so his claim to have developed some new criteria should be taken seriously. His work is interesting because it comes in the aftermath of the publication of the main results of the Jesus Seminar, and so one hopes Porter has learned some lessons from that enterprise.

In 2000 Porter published *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical Jesus Research: Previous Discussions and New Proposals*. After an extensive review of the previous criteria used to determine the "authenticity" of Jesus traditions, he proposed three new ones, which he summarizes as: (1) "the criteria of Greek language and its context"; (2) "the criterion of Greek textual variance"; (3) "the criterion of discourse features."⁶⁹ The third criterion manages only to tell us that the features of the apocalyptic discourse in Mark 13:5-37 "point clearly toward an earlier origin of the discourse than the Gospel itself."⁷⁰ Therefore, we concentrate on the first two criteria, where Porter believes he has some certainty of specific words spoken by Jesus.

Porter's criteria were developed in the context of some previous criteria that relied on the supposition that Jesus spoke only, or mainly, in Galilean Aramaic, the form of Aramaic that existed in his presumed homeland of Galilee in what is now northern Israel. Such a supposition, as Porter notes, can be traced as far back as the seventeenth century, but it is mainly associated with scholars such as Gustav Dalman, Matthew Black, and, most recently, Maurice Casey.⁷¹ A dramatic reflection of this idea is, of course, found in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), which featured Jesus speaking in Aramaic throughout.

Since the Gospels were written in Greek, any clue for translation from Aramaic could be used as an indicator that we had a tradition emanating from Jesus himself. Some, such as Casey, even expend much effort reconstructing ("retroverting") the Aramaic behind the Greek. Porter does not deny that Jesus probably spoke in Galilean Aramaic, but he believes that scholars have devalued the amount of Greek that Jesus spoke. As he phrases it, "He spoke Aramaic to be sure, and Greek to be almost as sure, and possibly even Hebrew."⁷² By looking again more seriously at some of the situations in which Jesus probably spoke in Greek, argues Porter, we may recover some of his authentic words in Greek.

However, the promise of these new criteria is immediately diluted once we realize what Porter means by "authenticity." As he phrases it:

The third caveat is with regard to what is meant by authenticity.... It will suffice to say that I use the term as it has been used in previous historical-Jesus Jesus research ... as indicating an earlier tradition that has definable hallmarks that indicate that it might well have originated with Jesus, or at least it comes as close to this as we can reasonably find using the means at our disposal. In other words, the criteria

indicate episodes where the probability is that the material could have originated with Jesus.⁷³

Imagine if we still expended such efforts on finding the words of King Arthur in fifth-century Britain. We could, for example, establish that at the time of King Arthur there was Latin in use (as Romans had conquered Britain), and so if we found some episode that would render plausible the use of Latin by Arthur, then we could conclude that the probability is that the material could have originated with King Arthur.

And all of Porter's efforts in applying his first two criteria yield a miserly seven passages (and their parallels) where Jesus' words in Greek might be declared authentic. We adapt here his summary of these passages:⁷⁴

1. Matthew 8:5-13 = John 4:46-54: Jesus' conversation with the centurion or commander (but the Johannine account diverges in terms of wording)
2. John 4:4-26: Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan Woman
3. Mark 2:13-14 = Matthew 9:9 = Luke 5:27-28: Jesus' calling of Levi/Matthew
4. Mark 7:25-30 = Matthew 15:21-28: Jesus' conversation with the Syrophenician woman
5. Mark 12:13-17 = Matthew 22:16-22 = Luke 20:20-26: Jesus' conversation with the Pharisees and Herodians over the Roman coin of Caesar
6. Mark 8:27-30 = Matthew 16:13-20 = Luke 9:18-21: Jesus' conversations with his disciples at Caesarea Philippi
7. Mark 15:2-5 = Matthew 27:11-14 = Luke 23:2-4 = John 18:29-38: Jesus' trial before Pilate

If we look closely at a couple of these passages, we see that Porter has not learned any lessons from the failures of the Jesus Seminar or other previous criteria. For example, in John 4:4-26, Jesus probably spoke in Greek to the Samaritan woman because

a conversation with a Samaritan woman who was at the least sceptical about a Jew speaking with her at all ... could easily have treated mundane issues such as the drawing of water, in Greek (even if mundane issues were given symbolic value by either Jesus or the Gospel author, and understood that way by the Gospel's readers).⁷⁵

So it appears that discussing a "mundane" subject is a main criterion here for thinking that Jesus spoke in Greek to a Samaritan woman. Of course, Jesus could also have spoken in a Samaritan dialect to discuss mundane issues, but that does not seem to occur to Porter.

