

## Chapter 12 — Holy Books and the Sixteen Crucified Saviors

In uncovering the devices used by Paul Twitchell to create Eckankar, I was struck by similarities to those used by the Church in creating its doctrine and dogma. A closer look at the origins of Christianity is useful to illustrate how tenuous is the undergirding of one of the most powerful religions in the world. It also illustrates the many techniques and devices that Paul Twitchell used, which paralleled those used by the Church Fathers. Whether Paul knew about this history and actively copied it in the formulation of Eckankar is not known. But as we will see, the similarities are striking.

This review is instructive because it is indicative of the origins of every religion that has at its center a mythical or historical figure whose life has taken on God-like proportions. The stories and myths that evolved have shaped their rituals and dogma. Indeed, most religions have become ritualistic recapitulations of their own history surrounded by pomp and circumstance. An emphasis on ceremony and ritual is designed to evoke emotions and reinforce the institution's belief structure. But these practices have little to do with transcendent truth and virtually nothing to do with the inner search that is indispensable to the quest of the God-seeker.

That religious practices are vital to the life of its followers is undeniable. But, as pointed out earlier, religions are classrooms in an eternal process of expanding awareness. Yet many religions purport to control access to heaven if not to God itself; otherwise excommunication or its equivalent would have no impact. Presenting the fragile foundations of truth that underlie these teachings is not intended to demean their importance in spiritual unfoldment. Nor is it intended to suggest that they do not carry positive principles and lessons. Rather, a closer look at the truth of these teachings is part of a process that leads to spiritual awakening, which, in turn, leads to spiritual growth. Everyone must at some point break through the "Santa Claus Effect," the deliberate withholding of truth by a religion or society in the belief, perhaps well

intended, that the faithful are not ready for it, or are happier and prefer living under illusion. However, unlike the Santa Claus myth, silence about certain religious truths has gone on for millennia. Religions, then, have become resting points of safety and security on the road to spiritual unfoldment, which, unfortunately have also discouraged or even forbade departure. The seeker must use other means to ascertain the truth about himself as soul and his awe-inspiring heritage as a spark of God. The keepers of the secret will not tell him, if by now they even remember themselves.

### **Old Testament Controversies**

Debate over the origins of the Bible has been on going for centuries. So vigorous was the criticism at times that the field of Christian Apologetics arose to counter numerous assaults on the integrity, authenticity, and veracity of the Bible. Discovery of the true origins of the Bible does not diminish the value of its insights, though it has dimmed the light shone on many Old and New Testament stories. Religious scholars working within a fixed paradigm undertook the search for historical truth. But religious paradigms have so many layers of orthodoxy, dogma, and ritual that even the acknowledgement of a truth leaves the seeker only somewhat closer to higher truth, if at all.

An example of this is seen in attempts to resolve the centuries-old debate of whether the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, often referred to as the Pentateuch or the Torah) were actually written by Moses. Belief in his authorship was and is so strong that one would think that the entire faith hinged on its validity. In spite of obvious inconsistencies that suggest Moses did not write these books, the orthodoxy prevailed:

People observed contradictions in the text [Bible]. . . . It would describe Moses as going to a Tabernacle in a chapter before Moses builds the Tabernacle. People also noticed that the Five Books of Moses included things that Moses could not have known or was not likely to have said. The text, after all, gave an account of Moses' death. It also said that Moses was the humblest man on earth; and normally one would not expect the humblest man on earth to point out that he is the humblest man on earth.<sup>1</sup>

The debate raged for more than six hundred years, with few scholars brave enough to question the obvious. In more recent years, the

weight of orthodoxy has lifted somewhat from the backs of scholars and truth seekers. The new and more widely held view is that the “Five Books of Moses had been composed by combining four different source documents into one continuous history.”<sup>2</sup> Eureka! After centuries, the debate was resolved, at least for the open-minded investigator. But the movement to truth through the refinement of orthodoxy remained an exercise in pedantry. The truth seeker was still focused on events of past millennia. He searched in the shadows of history to discover the reality of God that was and is within, always here and now. Old Testament controversy continues at an unprecedented rate, with challenges to the authenticity and veracity of most other books of the Bible. Indeed, there is increasing evidence that many parts of the Old Testament have their origins in the stories and myths of Egyptian culture.<sup>3</sup>

### **New Testament Controversies**

The idea of the Bible as the word of God has evolved among many Christians to a more enlightened and historically accurate view that recognizes the labors of the men who actually wrote it.<sup>4</sup> What is most remarkable about this late recognition is the extent to which early Church leaders and scholars labored to deny or suppress the truth about the origins of the Bible and the history of Jesus. As we will see, truth was not their concern. Defense of orthodoxy was the motivation, and anyone who questioned it was branded a heretic or worse. However, the accounts of Jesus contained in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were viewed with great skepticism if not incredulity from earliest times. In fact, the first three Gospels, often called the Synoptic Gospels,<sup>5</sup> were so similar in content as to likely have been drawn from each other. Indeed, some scholars have maintained that they are plagiarisms, so similar is each version.<sup>6</sup> But even as alleged plagiarisms, there are numerous contradictions in the portrayal of various stories of the life of Christ.<sup>7</sup> No less a personage than St. Augustine (354-430) expressed the view:

I would not believe the Gospels to be true, unless the authority of the Catholic Church constrained [forced] me.<sup>8</sup>

Well, it did! He was not alone in his incredulity. The Gospels contained so many inconsistencies and parallels to each other and to other

religious martyrs that, as early as 160-200, Church leaders were questioning stories of the life of Jesus that were appearing, for the first time, more than 120 years<sup>9</sup> (some say forty to seventy years<sup>10</sup>) after the purported death of Jesus in 33. One such Church Father labored to defend the faith from “pagan” criticism that claimed his new religion to be a fabrication.

Understanding their criticism about religious fabrication, yet holding to his belief in the divinity of Jesus the Christ and the Gospels, Father Tertullian, an early Christian theologian and polemicist, in an oft-quoted passage, used a rather extraordinary form of reverse logic to defend his faith. In it, he also seemed to be acknowledging the obvious questions raised by the historical anomalies in the story of Jesus the Christ. His statement “Credo quia incredibilis est”<sup>11</sup> (“I believe because it is unbelievable”) is interesting enough, but he amplified it:

[T]he Son of God was born; why am I not ashamed of maintaining such a thing? Why! but because it is itself a shameful thing. I maintain that the Son of God died: well, that is wholly credible because it is monstrously absurd. I maintain that after having been buried, he rose again: and that I take to be absolutely true, because it was manifestly impossible.<sup>12</sup>

The charge that the Church had fabricated the stories contained in the Gospels, indeed the Gospels themselves, was made during the early years of Christianity. The charge had considerable gravity because there existed no written historical record of the life of Jesus coterminous with the years he is said to have lived and taught. This situation prevailed in spite of Church efforts, with varying degrees of success, to create documents establishing such a record.<sup>13</sup> In spite of this known deficiency and more than 125 years later, there appeared, in a series of writings to be called the Gospels, a story so powerful and profound that, if it occurred, it would surely have been known and extensively recorded by historians and scribes of the period. But it was not!

Was this the reason for Father Tertullian’s strange flight of reverse logic? Was this the basis for Augustine’s declaration that he would not believe in the Gospels except if the Church forced him to? What did these early thinkers know or suspect that the religious leaders and followers of today are oblivious to, have forgotten, or actively suppress? Why was there such skepticism about early Church efforts to piece

together the story of Jesus? The answers to these questions are as enlightening to the truth seeker as they are disturbing to the true believer. They tell of a period in Church history that goes to the very heart of the truth about its doctrine and dogma. Even as it demonstrates the dangers of constructing a belief system on the zealous writings of true believers who intentionally invented or borrowed stories from history, it also confirms the power of such a belief system to impact the lives of millions, irrespective of the provenance or veracity of the story behind it.

In many ways, the history of the Gospels and their acceptance parallels the creation of Eckankar doctrine derived from the stories put forth by its founder, who also saw himself as the “Son of God.” Both teachings sustain themselves not on the genuineness of their founders or the authenticity of stories that grew around them, but on the unquestioning acceptance of these stories. It is faith and belief that bring the stories to life and provide the spiritual energy on which inner experiences and modern-day miracles abound.

