

Jesus Never Was

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The purpose of this article is to outline what I consider to be the major arguments in support of a “pure-myth” viewpoint or position concerning the question of the historicity of the biblical figure we know as Jesus, a.k.a. Jesus Christ, Jesus the Christ, or Jesus of Nazareth. A second purpose is to provide the reader with a selected bibliography of books, generally written by highly qualified biblical scholars, which the author has either used as sources of information, and/or has directly quoted from in the preparation of this paper. The author, himself, makes no pretense of being a “biblical scholar,” only an avid reader of their works.

Before I attempt to present at least “summaries” of arguments in support of the pure-myth point of view, (hereafter referred to as a “position”) I think it would be helpful to make clear the various positions which have traditionally been listed as possible. Some scholars have listed three positions. I prefer John Remsburg’s four different options. The positions listed below are from Remsburg’s 1909 book, *The Christ*, page 327, with slight additions of mine for clarification.

1. “Orthodox Christians believe that Christ was a historical character. [However, he was] both supernatural and divine; and that the New Testament narratives, which purport to give a record of his life and teachings, contain nothing but infallible truth.” (This is generally known as the “literalist position.”)
2. Conservative Rationalists, like Renan and the Unitarians, believe that Jesus of Nazareth *is* a historical character and that these narratives, eliminating the super-natural elements, which they regard as myths, give a fairly authentic account of his life.” (This is usually referred to as the “historical myth” position.)
3. Many radical Freethinkers believe that Christ is a myth, of which Jesus of Nazareth is the basis, but that these narratives are so legendary and contradictory as to be almost if not wholly, unworthy of credit.” In other words, there was most likely a historical Jesus, but virtually all of the stories about him are mythical. (This is known as the “philosophical myth” position.) My added comment would be that in the intervening years between 1909 and now, this position would no longer be considered at all “radical,” and the Unitarians referred to in position 2, above, have shifted almost entirely to this third perspective.
4. “Other [‘more radical’ is implied here] Freethinkers believe that Jesus Christ is a pure myth—that he never had an [historic] existence, except as a Messianic idea, or an imaginary solar deity.” I would add here that a natural concomitant of this position is that the four canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are entirely fictional—made up stories, no parts of which have any basis in reality whatsoever. (This is the “pure-myth” position.)

The Seven Major Arguments

I admit that there may very well be more than “seven major arguments” for the pure-myth position, and that in some instances the arguments presented here partially overlap. Also, many of the same arguments can be used to support position three. However, I have, perhaps arbitrarily, outlined the following seven arguments for the reader’s consideration: (1) No one seemed to have noticed Jesus in his time. (2) The Gospels were not written by eyewitnesses. (3) The gospels are entirely fictional, pure myths. (4) What we now call “Christianity” existed long before Jesus’ time. It was derived from earlier “scripture” and more ancient myths. (5) Paul, writing earlier than the gospels, clearly spoke of a “spiritual” Christ. He knew nothing of a real, live human Jesus. (6) There is no agreement at all concerning this putative historical Jesus’ looks, lineage, biography, character, moral worthiness, or even his central message. (7) The “you-can’t-have-it-both-ways” argument.

Again, the combination of all the arguments and opinions outlined in support of the above points will not absolutely “prove” that there was no historical Jesus. Logicians tell us it is impossible to absolutely prove a negative. It might be possible that there was a “real” William Tell who served as the inspiration for, and may have even engaged in some of the activities ascribed to the legendary Swiss folk hero. However, the great preponderance of the evidence we have at this time argues very strongly against this possibility. I believe that position four, described above, is an exact parallel to the pure myth claim for William Tell. The same claim might also be made about any of the long list of crucified saviors that have “visited” earth long before the beginning of the first century of this era. My claim is, in other words, that applying “Ockham’s razor,” (e.g. the simplest, most logical explanation that comports with all the known facts), and considering the tremendous dearth of evidence to the contrary, the most rational conclusion is that there never was an historical Jesus. Further, I contend that he, and consequently all that is said about him, are entirely fictional.

Now that I’ve made that exceedingly clear, let’s get on with the arguments, one by one.

No one noticed Jesus in “his day.”