A similar rationale applies to Jesus' conversation in Mark 7:25-30 (= Matthew 15:21-28) with the woman from Syrophenicia (an area outside of Israel corresponding roughly to modern Lebanon). Here, Porter concludes that "it is plausible that Jesus' discussion with the Syrophenician woman in Tyre (or Sidon) would be in Greek."⁷⁶ Again, there are many other possibilities that are also "plausible." For example, it is "plausible" that an author simply portrayed Jesus as speaking to a Syro-Canaanite woman to make some other point (e.g., about ethnic relations).

When we delve deeper into the fruit of all of this speculation, we go from the uncertain to the inane trivial. Consider that in Matthew 15:26 there is a phrase translated as "it is better." In Greek this phrase can be expressed by two words that can be in alternate order: *εστιν καλον* (*estin kalon*) or *καλον εστιν* (*kalon estin*), where *kalon* = "better" and *estin* = "is." So, basically, Porter engages in a discussion of whether Jesus probably used "is better" or "better is."

Porter concludes that "one is on firm ground in noting that Jesus probably used" *estin kalon* ("is better") within a larger sentence.⁷⁷ Why? Because there are more manuscripts that have *estin kalon* in both Matthew and Mark. But all that proves again is that we have more copies of *one textual tradition* with that word order versus that of the textual tradition that has the reverse order. And that tells us nothing more about whether Jesus spoke the phrase than similar traditions about the order of King Arthur's words in a manuscript tradition tell us whether King Arthur said any particular set of words ascribed to him.

To be fair to Porter, let us consider the strongest case he has, which, by his own words, involves Jesus' answer to Pilate's question "Are you the king of the Jews?" Basically, Jesus' response consists of two Greek words, *συ λεγεις* (*su legeis* = "you say"), which are found in all four gospels: Matthew 27:11, Mark 15:2, Luke 23:3, and John 18:37. Of these, John has a longer version (literally, "You say that King I am").

Porter concludes that "we probably have the authentic words of Pilate."⁷⁸ He reasons that Pilate uses a "non-Jewish phrasing" and so sounds like what a Gentile like Pilate would say. This despite the fact that Porter himself notes that Josephus, a Jew, also could use the phrase "king of the Jews."⁷⁹ But Porter soon glosses over that problem and tells us that the phrase "you say" is invariably attested in all four Gospels.

He further notes that the Greek phrase translated "you say" is found only in this episode in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Porter admits that John does have "you say" in a number of places (8:33, 8:52, and 9:17), but he dismisses them because they are in the context of questions, not statements. Presumably, this precludes the objection that John might just be applying some formulaic phrase in the Pilate episode.

The vacuity of such exercises can be demonstrated by observing that a work attributed to the same Greek author sometimes had very

different words even when presenting the same quotation. Consider again the story of Caesar's assassination, where the first attacker is a man named Casca. Plutarch wrote two works (*Caesar* and *Brutus*), which describe Caesar's first words to Casca as the latter attacks:

Caesar 66.5: Accursed Casca, what doest thou?⁸⁰

Μιαρῳτᾶτε Κᾰσκᾰ, τι ποιειεις;

Brutus 17.3: Impious Casca, what doest thou?⁸¹

Ανοσιε Κᾰσκᾰ, τι ποιειεις;

Assuming neither textual corruption nor the work of later editor, each of which is always possible, Plutarch's *Caesar* and *Brutus* show that the same author could vary his own quotes. Trying to find which words Caesar actually spoke is beyond our ability, as Plutarch himself could have invented and varied these words for his own purposes.

So did we get very far by applying the criteria of Greek language use and Greek textual variants? The answer is no. All Porter has proven is that there was a textual tradition that portrayed Jesus as saying "you say." The historicity of this is no more proven than almost anything else attributed to him (or to Caesar) because authors could make up such quotes just as easily.

Nor can we really psychoanalyze the Gospel writers and conclude that they kept this short phrase because they thought it was more authentic than anything else Jesus said. The Gospel writers would have no way to verify what Jesus said to Pilate, especially if we believe John, who suggests that the whole conversation may have been a private one between Jesus and Pilate (see John 18:33, 38). Even if it was not a private conversation, Porter never explains how the chain of transmission would have worked (court records? Pilate or someone standing nearby told someone what Jesus said?).