As I delved deeper into the mystery of the Gospels, I wanted to know who actually wrote them. Why was nothing written about Jesus during his life? Why were the Gospels named after disciples (two of them anyway) if they didn’t write them? These and other questions were of particular interest to me for I found many similarities between the early history of Christianity and of the one Paul Twitchell created for Eckankar. Had Paul and his successors had the benefit of even several hundred years between Eckankar’s formation and the present, the stories relayed in earlier chapters of this book might have been lost to modern investigators. Instead, revelations about Eckankar came during its formative stages. We can see who Paul Twitchell really was and how he built defenses for the challenges that lay ahead.

In this respect, the Eckankar leadership of today is in an even more difficult position than the Church founders. They had to explain and defend stories about a person for whom there were no records, only an oral tradition. The appearance of Jesus in later Christian writings resembles that of Sudar Singh of Eckankar lore about fifty years after Paul alleges to have first encountered him. However, unlike the Church, Eckankar must defend a person about whom there does exist a

traceable history and written record, albeit, one that does not stand up to scrutiny.

Parallels between the histories of both religions are fascinating and instructive. To those in the new religion of Eckankar still concerned with the truth, they show how important it is to reveal the unvarnished story to the world, so that the dust of history does not hide the truth. For the Christian believer (I was once one), it sheds light on the intrinsic truth of the teaching and the motivations and intentions of Church Fathers vis-à-vis their followers. For those who wish to know this truth, the broad outlines of what happened are presented here with enough references to permit a more in-depth study.

### **The Early Role of the Church in the Formulation of the Gospels and Christianity**

It appears that the Church encouraged the creation of writings that set the story of Jesus in the desired historic and eschatological context. Perhaps the greatest confusion regarding the Gospels is over whether Mathew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote them. Assigning authorship to four of Jesus' followers was intended to convey to the faithful that they were written during the time Jesus walked the Holy Land. Ascribing false authorship to a particular writing was common practice in the early Church. It was known as *pseudepigraphy*, a practice we will consider in more detail. However, most modern scholars agree that the Gospels did not appear on the scene or have any mention in literature until forty to one hundred twenty-five years after the death of Jesus. Views about the authenticity of these early documents range from more strident and incredulous positions such as:

Although they are held up by true believers to be the “inspired” works of the apostles, the canonical gospels were forged at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, all four of them probably between 170-180, a date that just happens to correspond with the establishment of the orthodoxy and supremacy of the Roman Church. Despite the claims of apostolic authorship, the gospels were not mere translations of manuscripts written in Hebrew or Aramaic by Jewish apostles, because they were originally written in Greek.<sup>14</sup>

Other views on the matter reflect a more supportive though not inconsistent view of the origins. Paula Fredriksen<sup>15</sup> writes:

What then must be borne in mind when reading the canonical gospels for historical information about Jesus of Nazareth? First, the impression of orderliness conveyed by their connected narratives should not deceive us about their true nature: these are *composite documents*, the final products of *long and creative traditions* in which *old material was reworked and new material interpolated*. As they now stand, they are witness first of all to the faith of their individual writers and their late first-century, largely Gentile communities. Only at a distance do they relate to the people and the period they purport to describe.... [*T*]he gospels are *theological proclamation, not historical biography*.... Second, we must remember that forty to seventy years stand between the public career and death of Jesus of Nazareth and the probable dates of composition of the gospels.<sup>16</sup>

Admitting the unreliability of the oral tradition of Jesus, Fredriksen acknowledges that Christian scholars must stick to the written record about Jesus. However, Fredriksen fails to address the issue of the reliability of these written documents in light of the Church's avowed program of creating a written record establishing the historical and spiritual continuity of Jesus. She uses euphemisms to convey a faint picture of the Church's involvement in the creation of the Gospels such as "composite documents," "long and creative traditions," and "old material . . . reworked and new material interpolated." But euphemisms obscure the extent of the Church's involvement in creating the Gospels.

To uncover this part of the story, we must go back to the time of the Gospel's creation and see the practices of Church Fathers in formulating the story. When the unvarnished picture of the Church's role in creating the history of Jesus is seen, the integrity of the New Testament and Church doctrine must be reconsidered. From this perspective, the inherent flaws in the writings of today's Christian scholars, who look to the Gospels as proof of the reality of Jesus, are exposed. These writings are almost exclusively based on accepting as wholly true the testimony of the Gospels, when it is the very truthfulness and credibility of the Gospels that is in question. A close examination of the Gospels and how they were created exposes a vulnerability that renders them impeachable. This is a weakness at which scholars such as Fredriksen will only hint.

## **Pseudepigraphy, Pious Fraud, and the Greatest Story Ever Told**

This discussion portrays a general atmosphere and philosophy that permeated the thinking and actions of Church Fathers from the earliest periods when the different versions of the Gospels were first formulated to centuries thereafter. For once the Gospels were canonized, the efforts of later Church Fathers were directed at reinforcing this anointed version of the story. This called for additional tales and myths to stimulate and strengthen the belief of the faithful.

It was essential for the Church to create stories around the existence of a personage that many, by that time, had accepted as real. What difference did it make? He was no longer around, and, in any event, only the memory and stories of his existence survived. If real stories did not exist, then it was possible, indeed necessary, to create stories appropriate for one who would become the Christ. And what if Jesus the Christ was a myth? Were there not other religions whose deities were regarded as myths, yet were no less powerful and effective once followers believed? To this point, the famous lecturer and Christian scholar, M. M. Mangasarian argues:

And to the question that if Jesus be mythical, we cannot account for the rise and progress of the Christian church, we answer that the Pagan gods who occupied Mount Olympus were all mythical beings — mere shadows, and yet Paganism was the religion of the most advanced and cultured nations of antiquity. . . . [I]f the worship of Adonis, of Attis, of Isis, and the legends of Heracles, Prometheus, Hercules, and the Hindu trinity, — Brahma, Shiva, Chishna, — with their rock-hewn temples, can be explained without believing in the actual existence of these gods — why not Christianity?<sup>17</sup>

What is remarkable about this is that the Church actually encouraged the creation of myths around Jesus. It was necessary to elaborate on a story that was active but sparse on details. No one actually knew what Jesus said or did. It is this void into which “pious fraud”<sup>18</sup> rushed, a practice sanctioned by the Church during the first centuries of its existence. The Church encouraged or at least accepted “divinely inspired” accounts of the life of Jesus, which were falsely attributed to Biblical figures, a practice called pseudepigraphy.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, these were inspired writers who believed they were serving a holy end. Nor was the pious fraud limited to writings. It also encompassed the

forgery, creation, and presentation of objects and artifacts supposedly associated with Jesus. The reason was simple. The more detail that could be created, the easier it would be to convince the faithful of the reality of the Savior. Aside from misdirecting the attention of the devoted to objects and artifacts for spiritual succor, these misleading objects, the fruits of pious fraud, continue to emerge in later millennia to challenge the authentication skills of science and to rejuvenate the leap of the faithful.

To better understand this phenomenon, which would be scandalous if practiced today, we must understand the thinking of the early Church as it attempted to keep the faithful in thrall and counter the criticisms of pagan antagonists. Joseph Wheless notes:

[S]uch frauds of the Church were not confined to the Middle Ages; they begin even with the beginning of the Church and infest every period of its history for fifteen hundred years and defile nearly every document, both of “Scriptures” and of Church aggrandizement. As truly said by Collins. . . :

In short, these frauds are very common in all books which are published by priests or priestly men. . . . For it is certain they may plead the authority of the Fathers for Forgery, Corruption and mangling of Authors, with more reason than for any of their Articles of Faith”<sup>20</sup>

It is hard to imagine that the Church would engage in outright fraud, albeit based in piety, but it was not seen in this light, even though it would clearly be seen so today. Whatever was necessary to convince an audience or to keep the articles of faith alive could be done in the name of salvation. When stories didn’t fit, they were blended to make them fit. Several statements of early Church leaders further illustrate this point. Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, the great “Father of Church History” (ca. 324) was considered by many as one of the most ardent practitioners of pious fraud. Of his early participation in the establishment of Church doctrine, it is written:

Bishop Eusebius, as we shall see, was one of the most prolific forgers and liars of his age of the Church . . . . To such an extent had the “*pious frauds of the theologians been thus early systematized and raised to the dignity of a regular doctrine,*” that Bishop Eusebius, “in one of the most learned and elaborate works that antiquity has left us, the Thirty-second Chapter of the Twelfth Book of his *Evangelical Preparation*, bears for its title this scandalous proposition: ‘*How it may be Lawful and Fitting*

*to use Falsehood as a Medicine, and for the Benefit of those who Want to be Deceived.*”<sup>21</sup>