As most of the readers of this article know, Christian apologists, world-wide, have “pointed with pride” to a handful of early extra-biblical writings which directly mention Jesus, John the Baptist, and/or James the Just, a.k.a. James the Brother of the Lord as a real first-century historical persons. “Ah ha,” they say. “Since you skeptics erroneously believe that the four Gospels are works of fiction, how can you account for *these* writings of reliable, unbiased historians who wrote about or referred to Jesus at or very near the time when he was alive?”

Just to mention the one “main gun” that Christian apologist have been firing at us skeptics for the past 1,800 years, (The difficulty of defending the Gospels has been a well-recognized problem for the church since they first where apparently “noticed’ by anyone around the middle of the second century.), I will briefly discuss the famous “Testimonium Flavium.” This Latin phrase refers to a single paragraph of about twelve sentences which appears to most critics to have been inserted awkwardly between two paragraphs which make perfectly good sense without the insertion. The reference is in a book by the well-known first century Jewish historian,

Flavius Josephus [37 – c95 CE]. The reference is contained in his book, *The Antiquities of the Jews*. This book is—appropriately enough for the reference to be contained in—a book about the early history of the Jews in the area where Jesus is supposed to have preached, and in the time when he was supposedly alive.

As Frank R. Zindler says, “Although Flavius Josephus was born too late to be an eyewitness of the lives of Jesus or John the Baptist nevertheless he was a contemporary of the evangelists [assuming they existed] who wrote of these characters. He should have heard of Paul [if he existed, whom he never mentions]. Furthermore, from his priest-craft father, Matthias [b 6 CE] he should have known about the religious ferment supposedly stirred up by the doings of Jesus.” (Zindler, Frank R., *The Jesus The Jews Never Knew*, p. 35). Yet this well-respected historian mentions none of this with the single exception of the paragraph referred to above. In that paragraph only, he names a man called Jesus. “He was the Christ,” Josephus is made to say. He was a “doer of wonderful works” and that “Pilate condemned him to the cross.” The paragraph concludes that, “The tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.” “This day” would be about the year 90 CE, approximately when Josephus wrote his history book. This phrase, at the very least, is an obvious later interpolation as there was no “tribe of Christians” during Josephus’s time. Christianity did not get off the ground until the second century.

It is also interesting that the mention of this particular Jesus, “Jesus the Christ,” is divulged by Josephus with no more emphasis than he gives to the other 20 Jesuses he speaks of in his writings. (See Leidner, Harold, *The Fabrication of the Christ Myth*, p. 19 – 20).

In summary, let me just say that the single paragraph referred to above has been one of the most thoroughly researched and debated topics in all of biblical criticism. Those that want a more detailed analysis can refer to Zindler’s entire chapter on it in the above cited book, (“Faking Flavius”, p. 31 to 73.) Additionally, Earl Doherty’s book supporting the mythical Christ theory, *The Jesus Puzzle* discusses this and other early likely Christian interpolations in chapter 21, “Flavius Josephus” p. 205 to 222. Referring to another oft-quoted reference to Jesus in the writings of the Roman historian Tacitus [c55CE-c120 CE], Doherty says, “If the silence on Jesus in the earlier works of both Tacitus and Josephus casts doubt on the authenticity of their later references, then we truly have *lost every clear non-Christian reference to Jesus as a human being* [emphasis added] before the latter half of the second century.” (p. 222)

Think about that sentence for a minute. Dozens of books of Christian apologists will offer long lists of citations about Jesus from early writings. However, most of these citations refer to either clearly awkwardly done interpolations, whereas others were written by authors who lived anywhere from a century and a half up to several centuries past the time when Jesus was supposed to have lived. These quotations referring to Jesus and other Gospel characters simply repeat stories that the writer has heard from other Jesus cult enthusiasts. As such, they are of no value whatsoever.

In addition to the above noted refutation of the most important references to a supposed historical Jesus written near Jesus’ time, I should also mention at least two “deafening silences” by highly regarded writers of the same time period. I am referring to the writings of Philo, an

eminent Jewish philosopher and historian who lived during the early first century, and Justus of Tiberias, a native of Galilee who wrote a history covering the period in which Jesus is said to have lived. Neither one of them ever mentioned a “Jesus.” The works of Justus have all perished now. However, we have the writings of a ninth century Christian Bishop and scholar of Constantinople, Photius, who says that he had read Justus’ works. He reports, in utter amazement one might imagine, that, “He (Justus) makes not the least mention of the appearance of Christ, of what things happened to him, or of the wonderful works he did.” (Jackson, J. G., *Pagan Origins of the Jesus Myth*, p. 8.) Personally, I find that quote absolutely jaw-dropping.