As in the case of the claims by fundamentalists, we can also use the phenomena at Medjugorje to test some of Porter's speculations about how textual traditions arise. In the case of Medjugorje, the messages of Mary to the children were recorded much more rapidly than in the case of Jesus, which had at least a twenty-year oral transmission period according to most scholars. Let us take a look at what should be a very fixed tradition at Medjugorje, the parting words of the Virgin Mary on June 26, 1981, the third day of the apparitions. These parting words are recorded in the accounts of three modern Medjugorje "Gospels"—by Mark I. Miravalle (1986), Rene Laurentin and Rene Lejeune (1988), and Michael O'Carroll (1989):

Miravalle: "Go in God's peace."⁸²

O'Carroll: "Goodbye, my angels."⁸³

Laurentin and Lejeune: "Yes, to the same place as yesterday"?⁸⁴

I place a question mark at the last entry because the parting words are not at all as in the first two sources, and it is uncertain that Laurentin and Lejeune represent a complete transcript.

Miravalle also records that on June 25, 1981, the second day of the apparitions, the Virgin Mary gave a message to Ivanka Ivankovic as follows, "Obey your grandmother and be good to her, for she is old and cannot work."⁸⁵ Laurentin and Lejeune, however, record something similar on June 26, 1981, "Obey your grandmother and help her because she is old."⁸⁶ Laurentin and Lejeune record no such message on June 25, and so we must posit that they believe they are recording the same message but on different days.

So at Medjugorje there are established variant textual traditions within five years of the apparitions. As in the case of my classroom exercise in textual criticism, the variety of quotes and sayings of the virgin, transmitted by the "witnesses" is already quite varied from the

start. Thus, any invariant tradition (such as Jesus' "you say" to Pilate) may actually reflect a tradition standardized by writing rather than the preservation of some authentic oral tradition.

Note also that Laurentin and Lejeune have a shorter saying even though their book is later than the book of Miravalle, which has the longer saying. Usually, John's expanded answer of Jesus to Pilate is thought to be secondary because it is later than the other Gospels. Two "Medjugorje Gospels," however, both agree on the text "Obey your grandmother." Thus, if we use Porter's rationale for Jesus' answer to Pilate, then "we probably have here the authentic words of Mary."

Yet few biblical scholars today are advocates for the apparitions of Mary at Medjugorje and, as such, few seek to determine which of those words Mary actually spoke. Some of these biblical scholars may indeed argue that the case of Pilate's meeting with Jesus purports to be a natural occurrence, whereas the phenomena at Medjugorje do not. However, as we have noted, the encounters of the Medjugorje children with Mary affirm to be just as historical and physical as anything claimed for Jesus in the Gospels. And the point remains that the Medjugorje phenomena, natural or not, definitely prove that complex textual traditions can arise from nonoccurring events (or at least events we cannot verify to have occurred, if that means the actual appearance of Mary) in a very short time.

The Medjugorje traditions also show how difficult it is, even with all the modern tools of science and the existence of still living "witnesses," to determine what Mary is supposed to have said on any occasion. Given that simple fact, it should be apparent that searching for the actual words and deeds of Jesus, where the gap between his supposed existence and the first actual preserved texts is upward of one hundred fifty to two hundred years, is doomed to failure every time. Without video recordings of Jesus, we have only a terminus in what we can learn about his words and deeds.

WHY WE CANNOT MAKE PROGRESS

Rene Magritte (1898-1967), the famous Belgian surrealist painter, had an acute insight into the nature of reality and its representation. One of his famed paintings, titled "The Treachery of Images" (1928-29), consisted of a pipe with the caption: "This is not a pipe" ("Ceci n'est une pipe").⁸⁷ Some may be puzzled at this caption, for the painting clearly shows a pipe, and so how can Magritte say it is not a pipe? To anyone familiar with the history of philosophy, Magritte was simply stating what is otherwise obvious; you are not looking at a pipe but at "a picture of a pipe."⁸⁸