Sharing Eusebius’s Machiavellian view was St. John Chrysostom, who, in his *On the Priesthood*, advised his fellow clergy:

Great is the force of deceit! provided it is not excited by a treacherous intention.<sup>22</sup>

I did a triple-take when I encountered this passage. It sounds like the credo of someone who lies to us for our own good. But to be an active practitioner of deceit and to proclaim its power, even endorse its use, so long as intentions are good, is a startling statement coming from a Christian saint. Acknowledging the penchant of early Church leaders to stretch the truth in their zeal to make all things right in the name of God, Cardinal Newman, commenting on this rather extraordinary piece of advice from St. John Chrysostom, said:

The Greek Fathers thought that, when there was a *justa causa*, an *untruth need not be a lie*.... Now, as to the just cause,... the Greek Fathers make them such as these — self-defense, charity, *zeal for God’s honour*, and the like.<sup>23</sup>

This is surely magic, for Cardinal Newman has miraculously transmuted “deceit without treachery” into an untruth that “need not be a lie.” Another commentator on the practice, the Great Latin Father St. Jerome (c. 340-420), asserted:

To confute the opposer, now this argument is adduced and not that. One argues as one pleases, *saying one thing while one means another*.... Origen, Methodius, Eusebius, and Apollinaris write at great length.... Consider how subtle are the arguments, how insidious the engines with which they overthrow what the spirit of the devil has wrought. Sometimes, it is true, they are compelled *to say not what they think but what is needful*....<sup>24</sup>

In case the good saint’s position isn’t clear, he is arguing that it is acceptable to lie if necessary to overthrow the position of the devil, a justification that could be easily broadened to condone “overthrowing” anyone who disagrees with the Church. While explaining the rationale for pious fraud, Jerome implicates the greatest writers and religious historians of the day, Origen, Methodius, Eusebius, and Apollinaris, in this practice. Obviously, these musings were troubling, even to Church

Fathers of the day, for, in reference to Eusebius and the others mentioned above, he observes that they:

[P]resume at the price of their soul to assert dogmatically whatever first comes into their head.<sup>25</sup>

And in a final startling note of honesty, he appears to express contempt for the gullibility of early Christian communities:

There is nothing so easy as by sheer volubility to deceive a common crowd or an uneducated congregation.<sup>26</sup>

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* acknowledges the prevalence of this attitude:

Enterprising spirits responded to this natural craving by *pretended gospels* full of romantic fables, and fantastic and striking details; their fabrications were eagerly read and *accepted as true* by common folk who were *devoid of any critical faculty* and who *were predisposed to believe* what so luxuriously fed their pious curiosity. Both Catholics and Gnostics were concerned in writing these fictions. The *former* had no motive other than that of a pious fraud.<sup>27</sup>

This disdain for truth, unless it served the ends of the Church, was the rule of the day. It colored everything that was written, said, and done from the earliest days of the Church's founding and for centuries thereafter.

But the practice of pious fraud was particularly virulent during the first four centuries when the foundations of the Church were laid. Nothing was as important as filling the void left by the absence of a written history or records on the life of Jesus. Church Fathers were given a free hand to invent and embellish whatever stories were necessary to sustain the Church and its following. And invent they did! St. Jerome,<sup>28</sup> who played a significant role in the translation and revisions to the Gospels, was also notable in this regard and actively demonstrated his attitude about the credulity of his audiences when he propagated such divine pearls as:

- The River Ganges has its source in Paradise.
- In India, there are mountains of gold that men cannot approach because of the dragons and huge monsters that haunt them.

- And his grandest tale of all in which he recounts the story of the 113-year-old hermit, Paulus, who had lived in a hole in the ground in a remote part of the desert for sixty years. In an inner revelation, he was shown the neighboring hole (four days away) of another hermit, St. Anthony, who was only ninety years old. Paulus set about to visit his neighbor and encountered several strange animals, including a half-horse, half-man, and other strange beasts know as Fauns, Satyrs, and Incubi. They conversed about the salvation of the lord. The good Father Jerome admonished the congregation, “Let no one scruple to believe this incident.... [I]ts truth is supported by [the fact that] one of those creatures...was captured and brought alive to Alexandria and sent embalmed to the emperor at Antioch.”<sup>29</sup>

The story was apparently told in such convincing detail and with such startling proof that communities became convinced. Such was the practice of pious “prevarication” to communities or to anyone else if it was necessary to strengthen belief in the Church and Jesus. On this matter, Mangasarian states:

The church historian Mosheim, writes that, “The Christian Fathers deemed it a pious act to employ deception and fraud.” . . . The greatest and most pious teachers were nearly all of them infected with this leprosy. Will not some believer tell us why forgery and fraud were necessary to prove the historicity of Jesus? . . . Another historian, Milman writes that, “Pious fraud was admitted and avowed by the early missionaries of Jesus.” “It was an age of literary frauds,” writes Bishop Ellicott, speaking of the times immediately following the alleged crucifixion of Jesus. Dr. Giles declares that, “There can be no doubt that great numbers of books were written with no other purpose than to deceive.” And it is the opinion of Dr. Robertson Smith that, “There was an enormous floating mass of spurious literature created to suit party views.”<sup>30</sup>

Pious fraud had gotten so out of hand, infecting everything in the name of Jesus and the Church, that Augustine wrote a treatise addressed to the clergy entitled *De Mendacio* (On Lying, ca. 395), followed twenty-five years later by a second treatise, *Contra Mendacium* (Against Lying) — it always sounds more holy in Latin. These treatises rebuked the clergy for its fraud, but their main point wasn’t nearly so high-minded. His principal concern was the deleterious impact lying

was having on the Church. In fact, Augustine's treatise was, according to Bishop Wordsworth:

[A] protest against these "pious frauds" which have brought discredit and damage on the cause of the Gospel, and have created prejudice against it, from the days of Augustine to our times.<sup>31</sup>

Augustine was against lying, even if used to trap a heretic:

It is more pernicious for Catholics to lie that they may catch heretics, than for heretics to lie that they may not be found out by Catholics.<sup>32</sup>

In an atmosphere permeated by pious fraud, such that Augustine found it necessary to issue his admonition against lying for a second time, it was notable that someone stood up against the practice of lying. However, Augustine does not come right out and declare a moratorium on lying. Instead, he declares that the priesthood should live by a higher standard than heretics. This was a step in the right direction, even though truth was still not a full partner in the religious practice of the day. This is evident in the position taken by Augustine on the Church policy of *suppressio veri*. He argued in support of this policy of suppressing or concealing the truth for the sake of Christian instruction. This practice of shielding the faithful from the truth in order to encourage belief in the doctrine and dogma of the Church is practiced to this day, as the Church has never disavowed it. On this point, Augustine wrote:

It is lawful, then, either to him that discourses, disputes, and preaches of things eternal, or to him that narrates or speaks of things temporal pertaining to *edification* of religion or piety, to *conceal* at fitting times *whatever seems fit to be concealed*; but to tell a lie is never lawful, therefore neither to conceal by telling a lie.<sup>33</sup>

Augustine was sanctioning concealment of any information, at any time and in any situation, if deemed appropriate by the clergy. Such concealment was deemed acceptable provided no lie was told to effect concealment. There was obviously no consideration of the standard that to conceal the truth was to mislead, thus to knowingly foster a lie, that is, a belief in something other than the truth.

This practice of concealment, which is only today being exposed, constitutes and evinces what I have termed the Santa Claus Effect:

A state of belief or practice created and/or fostered by the active ongoing propagation of that belief and the simultaneous denial of facts or information that might challenge or destroy it, directed to a believer in the conviction that they cannot handle the truth at that time; or to perpetuate the belief in the patronizing opinion that it is in their best interest; or because it is in the best interest of the propagator.

When adults create or foster a story for the fun and enjoyment of their children, or convey a truth with euphemisms (such as the birds and the bees), that is one thing. But parents function as surrogates for spirit in whose care we are all ultimately entrusted. Even with such noble intentions, the child still feels a sense of betrayal upon learning the truth. But to exercise such control over an adult and intentionally withhold the truth is a violation of trust and is reprehensible.