The Gospels were not written by eyewitnesses

Whether one believes that the canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John) are partly fictional elaborations of some core of truth, or whether you believe they are entirely fictional is not the issue at this point. (What I see as a separate issue of their fictional or non-fictional status will be taken up in the next point.) The question here is simply, were the gospels written by human witnesses to the “life and times” of the putative Jesus? This point can be handled quite briefly. The answer is a resounding “No!” There is virtual unanimity of opinion by all un-brainwashed, rational biblical scholars—even so-called Christian scholars (perhaps an oxymoron)—that the gospels were written by now unknown writers anytime between 40 years after Jesus’ time up to about 185 years after his supposed death, depending on what scholar one consults. Most scholars place Mark, the generally recognized first written gospel, at about the year 70 CE, just after the destruction of the Jewish temple of Yahweh. However, Earl Doherty has advanced some closely reasoned arguments that support a time “around the years 85 to 90 CE.” (*The Jesus Puzzle*, p. 3).

Famed Jesus scholar, Dr. G. A Wells summarizes in his 1988 book, *The Historical Evidence for Jesus*, “The gospels are usually put between 70 and 110, with Mark at about 70, Matthew and Luke a little later, and John, the latest, at about 100. Acts (written as we shall see, by the author of Luke) and some of the pseudo-Pauline epistles are assigned to the turn of the century. I find all this convincing enough, except in the case of Mark, which I date at about 90 rather than 70. If this is correct, then all four gospels were written soon after 90 and drew some of their material from earlier documents which have not survived and from oral tradition, much of which must have been available from about 80, although it would have taken time for them to have become generally disseminated.” (Wells, op. cit. p. 10 & 11).

There is near unanimous agreement that the very first mention of the existence of what we now call the gospels was by Justin Martyr, in the 150s. Doherty says, however, that he may only have known of Matthew and Luke. “Even at that, he does not refer to them by name, calling the documents he is quoting from ‘memoirs of the Apostles.’ Moreover, his quotations for the most part do not agree with our present texts.” (*The Jesus Puzzle*, p. 259) So, it seems that the “eyewitness testimony” of the so-called “apostles” was still being sort of “worked out” a century and a half after J.C.’s supposed birth.

The gospels are entirely fictional, pure myths

Many large tomes have been entirely devoted to supporting the point that great sections, if not all, of the New Testament, as well as the Old Testament, are simply a retelling of fabulous tales based on older Jewish, Roman, Greek, Persian, and even more ancient Egyptian stories. Substantiating this point does not advance this paper's major thesis, except as it applies to the only supposed biblical "evidence" in support of a historic Jesus—that is, that testimony provided by the four gospels. For those readers who might be interested in the spurious origins of not only the gospels, but also the entire bible, the names several entire books devoted to this subject can be found in the bibliography of this paper.

It is interesting to me that a great many freethinkers and rationalists—people who might be reading this article—are very quick to agree that pretty much the entire bible is chock full of misinformation, forgeries, bad history and just plain lies. Not only that, but most rationalists are quite willing to accept the proposition that this mish-mash of prevarication was not simply a naive passing along of old legends, but were written for the express purpose of convincing (i.e. "converting") the gullible reader into subscribing to the particular fanciful dogma the ancient writers were trying to peddle. However, for some reason or another that entirely escapes me—perhaps just early brainwashing imbedded as deeply as potty training—these same rationalists are reluctant to imagine that the four gospels are *completely* fictional. Surely, they say, there must have been *some* sort of demythologized, even perhaps anonymous nobody who was arrested, tried by Roman authorities, then crucified. We can't be sure of any more details than that, they say. I simply ask, why must this be so? What more tangible evidence can anyone present that the whole story is not simply what it appears to be—a retelling of one or more of the dozens, perhaps hundreds, of ancient sun-god or sky-god's traditional, descending then ascending god myths, generally consisting of elements such as of first some tribulations (a trial), conviction, crucifixion, and finally resurrection? One could go on for several paragraphs pointing out the many details of the "passion story" that have parallels not only in more ancient myths, but also in earlier Jewish writings including the Old Testament. See, for example, Zechariah 9: 9, which foreshadows Jesus' triumphal entrance into Jerusalem on an ass; actually "on an ass and the foal of an ass"—a neat trick, eh?), and the foreshadowing of the whole "passion story" in Psalms 22, the virgin birth in Isaiah 7: 14, his birth in Bethlehem in Micah 5: 2. All of this has been well noted for centuries. Why in the world would any rational person imagine that any of these fables were in any sense *true*?