Yet Magritte's warning not to confuse reality with its representation is at the heart of most of the failures of biblical studies. We can see this confusion between reality and its representation in historical Jesus studies, textual criticism, and in biblical archaeology. And the fact that eminent scholars often do not understand this problem is evident in how William Dever attempts to refute the minimalist claim that the Bible does not bear a depiction of any real David or Solomon, but rather depicts a propagandistic myth:

Propaganda characteristically and deliberately distorts; but it does not freely invent. Even a caricature is an accurate, recognizable portrait in some respects, or otherwise it would have no impact.⁸⁹

Baudrillard could not have chosen a better example of a person who has succumbed to an old trap. Not only is Dever flatly wrong in asserting that propaganda "does not freely invent," but the problem with the whole caricature analogy is that in modern caricatures we have access to both the referent (the object being depicted by the caricature) and the caricature itself. We can compare the caricature to

the referent to determine where the real object is being distorted and where it is not.

But a comparison between the referent and the representation is just precisely the type of comparison we rarely can make using evidence from the ancient world. For example, we don't have access to "the real David," except through textual representations. The same goes for "the original text," "the real Israel," of the Iron Age, and the "historical Jesus." Without direct access to the "original" Jesus, as Reimarus seemed to have realized, all portraits are doomed to interminable speculation.

Medjugorje traditions again are an ideal living laboratory, which can demonstrate how "freely invented" complex traditions can be. There are now thousands of speeches, messages, events, and deeds claimed for a person who most scholars do not acknowledge as existing. The Mary at Medjugorje has impact not because it affirms or distorts the picture of a "real" person. Indeed, there is not much of a real Mary to describe even in the Gospel accounts. The Medjugorje traditions have an impact because they affirm or distort portrayals and representations of referents, like the Virgin Mary, who may never have existed as depicted at all.

OTHER GOSPELS CHANGE EVERYTHING

Charles W. Hedrick, who discovered a "lost Gospel," placed the number of Gospels at thirty-four in 2002.⁹⁰ According to him, we have four canonical Gospels, four complete noncanonical Gospels, seven fragmentary Gospels, four Gospels known only from early quotations, two hypothetical Gospels (Q and the Signs Gospels), and thirteen

known only by a name mentioned in some ancient source. By 2006, one of those thirteen had surfaced and is known as the Gospel of Judas.

The Gospel of Judas was announced with great fanfare by the National Geographic Society. As with all such announcements, I tend to be skeptical, especially since the document precipitated out of the black market. However, the National Geographic Society subjected it to numerous scientific tests, including radiocarbon dating by the renowned accelerated mass spectrometry laboratory at the University of Arizona. The tests calculated that "the mean calendar age for the collection was between CE 220 and 340."⁹¹ Other tests performed on the inks satisfied the National Geographic Society of the authenticity of all the material components.⁹²

Besides the excitement of such a new discovery, the Gospel of Judas seems to paint a different picture of Judas. In the canonical Gospels, he is a traitor and a symbol of evil. The Gospel of Judas suggests that eventually Judas will be the most exalted of the disciples. Jesus discusses how the other disciples are jealous of Judas, and Jesus even says this to Judas: "[Y]ou will come to rule over them."⁹³ So was Judas really the bad guy, or have the canonical gospels portrayed him as evil out of jealousy or for some other malicious purpose? Can we verify the claims about Judas in the canonical Gospels any more than we can verify the claims in the Gospel of Judas? Of course, such noncanonical Gospels make it even more difficult to ever think we know much about Jesus at all.

In any case, and without rehearsing the contents and debates about each of the noncanonical Gospels counted by Hedrick, we can make the following brief comments about their implications for the end of biblical studies. First, these "lost" Gospels confirm that early Christianity was so diverse and chaotic that we can no longer speak of "Christianity" but now must talk of "Christianities," a point made by, among others, Bart Ehrman's *Lost Christianities* (2003).⁹⁴ What these

"Christianities" have in common is their claimed connection with a "Christ," who is portrayed in astoundingly variegated fashion.

Second, we can no longer privilege just the canonical Gospels as the earliest or best sources for depicting early Christianity. This, of course, is a fundamental principle of the Jesus Seminar, and John Dominic Crossan's study of the Historical Jesus already places the Gospel of Thomas and the Egerton Gospel in the earliest stratum of his sources (alongside 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and Romans).⁹⁵ The fact remains that the earliest dated manuscript of any Gospel is a tiny fragment known as P52, which contains only a few verses from John 18. That fragment cannot tell us if the unpreserved part of that manuscript bears a Gospel of John much like ours. The other three Gospels do not have manuscripts dated before the third century, and the complete ones come from the fourth.