As it turns out, St. Augustine should have included himself in some of his admonishments about lying, for he too told extravagant tales to hold an audience and enhance the power of the Church. In one notable example, he apparently couldn't resist a good story, even if he had to invent it:

I was already Bishop of Hippo,<sup>34</sup> when I went into Ethiopia with some servants of Christ there to preach the Gospel. In this country we saw many men and women *without heads*, who had two great eyes in their breasts; and in countries still more southly, we saw people who had but one eye in their foreheads.<sup>35</sup>

Why all this lying was so rampant in the Church is largely a mystery. Perhaps it was that there was such a dichotomy between the Church hierarchy and the masses, that the former saw the latter as children, who needed stories to guide them and keep them in check. Yet, even with the greed and societal assertiveness of today, such sanctioned lying and deception is hard to conceive. As I read these accounts, they would have been even more incredible if I had not uncovered similar acts of fraud perpetrated by Paul Twitchell and Eckankar. I had seen first-hand how it developed and how leaders would do whatever it took to uphold the image of their religion and their positions in it. Neither the Church nor Eckankar was concerned with the sea of truth on which the boat of their religious teachings floated. Their concern was to keep the boat floating and bring aboard more passengers. Those who boarded knew nothing of the port from which the ship had sailed or the

course that had been set. In the eyes of the leaders, they were only the faithful; they didn't need to know.

### **Creation of the Gospels: The Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John**

Against the backdrop of creating a history in the name of God, we now examine the actual process by which the Gospels<sup>36</sup> came into being. Fredriksen provides some insight on the authenticity of the Gospels as well as the uniqueness of the events they narrate. She points out numerous competing and conflicting writings about the life of Jesus that were reviewed and considered for inclusion in the Gospels. Church leaders were well aware of the various writings that would compete to become the Gospels. They feared that different stories being told in different places by different clergy would lead to splintering and would undermine belief among the faithful. Something had to be done. Namely, one or at least a few accounts of “the greatest story ever told,” had to be selected as the official position of the Church. So, notwithstanding the pious fraud and pseudepigraphy that had stimulated the creation and copying of the many and varied versions of the Gospels, there had to be a winner. Some account of the life of Christ had to be selected that would best represent the Church, upon which everything else would be built.

Councils convened to decide which versions would prevail. One scholar who examined this period noted:

Half a hundred . . . false and forged Apostolic “Gospels of Jesus Christ,” together with more numerous other “Scripture” forgeries, was the output, so far as known now, of the . . . first two centuries of the Christian “Age of Apocryphal Literature.”<sup>37</sup>

The unenviable job of making the selection and establishing the canon fell to Church Father and Bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus (ca. 120-200), who settled on four of these “creative” works. Fredriksen notes:

[T]he canon . . . represents an attempt [by] one branch of the . . . church to produce order, to authorize only some of the growing quantity of Christian writings for its members. . . . [The four gospels collectively stand as the survivors of a process whose principles of selection had *more to do with competition between different Christian groups than with a disinterested concern for history.*] And once the choice was

made, it was perceived and defended in terms persuasive and meaningful to its ancient audience.<sup>38</sup>

Bishop Irenaeus first had to defend his decision on *why he chose only four books* out of almost fifty versions that were available, to make up the Canonical Gospels. The good Bishop provided this arcane explanation:

The Gospels could not possibly be either more or less in number than they are. Since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, the church . . . fittingly has four pillars, everywhere breathing out incorruption and revivifying men. From this it is clear that the Logos, the artificer of all things, he who sits upon the cherubim and sustains all things . . . gave us the gospel in four-fold form, but held together by one Spirit. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Thus was the number of Gospels decided. The story of their origins is almost lost to today's Christian who generally believes that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John faithfully and laboriously recorded the words and actions of Jesus so that the world could hear and know the good news. Certainly, there was a great deal of good news in these writings. They contained, as do most religious writings, a great deal of truth and wisdom drawn from many sources, albeit mixed with pious frauds that comprised its many stories. But this account of the writing of the Gospels is far different from what today's Christians — including the clergy — have been led to believe. Fredriksen's observations make it clear that historical accuracy about the life of Jesus was not of primary concern — or even possible — in the selection of the Gospels. Indeed, given the nature of the source documents how could it be? It was all created history, written by well-meaning clergy, but based on nothing but stories inflated over the years into the stuff of Gods. Fredriksen makes it clear that “competition between different Christian groups”<sup>40</sup> was the rationale for the selection of the chosen books rather than concern for truth.

But who *did* write the Gospels? One clue is found in the language in which they were written. The use of Greek as the original language of the Gospels is a sign that they were not written by any of Jesus' followers. Why would Jesus' apostles write about the activities of their lord and savior in a language that was not indigenous to their land or to

them? If they were Jewish and spoke Aramaic, why and how could they possibly write in the high-Greek style of these works?

[A] Galilean fisherman could not have written what Kummel calls such “cultivated Greek,” with “many rhetorical devices,” and with all the *Old Testament quotations and allusions deriving from the Greek version of these scriptures, not from the Hebrew original*.<sup>41</sup>

The noted Christian apologist Norman Geisler glosses over this point even as he praises the erudition of Luke for the “high quality of the Greek” that he uses in writing the Gospel attributed to him. Jesus and his disciples lived and worked in Palestine, yet the authors of the Gospels make obvious errors in describing the geography of Palestine.<sup>42</sup> Why explain to a supposed Jewish audience such details of Jewish life as “the Pharisees and the Jews in general never eat without washing the hands. . . . And there are many other points on which they have a traditional rule to maintain.”<sup>43</sup> Obviously, such descriptions suggest a foreign writer catering to an audience that understood little about the Jews and Palestine. Christian apologists seem unable to answer these and many other questions — and for obvious reasons.

### **Non-Gospel Sources for Jesus**

There is no corroborating evidence of Jesus’ life and works in the histories of authentic, disinterested writers. A possible exception can be found in the writings of Josephus, which Christian Apologists claim contains references to Jesus. Yet these have been found to be forgeries, as have all of the early non-Christian historical works attempting to establish the existence of Jesus. They were part and parcel of the age of pious fraud, an age so tainted by the pious but unethical actions of Church Fathers that scholars of today must hide or ignore the practice in order to make even a plausible argument of historical validity. There is simply no authentic record of the life of Jesus against which the Church renditions can even be compared. And while desperately needing such verification to establish the validity of Church claims, it was precisely the absence of such documentation that allowed pious fraud to flourish without fear of written historic contradiction.

We see how priests and writers of the time were inspired and sustained on stories of the life of Jesus. These stories inspired countless inner and outer experiences with Jesus. In time, his reality became

unassailable in the minds and hearts of the faithful, just as it is today. Truth has little to do with it. Belief alone created it and sustains it.

Thus, we have, in the case of Jesus and his followers, a person about whom there was no historical record yet around whom a mighty religion arose. He was reported to have performed public miracles. His birth so frightened Herod that he ordered the first-born male child of each family killed. He spoke to multitudes and shook up the entire region. Yet, somehow, he inspired not one word to be written by any historian of the time. And these were times with many chroniclers. One such historian, Livy (59 B.C.E.-17 C.E.) wrote more than 104 volumes on this period. While many of these volumes were destroyed (purposefully, some allege), no mention of Jesus can be found in them. One of the modern-day writers of this period wrote: “No literate person of his own time mentioned him in any known writing.”<sup>44</sup>

A Jewish historian and philosopher, Philo (20 B.C.E.-50 C.E.), similarly wrote nothing about this man who seems to have silently passed through, leaving no mark on the written record in spite of the historic, even monumental, events that were supposed to have occurred during his lifetime. In fact, of the more than forty other historians and chroniclers of the period, including Plutarch, the Roman biographer (46-120), who lived in the same area where large numbers of Christians supposedly lived, no mention was ever made of them, their religion, or their founder. Perhaps the strongest commentary on the historical validity of Jesus is:

The fact that no history, sacred or profane, — that not one of the three hundred histories of that age, — makes the slightest allusion to Christ, or any of the miraculous incidents ingrafted into his life, certainly proves, with a cogency that no logic can overthrow, no sophistry can contradict, and no honest skepticism can resist, that there never was such a miraculously endowed being as his many orthodox disciples claim him to have been.