It is interesting to speculate on the source material for the first written gospel, the Gospel according to Mark. Perhaps Mark—probably a well educated Greek-speaking member of the Jewish Diaspora—had read the works of "Philo Judaeus, the Jewish philosopher-theologian of Alexandria in Egypt." (A speculation of Alvar Ellegard, *Jesus One Hundred Years Before Christ*, p. 5) Or, perhaps he had heard the stories of the so-called "Teacher of Righteousness" of the Essenes who may have lived (mythological or real—who knows?) sometime in the first century BCE. (Ellegard, op. cit., p. 258). Maybe Mark wrote in the second century as scholar Ellegard holds, and had read Flavius Philostratus's *Life of Apollonius*, whose life almost exactly paralleled the life of the mythical Jesus and who reportedly died in 98 CE. (See Randel Helms, *Gospel Fictions*, p. 9) Surely, he had read of the so-called "Suffering Servant of the Lord" described in Isaiah 52: 13 – 53: 12. (See Doherty's *The Jesus Puzzle*, p. 80). Certainly Mark,

and later the other gospel writers, had no shortage of inspiration. What they didn't have is anyone who was in any sense "real."

It is important to remain focused on the primary reason why these gospels were written, or perhaps "compiled" would be a better word. They were written for the express purpose of convincing the uneducated and gullible masses that they no longer needed to believe in a sort of mystical, unseen, spiritual Christ—a somewhat difficult concept for the unsophisticated to grasp even though it was familiar to them as I will discuss later. Here, in the gospels, the new Jesus cult offers a "real", flesh and blood incarnation of god to believe in. (In truth, there was a terrific argument early on between the Gnostic Christians and the main line, later to become the Catholic Christians as to this "flesh and blood" issue.) This savior figure spoke real words (i.e. the Sermon on the Mount, etc.), ate food, performed miracles, visited real places, and spoke to "multitudes." He was truly crucified, not allegorically crucified in a heavenly realm. Remember "doubting Thomas"? He wanted to stick his fingers into Jesus' wounds, just to be sure. (John 20: 26-27) I thought that was a "nice touch" for the last gospel fiction writer to add; don't you? For those of you that might still be unconvinced of the absolute untrustworthiness of the gospels in particular, I offer just one more powerful quotation for your consideration:

"Nearly every thing written concerning the gospels to the year 325, and all the copies of the gospels themselves to the same period, are lost or destroyed. The truth is that very few early Christian texts exist because the autographs, or originals, were destroyed after the Council of Nicea and the "retouching" of 506 CE under Emperor Anastasius, which included "revision" of the Church fathers' works—catastrophic acts that would be inconceivable if these 'documents' were truly the precious testaments of the very Apostles themselves regarding the 'Lord and Savior,' whose alleged advent was so significant that it sparked profound fanaticism and endless wars. Repeating what would seem to be utter blasphemy, in the 11th and 12th centuries the 'infallible Word of God' was 'corrected' again by a variety of church officials. In addition to these major 'revisions' have been many others, including copying and translation mistakes and deliberate mutilation and obfuscation of meaning." (Acharya S, *The Christ Conspiracy*, p. 26). Still think the gospels are about real events? If so, I have a bridge in Brooklyn I'd like to talk to you about.

What we now call "Christianity" existed long before Jesus' time

As with point two above, there is little or no debate among serious scholars that what we now call "Christianity" has so heavily plagiarized from prior existing Christ and risen sun-god myths as to be virtually indistinguishable from many of them. Of course, first of all there is simply Judaism, which had long talked about and predicted a soon-to-arrive "Christ." Ironically, according to them, he still hasn't come. The documentation of this claim is the subject of literally hundreds of books. A small number of these books are quoted in this paper. Just to present a quick summation, I would like to quote a well-recognized scholar of the early 20th century. "The Pagans had their holy days (from which the Christians plagiarized their Christmas, Easter, Rogation Days, etc.); their monks, nuns, religious processions carrying images of idols, incense, holy water, holy oil, chants, hymns, liturgies, confessions of sins to priests, revelations by gods to priests, prophecies, sacred writings of 'holy bibles,' Pontiffs, Holy Fathers, holy crafty priesthoods. All these sacrosanct things of Christian 'Revealed Religion,' were age-old

pre-Christian Pagan myths and superstitions.” (*Forgery in Christianity*, by Joseph Wheless, p. 17 and 18) All of this is not even “controversial” among knowledgeable secular biblical scholars.