However, such dates for canonical materials overlap with at least some of the dates for noncanonical Gospels. The Greek fragments of the Gospel of Thomas have been dated to the second century, and the Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of Mary have been dated to the third century.⁹⁶ Thus, we cannot say that these Gospels have less "authentic" or "historical" material than the canonical Gospels, if they have any authentic or historical material at all. And if we dismiss noncanonical Gospels as forgeries because they were probably not written by the claimed authors, then the same could be said for many books in the canon, ranging from Moses's "books" to 2 Peter.⁹⁷ The point remains that we cannot verify or falsify many claims in these noncanonical Gospels any more than we can verify or falsify claims in the canonical ones.

If we identify biblical studies with the study of only the canonical materials, then it is clear that "biblical studies" actually ended decades ago. After all, we have been studying many of the noncanonical works in the DSS for decades. But as the shift to noncanonical Gospels

accelerates, so, too, will the final death of biblical studies. There may be studies of "Christian texts" or "Jewish-Christian texts" perhaps, but New Testament Studies will be at best a reverential, convenient, or nostalgic rubric.

SUMMARY

The quest for the historical Jesus is an abject failure. After hundreds of years, and probably millions of person-hours, reconstructions of Jesus are no better than the one of Reimarus in the eighteenth century. Reimarus had nearly exhausted the critical search for any historicity, and he found mostly a myth. Even if we do not accept all of Reimarus's conclusions, we can say that he had a plausible scenario based on verifiable phenomena that we can see exist today (people can steal bodies; people can lie; invention requires only an imagination and a pen, etc.).⁹⁸

Further progress is futile because we simply don't have any preserved accounts of Jesus from his time or from any proven eyewitnesses. And even if we were to discover lots of new material mentioning Jesus in his supposed lifetime, such material still would not render us surer of anything. After all, we possess an abundance of contemporary material about Mary at Medjugorje but most Protestant apologists easily dismiss it. Contemporaneity means very little after all if we cannot verify the information in any contemporary reports.

We can dismiss the conservative scholars as motivated by religious agendas, but what propels the more liberal academic scholars to invest in such futile searches for the historical Jesus? The answer is that both the conservative and liberal historical Jesus scholars still share

religionist and bibliolatrous bonds. They believe that Jesus' words matter or should matter.

But who is the audience for historical Jesus studies? The audience consists mostly of believers who think that Jesus' words and deeds are preserved in the Bible, or that at least some of them are recoverable. Intellectual honesty should compel at least the liberal scholars to announce aggressively to the world that Jesus cannot be found, and that any notion of following actual words or deeds of Jesus is vacuous.⁹⁹

Scholars should be helping end human dependence on the words and deeds of a man who cannot be shown to be any more special, wise, or ethical than many other people we can name. The fact that most academic scholars are not vigorously pursuing such an educational program only functions to keep their sacred text relevant and themselves employed.

NOTES

1. Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament 1861-1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 379. The term "Third Quest" has been criticized effectively by Stanley Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity in Historical-Jesus Research: Previous Discussions and New Proposals* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), pp. 28-59, but especially pp. 51-59.

2. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity*, p. 242.
3. Many scholars have made the point that the portrait of the historical Jesus mirrors the values and theology of modern authors. For an anthology of such discussions, see William E. Arnal and Michel Desjardins, eds., *Whose Historical Jesus? Studies in Christianity and Judaism Series 7* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1997).
4. For one representative manifesto of this new generation, see J. P. Moreland, *Scaling the Secular City: A Defense of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987).
5. William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge between Science and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), p. 209.
6. William Lane Craig and J. P. Moreland, *Naturalism: A Critical Analysis* (London: Routledge, 2000).
7. The most relevant of these works include William Lane Craig, *Assessing the New Testament Evidence for the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2002); Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway, 1994). For another work from the same circle of apologists, see Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, eds., *Jesus under Fire: Modern Scholarship ship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995).
8. For example, Paul Copan and Ronald K. Tacelli, eds., *Jesus' Resurrection: Fact or Figment? A Debate between William Lane Craig and Gerd Ludemann* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000); Paul Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998). My debate with Craig took place on February 5, 2004, at Iowa State University.
9. Copan and Tacelli, *Jesus' Resurrection*, pp. 36-37.