The fact that Christ finds no place in the history of the era in which he lived... settles the conclusion... that the godlike achievements ascribed to him are naught but fable or fiction.... It would be a historical anomaly without a precedent, that Christ should have performed any of the extraordinary acts attributed to him in the Gospels, and no Roman or Grecian historian... make the slightest mention of one of them.... Such a historical fact banishes the last shadow of faith in their reality.<sup>45</sup>

As indicated, even the most famous historian of the period, Josephus (37-95) appears to have overlooked the extraordinary exploits of Jesus:

[I]n the entire works of Josephus, which constitute many volumes of great detail encompassing centuries of history, there is no mention of Paul or the Christians, and there are only two brief paragraphs that purport to refer to Jesus. Although much has been made of these “references,” they have been dismissed by scholars and Christian apologists alike as forgeries, as have been those referring to John the Baptist and James, “brother of Jesus.” No less an authority than Bishop Warburton of Gloucester (1698-1779) labeled the Josephus interpolation regarding Jesus “a rank forgery, and a very stupid one, too.”<sup>46</sup>

### **Contemporary Support for the Gospels**

Flaws in the arguments of Christian Apologist to prove the validity of the life of Jesus by reference to the Gospels are apparent. Failure to confront this fundamental problem is the reason why volumes of these tainted documents — products of pious fraud and pseudepigraphy — continue to be touted as proof of their validity. That these materials were produced at the urging or sanction of the church is the historical problem that no amount of erudition or evasion can overcome. Yet it is scholarship and erudition that are at the center of attempts to turn this mountain of pious fraud into faint memories or a bastion of insight and wisdom.

To achieve this metamorphosis, rules were developed to aid in determining what parts of the Gospels were more authentic than others. In other words, how does one distinguish between acceptable pious fraud and unreliable pious fraud? These rules of transmutation are applied with seeming disregard of the environment, practices, and intentions of the Church that have been outlined.

To ignore this history is to accept a continuing policy of concealment rather than to finally confront the truth. But this is precisely what has happened. In its stead, scholars have developed a tool for assessing the relative reliability of this mountain of dubious data. Here is a commentary on the basic tenets of that methodology, as summarized by Lee Strobel in *The Case for Christ*,<sup>47</sup> shorn of the shelter of historical amnesia.

**The Intention Test:** This test tries to determine, by the language of the document, if the writer intends to accurately preserve history. If one is engaged in pious fraud for the purpose of convincing opponents and adherents of the Church of its validity, any Church Father so inclined would make his creation credible. He would record history accurately and precisely. Like any good fraud, it works because of a stealthy blend of truth and deception. As we have seen, there was a phalanx of priests devoted to this end, and they were immensely successful in dodging their most ardent opponent — truth.

**The Ability Test:** This test takes for granted that the recorder had good intentions and asks whether the writer displays the ability to remember the information. Given the forty to, more likely, 120-year lapse between the supposed death of Jesus and the writing of the Gospels, this would seem a strange test for apologists to recommend. In spite of the stretch of credulity required to advance even a plausible case for “ability to remember,” some have tried a somewhat despairing and equally flawed argument. They have advanced the dubious proposition that Rabbis became famous for having committed to memory the entire Old Testament.<sup>48</sup> as support for the proposition that Gospel writers had the “ability” to accurately remember the stories in the Gospels. Aside from the thundering question why a writer waited so long to record such momentous events, there is an even larger problem. It is one thing to memorize a written work and quite another to memorize a memory without severe inaccuracies. Fredriksen makes this point quite explicitly.<sup>49</sup> Given the stronger evidence for a 120-year gap in the writing of the Gospels, this contention is even more untenable.

**The Character Test:** This test looks at the credibility of the person to whom the writing is attributed and asks whether there is any reason not to believe them. Augustine had to write *two* treatises on lying to encourage his colleagues to stop the practice that existed from the earliest periods of the Church’s history. This early and continuing practice occurred alongside pseudepigraphy and pious fraud. Both were sanctioned, if not encouraged before, during, and after the period of the formulation of the Gospels. These particulars would make the character test a measure that adherents would be well advised not to employ.

**The Consistency Test:** Are there contradictions in the Gospels that make them less credible than they might otherwise be? The evidence here is overwhelming, with literally hundreds of examples of significant and not so significant differences. But the issue is not just the discrepancy between these four books of the Gospels and other books of the New Testament. The larger question is that only four of more than fifty versions of the Gospels were selected, and the latter possessed even more inconsistencies and contradictions. How does one reconcile these fifty versions and a selection process that by its very nature acknowledged that none was authentic, original, and exclusive?

**The Bias Test:** Did the Gospel writers have any biases that would have colored their work? Obviously, the entire history of pious fraud shows that bias was the *modus operandi* of the writers of the Gospel.

**The Cover-Up Test:** Did the writers cover up any detail that might be embarrassing or reveal things that were embarrassing as proof of the documents' veracity? Answered within the context of pious fraud, the entire body of material produced during the gestation period of the Church was a known fabrication, making the test itself moot. Undeniably, the entire process was a cover-up, that is to say, a distortion of the truth.

**The Corroboration Test:** Can places, people, and events be corroborated against known events in history? Once again, given what we know of the policies supporting made-up stories to enthrall the faithful, such corroboration was elementary, as writers labored to create the most authentic and believable accounts of the life of Jesus. This was possible since there was no written history of Jesus' life to serve as a check against excesses.

**The Adverse Witness Test:** Are there contemporary sources who contradict the facts within the Gospels? To use the Gospels to make this point is to use a fraudulent document to prove another of its kind. The historians of the period serve as credible adverse witnesses and produce the most thunderous evidence by their sheer silence. As we will see, there are no legitimate non-Church sources to corroborate events in the life of Jesus as depicted in the Gospels.

There we have it, a contemporary methodology that fails to deal with the most salient evidence bearing on the authenticity and veracity

of the Gospels and other books of the Bible. The silence of scholars and the Church on this point is all the more disturbing in light of the known policy of *suppressio veri*, which would encourage concealment of this history. To confront it would impose a burden of overwhelming proportion. But that is the nature of truth. The burden of its weight increases in direct proportion to the degree of suppression. Just as in earlier versions of the now much vaunted new version of the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, there are no references to pious fraud, pseudepigraphy, *suppressio veri*, or any other marker of the practices that were the dubious foundations on which Christianity was built.

This is the problem with most current theological research and books such as *The Case for Christ*<sup>50</sup> and even the more scholarly *From Jesus to Christ*.<sup>51</sup> In the former, journalist Lee Strobel interviews many noted Christian scholars to get their take on the difficult questions posed by Christian critics and researchers regarding the life of Jesus. In interviews with distinguished scholars such as Dr. Craig L. Blomberg, Dr. Bruce Metzger, Dr. Edwin Yamauchi, Dr. John McRay, and Dr. Gregory Boyd among others, Strobel elicits testimony supportive of the conclusion that Jesus was real and that the account of him outlined in the Gospels is accurate. Yet, in interview after interview, the evidence supporting their assertions continues to be the early body of fraudulent writings of Church Fathers whose only objective was to serve God by providing whatever written support was necessary to further the Church's objectives. Again, we confront the essential weakness of all the testimony that Strobel elicits, namely, the avalanche of pious fraud that corrupted the work of the Church and continues to undermine its authenticity and veracity today.

Strobel's defense did not go without criticism. Earl Doherty countered with his, *Challenging the Verdict: A Cross-Examination of Lee Strobel's "The Case for Christ."*<sup>52</sup> Doherty does a fair job of arguing the available evidence that is susceptible to alternate conclusions, but misses the main argument, namely, the impeachability of the entire record of historic documents, most particularly the Gospels themselves, given the record of deception in which the Church acquiesced or actively participated.

## The Story Behind the Epistles of Paul

The Epistles of Paul are an important link in the chain that makes up the story of Jesus, for the letters of Paul are said to be the living link with the life of Jesus. Paul is said to have lived during the time of Jesus and thus was the only historical figure able to authenticate his existence and achievements. But even his letters have dubious provenance. Despite their importance in Christian thought, there is, astonishingly enough, nothing in Paul's letters directly about the teachings or life of the savior. About Paul, the writer and lecturer M. M. Mangasarian<sup>53</sup> says:

Is it conceivable that a preacher of Jesus could go throughout the world to convert people to the teachings of Jesus, as Paul did, *without ever quoting a single one of his sayings?* Had Paul known that Jesus had preached a sermon, or formulated a prayer, or said many inspired things about the here and the hereafter, *he could not have helped quoting, now and then, from the words of his master. . . .*

If Paul knew of a miracle-working Jesus, one who could feed the multitude with a few loaves and fishes — who could command the grave to open . . . is it conceivable that either intentionally or inadvertently *he would have never once referred to them in all his preaching?*

The conclusion is inevitable that the gospel [of] Jesus is later than Paul and his churches . . . [T]here is absolutely not a single hint or suggestion in them of such a Jesus as is depicted in the gospels. The gospel Jesus was not yet put together or compiled, when Paul was preaching.<sup>54</sup>

Of course, we now know that there were no writings about Jesus, which Paul could use in spreading the word about him. Paul knew nothing about Jesus' birth, life, or death, because no story existed and nothing had been created or written yet. If accounts of the lives of the disciples were true, Paul could have spoken with some of them. Certainly, they would still have been spreading Jesus' message immediately after his death. But, surprisingly, there is no evidence of any such communication. Paul mentions none of the disciples, in spite of their mutual devotion to Jesus and the spreading of his message. Consequently, Mangasarian concludes that the story of Jesus was made up, a creation from the pen of authors living long after Jesus died. Nothing later found in the Gospels was ever mentioned in any of Paul's writings. So the Gospels, thought to be telling the story of Jesus as it was

lived, observed and recorded by his disciples, are, to put it kindly, creative fabrications!