10. Ibid., p. 37.
11. C. Behan McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 21.
12. William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum*, especially 1:575 (the corresponding responding passage in the internal divisions of the *Gesta Regum Anglorum* is iv.333).
13. Christopher N. L. Brooke, *The Saxon and Norman Kings* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), pp. 178-96. Brooke, in turn, was reacting against the theory of Margaret A. Murray, who promoted the idea that William II belonged to a pagan cult that sacrificed him. See Margaret Murray, *The God of the Witches* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), especially pp. 162-71. McCullagh, following Brooke, slightly misrepresents Murray when he says (p. 21) that in the case of William II, Murray "attributed his death to witchcraft." Rather, Murray believed that while there were omens reported about William's death, his actual manner of death involved a literal sacrifice rather than death through some wholly supernatural means implied by "witchcraft."
14. McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, pp. 23-24.
15. Ibid., p. 19. Italics are McCullagh's.
16. Copan and Tacelli, *Jesus' Resurrection*, p. 37.
17. Morton White, *Foundations of Historical Knowledge* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965).
18. Craig, *Reasonable Faith*, p. 186.
19. Copan, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* p. 31.
20. McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, p. 22; Brooke, *The Saxon and Norman Kings*, p.196.
21. McCullagh, *Justifying Historical Descriptions*, p. 26.

22. Craig also overlooks McCullagh's comments (*Justifying Historical Descriptions*, p. 28) about the incommensurability of natural and supernatural explanations.

23. See William A. Christian, *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981); M. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Knopf, 1976); E. Ann Matter, "The Virgin Mary: A Goddess?" in *The Book of the Goddess Past and Present: An Introduction to Her Religion*, ed. Carl Olson (New York: Crossroad, 1990), pp. 80-96; and Kevin McClure, *The Evidence for Visions of the Virgin Mary* (Wellings-borough, borough, Northamptonshire, UK: Aquarian, 1983).

24. See Hector Avalos, "Mary at Medjugorje: A Critical Inquiry," *Free Inquiry* 14, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 48-54. According to M. J. Wallace (*Medjugorje: Its Background and Messages* [Huntington Beach, CA: Follow Me Communications, 1991], pp. 31-34), the six youngsters (and their birthdates) are: Jakov Colo (March 6, 1971), Ivan Dragicevic (May 25, 1965), Mirjana Dragicevic (March 18, 1965), Ivanka Ivankovic (April 21, 1966), Vicka Ivankovic (September 3, 1964), and Marija Pavlovic, (April 1, 1965). Ivanka is acknowledged to be the first one who saw the apparitions, as she was accompanied only by Mirjana; shortly thereafter the four remaining children joined the first two youngsters in sharing the experiences.

25. The physical nature of the encounters was emphasized numerous times by the claimed witnesses. Thus, when an interviewer (see Rene Laurentin and Ljudevit Rupcic, *Is the Virgin Mary Appearing at Medjugorje? An Urgent Message for the World Given in a Marxist Country*, trans. Francis Martin [Gaithersburg, MD: The Word Among Us Press, 1984], p. 46) asked "how" they saw the virgin, one of the children responded, "Like you right now as I talk to you. I can touch her."

26. Quotation from Michael O'Carroll, *Medjugorje: Facts, Documents, Theology* (Dublin: Veritas, 1989), p. 238. For a compilation of Zanies complaints and views, see pp. 73-140, 237-50.

27. Rene Laurentin and Henri Joyeux, *Scientific and Medical Studies on the Apparitions at Medjugorje* (Dublin: Veritas, 1987), pp. 49-50. According to Joyeux, the team included an ophthalmologist (Jacques Philippot), a cardiologist (Bernard Hoarau), a neurophysiologist (Jean Cadilhac, of the Yugoslav Society of Neurophysiology), and an electrical engineer (Rene Dubois-Chabert).

28. One can never be certain of these numbers. *Time* (December 30, 1991, p. 64) places the amount at "more than 10 million pilgrims." Wallace (*Medjugorje*, p. 1) places the number of pilgrims at "over 15 million."

29. The numbers are my own, and represent summarized statements based on Craig's "Four Facts" and their associated claims found in Copan and Tacelli, *Jesus' Resurrection*, pp. 32-34.