This essential flaw in the Church's story of Jesus has plagued it since its inception. Subtle attempts at pseudepigraphy to address the problem have been undertaken by later writers in an effort to backfill and attribute to Apostle Paul words about the life of Jesus that he did not write. But these efforts were transparent and largely futile, except to true believers. On this question, Mangasarian explained:

That the authorities of the church realize how damaging to the reality of the gospel Jesus is the inexplicable silence of Paul concerning him, may be seen in their vain effort to find in a passage put in Paul's mouth by the unknown author of the book of Acts, evidence that Paul does quote the sayings of Jesus. The passage referred to is the following: "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Paul is made to state that this was a saying of Jesus. In the first place, this quotation is not in the epistles of Paul, but in the Acts, of which Paul was not the author; in the second place, there is no such quotation in the gospels. The position, then, that there is not a single saying of Jesus in the gospels which is quoted by Paul in his many epistles is unassailable, and certainly fatal to the historicity of the gospel Jesus.<sup>55</sup>

On the question of whether the statements attributed to Paul in Acts were ever voiced by him, Fredriksen is in agreement with Mangasarian:

[T]he information that Acts relates about Paul — most specifically, on the event and circumstances of his call to be an apostle to Gentiles, and on his later negotiations with the Jerusalem community — contradicts Paul's own statements in crucial ways. Finally, Paul's speeches in Acts, according to the conventions of ancient historiography, are the free compositions of the author. . . . For all these reasons, then, Acts is not used here as a source for reconstructing Paul's reflections on the figure of Jesus.<sup>56</sup>

Others have argued that it was not Paul's mission or message to speak so much about the life and miracles of Jesus. Indeed, this is the apparent position taken by Fredriksen:

The source of . . . [Paul's] Gospel (by which he means "message"), as distinct from theirs, was neither the earthly Jesus nor a human tradition passed from man to man, but the Risen Christ, who had been revealed to him through a special act of God (Gal 1:11-17; but Cf. 1 Cor 11:23; 15:3a).<sup>57</sup>

While Fredriksen does not proclaim Paul's focus on the "Risen Christ" as an explanation for an absence of any mention of the life of Christ in his teachings, other historians have made note of this emphasis to explain the absence of any discourse about the life of Christ in Paul's writings. To this argument Mangasarian contends:

It has been hinted by certain professional defenders of Christianity that Paul's specific mission was to introduce Christianity among the Gentiles, and not to call attention to the miraculous element in the life of his Master. But this is a very lame defense. *What is Christianity, but the life and teachings of Jesus?* And how can it be introduced among the Gentiles without a knowledge of the doctrines and works of its founder? Paul gives no evidence of possessing any knowledge of the teachings of Jesus, how could he, then, be a missionary of Christianity to the heathen?<sup>58</sup>

As it turns out, it is widely recognized that Paul did not write some or all of the letters attributed to him. Fredriksen acknowledges:

[T]hough the basis of our investigation is solely the letters of Paul, not all the letters attributed to him in the canon are his. Fourteen of the twenty-seven writings comprising the New Testament are ascribed to Paul. Modern scholarship accepts as definitely Pauline only half that number.<sup>59</sup>

Other writers are far more critical of the validity of the Pauline letters.

[T]he entire "Pauline group" is the same forged class . . . says *Encyclopedia Biblica*. . . .<sup>60</sup> With respect to the canonical Pauline Epistles, . . . there are *none of them by Paul*; neither fourteen, nor thirteen, nor nine or eight, nor yet even the four so long 'universally' regarded as unassailable. They *are all, without distinction, pseudographia* (false-writings, forgeries). . . ." They are thus all uninspired anonymous church forgeries for Christ's sweet sake!<sup>61</sup>

## **The Jesus Story — The One and Only Savior?**

The words and life of Jesus have remarkable parallels to the lives of numerous other saviors and messiahs. For most readers, this may sound startling. I assure you, it was startling to me as I expanded my search for truth. There is a funny thing about the quest for truth. Once the door is opened, it never seems to close. The truth seeker is carried down paths that could never have been imagined.

I was taught as a Christian youth, that Jesus was the Son of God and the Savior of the world — *the only one*. While I had questions about the

rituals and dogma with which Christianity had surrounded the teachings of this pious man from Nazareth, I never had any question, during those days, that this was “the savior who died for our sins” — an exclusive designation if ever there was one. I never would have imagined that there had been other saviors — *many others saviors* — whose lives paralleled and *predated* that of Jesus. Even more, many also claimed to have been “crucified and died for our sins!” What was going on?

As we will see, the Christian claim of Jesus as *the* Son of God who died for the sins of the world, must be reexamined alongside the histories of more than twenty other messiahs, saviors, and Sons of God, all of whom predate Jesus and the claim made for him. Their stories are oddly familiar and parallel many critical facets of the life of Jesus found in the Gospels. For example, the histories of these saviors include:

- Descent from heaven,
- Taking on human form
- Performing miracles
- Crucifixion and ascension into heaven<sup>62</sup>

What is more, these saviors were recorded in the histories of their time, establishing that they lived and did some of the things, though likely less than generations of embellishers would have us believe. Also, just as Jesus’ coming was ostensibly foretold by prophecies, including some in the Old Testament — a dubious and contested proposition<sup>63</sup> — so too were the saviors that came before him. However, no special significance is attributed to the existence of a prophecy in establishing the divinity of a potential savior. It is presented here because much weight is given to this fact in Christian writings as evidence that Jesus was who they claim him to be. So, while it is a bogus indicator with no spiritual significance, similar prophecies were associated with the lives of many other saviors. In other words, these other prophecies undermine any claim of exclusivity to the divinity of Jesus as *the* Redeemer — even as all such claims to exclusivity or being a redeemer are bogus, since in truth, we are all soul, Jesus included.

These precursors arrived on the scene after prophecies of a divine redeemer coming from Heaven to liberate the people. Hindu-Buddhist writings prophesied a divine child:

He will relieve the earth of sin, and cause justice and truth to reign everywhere. And will bring the whole earth into the acceptance of the Hindoo religion.<sup>64</sup>

These prophecies presaged the arrival of the Buddha. Similar stories abound from China<sup>65</sup> and from Persia, where Zoroaster declared:

A virgin should conceive and bear a son, and a star would appear blazing at midday to signalize the occurrence. When you behold the star...follow it whithersoever it leads you. Adore the mysterious child, offering him gifts with profound humility. He is indeed the Almighty Word which created the heavens. He is indeed your Lord and everlasting King.<sup>66</sup>

Zoroaster's prophecy was made more than six hundred years before the birth of Jesus.<sup>67</sup> He was not speaking of Jesus. Instead, his prophecies presaged the Persian and Chaldean God, Josa.

In his book, *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors*, Kersey Graves summarizes:

We are compelled to omit, for want of room, the notice of numerous Messianic prophecies found in the sacred writings of Egypt, Greece, Rome, Mexico, Arabia, and other countries, all of which tend to show that the same prophetic spirit pervaded all religious countries.... And we find as much evidence that these pagan prophecies were inspired, and also fulfilled, as those found in the Jew[ish]-Christian bible....<sup>68</sup>

So then, messianic stories predating the birth of Jesus abound. To any truth seeker, these accounts raise fundamental questions about the validity of Christian claims regarding Jesus' uniqueness and exclusive divinity. And as to claims that Jesus alone died for the sins of the world, it is evident that he merely joins the pantheon of other saviors.