30. On the resurrection traditions of St. George, see Samantha Riches, *St. George: Hero, Martyr and Myth* (Thrupp, UK: Sutton, 2000), pp. 82-95.

31. For example, consider the report of Ray Stanford (*Fatima Prophecy* [New York: Ballantine, 1987]) about the Marian apparitions at Zeitoun, a suburb of Cairo, between 1968 and 1971. He says (p. 45): "The persons present at apparitional events there varied from several thousands to over two hundred thousand per night. Total witnesses numbered perhaps into the millions. People of many countries and of varied religious backgrounds ... Moslems, Copts, Roman Catholics, Protestants and others were enthralled, even overcome by tears of joy at what they saw."

32. For a thorough study of Virgin of Guadalupe traditions, see Stafford Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531-1797* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995).

33. For a detailed study of the divinity of the emperors, see Manfred Clauss, *Kaiser and Gott: Herrscherkult im römischen Reich* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1999). Epigraphic and other evidence clearly shows that Julius Caesar was also addressed as "God" (θεος) while still alive, on which see A. E. Raubitschek, "Epigraphical Notes on Julius Caesar," *Journal of Roman Studies* 44 (1954): 65-75, and especially inscription (I) on p. 66.

34. One of the dirty little secrets of historical Jesus scholarship is that the Greco-Roman sources used as "independent confirmation" for Jesus all depend on manuscripts of medieval date, and so one cannot be sure what has been added. John P. Meier (*A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1, *The Roots of the Problem and the Person* [New York: Doubleday, 1991], p. 100, n. 6) admits: "As with Josephus, so with Tacitus our observations must be tempered by the fact that the earliest manuscript of the *Annals* comes from the 11th century."

35. Robert J. Miller, "Responses: What Do Stories of the Resurrection Prove?" in Copan, *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* pp. 77-98.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

37. *Ibid.*

38. For another very equivocal answer to whether this passage in Matthew is "historical," see Nicholas T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), pp. 632-36.

39. My narrative about Reimarus depends on Charles H. Talbert, ed., *Reimarus: Fragments*, trans. Ralph S. Fraser (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970).
40. *Ibid.*, p. 173.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 267.
42. For Toland, there are two excellent editions: John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious or a Treatise Showing That There Is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor Above It and That No Christian Doctrine Can Be Properly Called a Mystery* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger, 2003); Philip McGuinness, Alan Harrison, and Richard Kearney, eds., *John Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious: Text, Associated Works, and Critical Essays* (Dublin: Lilliput, 1997).
43. Talbert, *Reimarus: Fragments*, p. 176.
44. Albert Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1906).
45. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 398-99.
46. Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000).
47. Earl Doherty, *The Jesus Puzzle: Did Christianity Begin with a Mythical Christ?* (Ottawa: Age of Reason, 2005).
48. See, for example, Burton Mack, *The Christian Myth: Origins, Logic, and Legacy* (New York: Continuum, 2003); Mack, *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of Christian Myth* (San Francisco: Harpers San Francisco, 1995); Gerd Ludemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Historical Inquiry* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2004).
49. John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1992),

p. xxviii; S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (New York: Scribner's, 1967); Morton Smith, *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981); Smith, *Jesus and the World of Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984); Bruce D. Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and His Bible: Jesus' Use of the Interpreted Scripture in His Time* (Washington, DC: Glazier, 1984); Harvey Falk, *Jesus the Pharisee: A New Look at the Jewishness of Jesus* (New York: Paulist, 1985); E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

50. Kathleen Corley, *Women and the Historical Jesus* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2002).

51. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, trans. John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), p. 10.

52. Talbert, *Reimarus: Fragments*, p. 124.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

55. Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), p. 34.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

57. *Ibid.*

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

59. For a general defense of the Jesus Seminar, see Robert J. Miller, *The Jesus Seminar and Its Critics* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 1999).

60. Funk, Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, p. 26.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

62. Ibid., p. 145.

63. Ibid., p. 43.

64. Ibid., p. 44.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. We follow the translation of the Prayer of Nabonidus in Florentino Garcia Martinez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, trans. Wilfred G. E. Watson (Leiden: Brill, 1994), p. 289. The quoted portion of the Aramaic text reads: יהודי וחטאי שבק לה גזר והוא, following F. M. Cross ("Fragments of a Prayer of Nabonidus," IEJ 34 [1984]: 260-64) who translates: "as for my sin, he forgave gave it (or: my sin he forgave). A diviner-who was a Jew ..." In this translation the one doing the forgiving is God, but the problem is that the words preceding the quoted portion are not certain. Thus, the alternative translation is also plausible. Note that Garcia Martinez's translation has brackets on the last two letters of "Jew," which means that he regards those letters as not present in the manuscript, but Cross's facsimile simile and transliteration ("Fragments of a Prayer of Nabonidus," pp. 261, 263) shows that all the letters of the word are visible.