As for crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension into heaven, the accounts of Jesus are also derivative of the stories of at least fifteen other saviors, further eroding any claim to exclusivity that is the popularly accepted view of his state. Paul proclaimed the death and resurrection of Jesus as the watershed event, proving incontrovertibly the divinity of Jesus, who by this act became the Christ. Paul's single-minded devotion to this story was the basis for the Church's proclama-

tion of Easter as the most holy and indeed the most important of Christian holy days. Yet Paul, and those who followed him in the Church, appeared oblivious to the fact that the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension story was old, even when Paul first propounded it. Indeed, other saviors who allegedly experienced, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension include:

- Wittoba of the Telingonesic (crucified 552 B.C.E.): He is represented with nail-holes in his hands and soles of his feet. He is celebrated in the region of Madura, India.
- Quexalcote of Mexico (crucified (587 B.C.E.): He was executed upon the cross as a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Evidence of this is tangible and indelibly engraved upon steel and metal plates. One plate represents him being crucified on a mountain and another in the heavens, just as St. Justin describes in the case of Jesus. In some depictions, he is crucified with two thieves.<sup>69</sup>

These accounts are written in the sacred books of their respective countries and are just a few of the numerous accounts of other saviors and messiahs that dispute any claim of exclusivity that grew to become one of the tenets of Church doctrine.

### **Where the Story of Jesus Originated**

The stories about the life of Christ that make up the Gospels did not come out of the blue and certainly not out of any historical records of his life. For as we have seen, there were no historical accounts of his life recorded by any historian of his era. But compelling historical evidence does exist to show that the story of Jesus is suspiciously similar to the accounts of other saviors and messiahs for whom there are recorded histories. These accounts do not conclusively prove that any of them was *the* source of the story or history of Jesus as found in the New Testament. But the parallels in the story of Jesus match so precisely with the life and history of Krishna as to convince all but the true-believer, for whom facts are irrelevant. The story of Krishna predates the birth, life, and death of Jesus by centuries. Further, the authors of the Gospels were obviously familiar with other religious myths, especially the life of Krishna, that were circulating in the Mediterranean World during that time. Many likely got mixed in with the actual

stories of Jesus that were circulating by word of mouth forty to a hundred and fifty years before they were finally written down. From these stories, the Church Fathers wrote an elaborate new myth eclectically drawn from the stories generously told and exchanged with locals, traders, soldiers, emissaries, wandering prophets, and others.<sup>70</sup>

The life of Krishna (literally meaning “black,” or “dark as a cloud”)<sup>71</sup> of India, as described in the Baghavat Gita, predated Jesus by 1200 years. Indeed, not just the story of his life, as we shall see, but many of the sayings attributed to Jesus were also uttered earlier by Krishna.<sup>72</sup> Here are a few of the more than one hundred parallels between the lives of these two saviors. Combined, they raise questions about the authenticity of the life story of Jesus, if not his very existence as other than myth. As to Krishna:

- He was born of a virgin.
- The mother and child were visited by shepherds, wise men, and an angelic host, who joyously sang, “In thy delivery, O favored among women, all nations shall have cause to exult.”
- The edict of the tyrant ruler Cansa, ordered all first-born to be put to death.
- The mother and child miraculously escaped by parting the waves of the river Jumna (the putative source of another well-known story) to permit them to pass through on dry ground.
- The retirement of Krishna to a desert for contemplation.
- His baptism or ablution in the river Ganges, corresponding to Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan.
- His transfiguration at Madura, where he assured his disciples that “present or absent, I will always be with you.”
- He had a favorite disciple (Arjoon), who was his friend, as John was the friend of Christ.
- He was anointed with oil by women.
- And more than one hundred other similarities.<sup>73</sup>

As we have seen, inventing or borrowing stories to exalt a “savior” as the center of a new religion was regarded as essential to strengthen belief of the faithful and the institution of the Church. But then as now, the faithful knew little if anything about the deception and untruth at the center of the teaching. Any institution based on a fundamental deception always runs the risk of discovery with the attendant consequences. This is not to say that, even from such a dubious and devious base, good cannot arise. Certainly it can, and there is much to be said about the tremendous good that the Church continues to contribute to civilization. But like Eckankar, where the good is built on a base of deception actively hidden from the view of the faithful, there is something fundamentally wrong. And it is this: people do not like being lied to and deceived. It goes against the most basic instinct that we have as humans and certainly as soul. “Tell me the truth and let *me* decide,” is the mantra that all would voice if given the chance. And this is precisely what is intended in this chapter. Anything less than the truth is to perpetuate a hoax, no matter how well-intentioned: it is disingenuous if not dishonorable.

### **The Basis of Contemporary Belief**

Whatever the facts surrounding Christianity, it has grown and spread as few other religions in history. The rationales of Christian adherents can be put into four categories. The first comprises the true believers, who do not care about the facts, but are comforted by the stories in the Gospels and can see the fruits of this belief in their lives. These are the fundamentalists who, ignoring or unaware of the facts of history, believe that the Bible — and thus the story of Jesus — represents the literal and unassailable Word of God. It is not to be challenged or questioned, lest one reap the consequences that flow from defying the Word of God.

A second group of Christian believers, the Euhemerists,<sup>74</sup> anchor their faith in the assumption that there was, in fact, an historical Jesus. How else, they would argue, can one explain the strength of Christianity? I can understand this position. From the earliest days, I was presented with a picture of Jesus, which in time filled my inner space and became as real as anyone in my life. My assumption of his historical reality only strengthened my belief in his mission and miracles. But a

similar thing happened when I assumed the reality of Eck Masters. The assumption of historic validity gives inner and outer life to any creation of imagination.

Of course the image of Jesus has been depicted with many faces, in many races. This is to be expected when dealing with a figure that no one has ever seen or known. To the extent that Jesus was a mortal man elevated to the status of god, his ascension paralleled the track of many historical figures whose accomplishments were so venerated as to be elevated to this status. This has come to be known as “euhemerism,” a word that comes to us from Euhemerus (a fourth-century B.C.E. Greek mythographer), who held that the gods were simply deified mortals.<sup>75</sup> In this school of thought, Jesus is portrayed as a rebel, who so incited the Romans that they executed him. But the problem with this hypothesis continues to be the dearth of any verifiable historic record of his life from sources other than those composed decades after his death. And, as we have seen, these were written by Church Fathers whose intentions were guided by anything but a concern for historical accuracy.

Third, there are the mythicists: students and interpreters of myth who adhere to the view that some supernatural persons or events originate in human imagination, especially as revealed in myth. Given the growing body of evidence that points to Jesus being a mythological figure, this school of thought adopted a more realistic and plausible view. They maintain that because the myths about Jesus appeared before he did, they constitute the core of a spiritual truth around which the history of the man and the movement came together.

In recent years, an intriguing fourth group of believers has emerged, basing their faith, at least in part, in *The Urantia Book*. In the words of the Urantia Foundation:

The Urantia Book was written in 1934-1935 and published in 1955. The book proclaims to be authored by numerous supermortal (angel-like) beings as a Revelation to our world. It is the first Epochal Revelation since Jesus and the fifth since the beginning of human life on Earth. No humans are associated with authoring The Urantia Book and the technique whereby the papers were transcribed is unknown. Like all other religious books, the contents should be evaluated by the fruits of the spirit which the teachings produce, not by any claim of authorship....<sup>76</sup>

Either this book is an astonishing example of extraterrestrial cooperation or it is another example of pious fraud that, in regard to its alleged origins and scope, leaves all other examples in its wake. This book contains minute details of Jesus' life, including an intricate description of the compound, neighborhood, and physical environment in which he walked as a boy. It similarly contains other details of the life of Christ spread over more than seven hundred remarkable pages. Whatever its source, the Urantia movement is growing. For many, its version of the life of Jesus is more credible than that of the Christian churches because it is more detailed — remember the device of truth by detail?

### **A Final Word**

As God-soul, the point of all religion and all worship is to eventually outgrow it and realize that the lives of the masters, saints, saviors, and redeemers are a preview of our own life. Each of us is a spark of God with the inherent potential of all other souls. But the deeper we become entangled in ritual, doctrine, and religious debate, the more we move away from learning the essential spiritual lesson for which we have come into this world, *yet again*. The stories of Christianity, Eckankar, and Radhasoami are only examples of what happens in any religion that establishes itself or its central figure as the conduit through which one must pass in order to know the reality of God. In the end, they all must be shown for the transient nature of the lessons they can teach. For ultimately each person is his own path to God and can never experience the divine reality in a religion or anything else outside of himself.