68. For a more conservative academic critique of modern historical Jesus research and the Jesus Seminar, see Philip Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels: How the Search for Jesus Lost Its Way* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Jenkins (p. 157) observes that of the seventy-six scholars listed as active members of the seminar in 1993, about one-third were associated with Harvard Divinity School and the Claremont Graduate School.

69. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity*, p. 126. For convenience, we have added numbers to Porter's quoted descriptions of the criteria.

70. Ibid., p. 235.

71. Gustav Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu mit Berücksichtigung des Nachkanonischen Jüdischen Schriftums und der Aramaischen Sprache, Band 1: Einleitung and wichtige Begriffe* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965); Matthew Black, *An Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967); Maurice Casey, *Aramaic Sources of Mark's Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

72. Porter, *The Criteria for Authenticity*, p. 131.

73. Ibid., pp. 143-44.

74. Ibid., p. 158. Our adaptation consists mainly of spelling out in full the names for the biblical books that Porter abbreviates.

75. Ibid., p. 155.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid., p. 198.

78. Ibid., p. 204.

79. Ibid., p. 204, n. 52. On Pilate, in general, see Jean-Pierre Lemonon, *Pilate et le gouvernement de la Judie: Textes et monuments* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1981), especially cially pp. 178-80, where the scene between Jesus and Pilate is discussed.

80. Plutarch's *Lives*, 7:598.

81. Ibid., 6:162.

82. Mark I. Miravalle, *The Message of Medjugorje: The Marian Message to the Modern World* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), p. 3.

83. O'Carroll, *Medjugorje: Facts, Documents, Theology*, p. 29.

84. Rene Laurentin and Rene Lejeune, *Messages and Teachings of Mary at Medjugorje: Chronology of the Messages, The Urgency of Return to God* (Milford, OH: Riehle Foundation, 1988), p. 150.

85. Miravalle, *The Message of Medjugorje*, p. 3.

86. Laurentin and Lejeune, *Messages and Teachings of Mary*, p. 150.

87. In French, "Le trahison des images." See also Michel Foucault, *This Is Not a Pipe*, trans. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983). For a collection of Magritte's works, see Marcel Paquet, *Rene Magritte, 1898-1967: Thoughts Rendered Visible* (New York: Taschen, 2000).

88. The entire discussion of representation, of course, can be traced at least back to Plato. For a more recent famous discussion, see Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheira Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

89. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), p. 47.

90. Charles W. Hedrick, "The 34 Gospels" *BR* (June 2002): 20-31, 46-47.

91. See the "Publisher's Note," in Rudolphe Kasser, Marvin Meyer, and Gregor Wurst, *The Gospel of Judas* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2006), p. 184.

92. We should note, however, that McCrone Associates, the company that tested the inks in the Gospel of Judas, also vouched for authenticity of inks in "The Widow's Plea," which has since been declared a forgery. On these tests by McCrone, see Chris A. Rollston, "Are They Genuine?" *NEA* 61, no. 1 (March 1998): 8-9; Rollston, "Non-Provenanced Epigraphs I: Pillaged Antiquities, Northwest Semitic Forgeries, and Protocols for Laboratory Tests," *Maarav* 10 (2003), especially pp. 146, n. 29 and 182-93.

93. Kasser, Meyer, and Wurst, *The Gospel of Judas*, p. 33.
94. Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
95. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus*, pp. 427-29.
96. For the dates, see list in Hedrick, "The 34 Gospels," pp. 27-28.
97. See Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, pp. 9-11.
98. For approaches that see the Gospels as having fictional elements parallel to classical literature, see the essays in Jo-Ann Brant, Charles W. Hedrick, and Chris Shea, eds., *Ancient Fiction: The Matrix of Early Christian and Jewish Narrative*, Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 32 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005).
99. On the diminishing willingness of liberal intellectuals to voice their opinions, see Eric Lott, *The Disappearing Liberal Intellectual* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).
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