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## Notes

### Chapter 12 — Holy Books and the Sixteen Crucified Saviors

- 1 Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible* (New York: Harper Collins, 1997), pp. 17-18.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 3 Gerald Massey, *Ancient Egypt: The Light of the World*, Two Volumes (Kila: Kessinger, 2002); *Book of the Beginnings*, Two Volumes (Kila: Kessinger, 1992). On this issue, Doane offers more detailed evidence to prove that parts of the Old Testament have their origins in Egyptian culture: “There is indeed, hardly a great or fruitful idea in the Jewish or Christian systems, which has not its analogy in the (ancient) Egyptian faith. The development of the one God into a *trinity*; the incarnation of the mediating deity in a Virgin, and without a father; his conflict and his momentary defeat by the powers of darkness; his partial victory (for the enemy is not destroyed); his resurrection and reign over an eternal kingdom with his justified saints; his distinction from, and yet identity with, the uncreate incomprehensible Father, whose form is unknown, and who dwelleth not in temples made with hands—all these theological conceptions pervade the oldest religion of Egypt....” T. W. Doane, *Bible Myths and Their Parallel in Other Religions* (Pomeroy: Health Research, 1985), p. 414.
- 4 See Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible*; Paula Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ: The Origins of the New Testament Images of Jesus* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).
- 5 “The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Since the 1780s, the first three books of the New Testament have been called the Synoptic Gospels because they are so similar in structure, content, and wording that they can easily be set side by side to provide a synoptic comparison of their content. The Gospel of John has a different arrangement and offers a somewhat different perspective on Christ. The striking similarities between the first three Gospels prompt

questions regarding the actual literary relationship that exists between them. This question, called the Synoptic problem, has been elaborately studied in modern times.” See *Encyclopædia Britannica*.

- 6 Joseph Wheless, *Forgery in Christianity: A Documented Record of the Foundations of the Christian Religion* (Kila: Kessinger, 1997), pp. 191-192.
- 7 Ibid., p. 192.
- 8 Ibid., p. xvii.
- 9 G. A. Wells, *Did Jesus Exist?* (London: Pemberton, 1986), p. 78.
- 10 See Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*.
- 11 Wheless, *Forgery in Christianity*, p. 145.
- 12 T. W. Doane, *Bible Myths and Their Parallel in Other Religions* (Pomero: Health Research, 1985), p. 412.
- 13 See Acharya S., *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold* (Kempston: Adventures Unlimited Press, 1999).
- 14 Ibid., p. 34.
- 15 Paula Fredriksen is a Boston University Professor of the Appreciation of Scriptures in the Department of Religion, and consultant and featured speaker on the PBS *Frontline* series “From Jesus to Christ.”
- 16 Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*, pp. 4-5 (emphasis added).
- 17 See Mangasar M. Mangasarian, *The Truth About Jesus: Is He A Myth?* (Chicago: Independent Religious Society, 1909), chapter “Jesus of Paul,” at [http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/m\\_m\\_mangasarian/truth\\_about\\_jesus.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/m_m_mangasarian/truth_about_jesus.html).
- 18 *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* defines pious fraud as “a fraud contrived and executed to benefit the church or accomplish some good end, upon the theory that the end justified the means.”
- 19 “Spurious writings, especially writings falsely attributed to biblical characters or times. Also a body of texts written between 200 B.C.E. and C.E. 200 and spuriously ascribed to various prophets and kings of Hebrew Scriptures.” See <http://www.cometozarahemla.org/others/movocabulary.html>.
- 20 Wheless, *Forgery in Christianity*, p. xxii.
- 21 Ibid., p. xxiii, (emphasis added).
- 22 Ibid.
- 23 Ibid., p. xxiv (emphasis added).

- 24 Ibid., (emphasis added).
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid., pp. xxiv-xxv.
- 27 See *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, under “III. Apocrypha of Christian Origin, (1) Apocryphal Gospels” at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01601a.htm> (emphasis added).
- 28 See “St. Jerome” at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08341a.htm>.
- 29 Wheless, *Forgery in Christianity*, p. xxv.
- 30 See Mangasarian, *The Truth About Jesus*, chapter entitled “Jesus of Paul,” at [http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/m\\_m\\_mangasarian/truth\\_about\\_jesus.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/m_m_mangasarian/truth_about_jesus.html).
- 31 Wheless, *Forgery in Christianity*, p. xxvi.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Hippo is near what is now Constantine, Algeria.
- 35 Wheless, *Forgery in Christianity*, p. xxvi (emphasis added).
- 36 *Merriam-Webster's* defines the Gospels as “the story or record of Christ's life and teachings contained in the first four books of the New Testament...containing narratives of the life and death of Jesus Christ ascribed respectively to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The good news concerning Christ, the Kingdom of God, and salvation... the teachings of Jesus and the apostles as a body or system.”
- 37 Wheless, *Forgery in Christianity*, p. 101.
- 38 Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*, p. 6 (emphasis added).
- 39 Ibid., pp. 6-7.
- 40 Ibid., p. 6.
- 41 Acharya S., *The Christ Conspiracy*, p. 35 (emphasis added).
- 42 Wells, *Did Jesus Exist?* p. 78.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Acharya S., *The Christ Conspiracy*, p. 49.
- 45 Kersey Graves, *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors* (Escondido, CA: Book Tree, 1999), pp. 322-3.
- 46 Acharya S., *The Christ Conspiracy*, p. 50.

- 47 See Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998).
- 48 Ibid.
- 49 See Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*.
- 50 See Strobel, *The Case for Christ*.
- 51 See Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*.
- 52 See Earl Doherty, *Challenging the Verdict: A Cross-Examination of Lee Strobel's "The Case for Christ"* (Ottawa: Age of Reason, 2002).
- 53 “Mangasar Magurditch Mangasarian was born in Mashger, Turkey, on December 29, 1859. His family was affluent enough to send him to Robert College in Constantinople where he was ordained into the Congregationalist ministry in 1878. He studied for the Presbyterian ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary (Princeton University) but he became the minister of the Spring Garden Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1882 and remained there until 1885. During the period 1885-89 he was an ‘independent preacher in Philadelphia’ and the founder of and lecturer on ‘Independent Religion’ in New York City sometime during this period. Mr. Mangasarian, progressively skeptical, soon surrendered the words of Christ as his creed. In fact he came finally to understand that the Christ of Christianity was nothing but a myth. Consequently, in 1909, his congregation printed his first hardback book in the United States, *The Truth About Jesus — Is He a Myth?*” See <http://www.atheists.org/Atheism/roots/mangasarian/>.
- 54 See Mangasarian, *The Truth About Jesus*, chapter “Jesus of Paul,” at [http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/m\\_m\\_mangasarian/truth\\_about\\_jesus.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/m_m_mangasarian/truth_about_jesus.html) (emphasis added).
- 55 Ibid.
- 56 Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*, p. 53.
- 57 Ibid., p. 52.
- 58 See Mangasarian, *The Truth About Jesus*, chapter “Jesus of Paul,” at [http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/m\\_m\\_mangasarian/truth\\_about\\_jesus.html](http://www.infidels.org/library/historical/m_m_mangasarian/truth_about_jesus.html) (emphases added).
- 59 Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*, p. 53.
- 60 “*Encyclopedia Biblica* was largely the idea and work of Prof. Robertson Smith who was a principal contributor of articles on Christianity to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* between 1875 and 1878. From this base, the *Encyclopedia Biblica* was created along with contributions from numerous other Christian scholars. The first

- edition was published around 1900.” See [http://www.cwru.edu/UL/preserve/Etana/encyl\\_biblica\\_a-d/preface.pdf](http://www.cwru.edu/UL/preserve/Etana/encyl_biblica_a-d/preface.pdf).
- 61 Wheless, *Forgery in Christianity*, p. 231 (emphasis added).
  - 62 See Graves, *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors*.
  - 63 See Fredriksen, *From Jesus to Christ*.
  - 64 See Graves, *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors*, p. 35.
  - 65 Ibid., p. 36.
  - 66 Ibid.
  - 67 See *Encyclopædia Britannica*, under “Zoroaster,” at <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=80561>.
  - 68 Graves, *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors*, p. 37.
  - 69 Ibid, Chapter XVI.
  - 70 Ibid.
  - 71 See *Encyclopædia Britannica*, under “Krishna,” at <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article?eu=47328>.
  - 72 See Graves, *The World's Sixteen Crucified Saviors*, chapter XVI.
  - 73 Ibid.
  - 74 See Acharya S., *The Christ Conspiracy*.
  - 75 *Merriam-Webster Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, under “Euhemerism,” at <http://unabridged.merriam-webster.com/cgi-bin/unabridged?va=euhemerism&x=13&y=6>.
  - 76 See *The Urantia Book* (Chicago: Urantia Foundation, 1993). See also at <http://www.urantia.org/papers/index.html>.