I will quote one more source, a small pamphlet published by The Freedom From Religion Foundation which “zeroes in” on the mythical antecedents of the Jesus Christ figure. The pamphlet—really, a tract—is entitled, “Cookie Cutter Christs.” The sun-god Mithra, who was very popular in the Roman Empire around 2000 years ago was “born of a virgin about 600 BC, was celebrated on December 25. Magi brought gifts to his birth. His first worshipers were shepherds and he was followed in his travels by twelve companions. Mithra was slain upon a cross in Persia to make atonement for humankind and take away the sins of the world. His ascension to heaven was celebrated at the spring equinox (Easter).” Additionally, the pamphlet continues, “Mithra celebrated a ‘Last Supper’ with his 12 disciples. The Mythraists observed weekly sabbath days and celebrated the Eucharist by eating wafers marked with a cross.” Does any of this sound familiar?

The same pamphlet notes that, “Attis was born of a virgin mother named Nana, in Phrygia sometime before 200 BC. He was hanged on a tree, died, rose again, and was called ‘Father God’.” “Horus was born of the virgin Isis in Egypt around 1550 BC. Horus as an infant received gifts from three kings, and was crucified on a cross. There are about 200 close parallels of the careers of Horus and Jesus Christ.” “Adonis (Tammuz) was born of a virgin mother called Ishtar (Easter), depicted like the Virgin Mary with her divine child in her arms. Adonis was regarded as both the son and husband of his mother Ishtar, as God the Father and God the Son.” We could go on and on. Any of the above named books will give the interested reader much more information about ancient gods along this same line. The mythology doesn’t change much, just the name of the current sun-god de jure.

Indeed, the parallels in the cult of Mithraism—perhaps Christianity’s major contemporary and most competitive religion of the first century CE—most especially, are so striking that I have often reflected that had Emperor Constantine not mandated that Christianity be the Empire’s only religion in 325 CE, and had that decree not been brutally enforced by the “firebrand and the sword” for the next 1,700 years by the Catholic Church, then we might see steepled little Mithric Churches dotting the landscape throughout Europe and the United States especially. As part of this same fantasy, I have often wondered if there would now be heated debates as to whether or not the now recognized as mythic Mithra was somehow based on a historic, real flesh-and-blood, human being named Mithra. If the Catholic Mithraist myth enforcers had been equally as successful as have been the Catholic Jesus myth enforcers, I suppose the answer of the masses—and even of some atheists—throughout most of the world would clearly be, “Yes, most likely there was a historic Mithra.” Incredible! What a brainwashing we have all been subjected to!

Most well informed Christian apologists—even back to the early “Church Fathers”—admit that the above parallels are true. Their standard response is that just because there are all of these parallels doesn’t necessarily prove that Jesus wasn’t a real human figure who may have been just doing his best to “fulfill” all the ancient prophesies, and to “fit in” to the familiar legends about him. This counter-point can’t be denied. I only ask the reader which of the two possible explanations seems the most likely?

Paul clearly spoke only of a “spiritual Christ,” not a human one.

It is well recognized by all but the most fanatical fundamentalist bible scholars that Paul, writing between approximately 54 C. E. and 65 C.E., was not a “witness to Jesus.” By his own admission, he saw Jesus “in a vision” while on the road to Damascus. This Jesus was a purely mythical, “spiritual Christ,” not in any sense a human being Christ. Paul “received” this Jesus through a kind of divine revelation. I believe that Doherty explains this sort of “Jesus” best when he says that the message Paul received, “. . . was about a heavenly Son of God who was both an intermediary between God and the world, and a Savior figure. He was variously called Jesus, or Yeshua (meaning ‘Yahweh Saves’ in Hebrew), the Christ (Greek for the Hebrew “Mashiach,” or Messiah, meaning ‘Anointed One’), and the Son. Some looked upon this new Son of God as a Reveler who bestowed saving knowledge of God, others as one who had undergone a sacrificial death and a resurrection. [In another heavenly realm] All manner of apostles like Paul were going about preaching this divine being and often not agreeing among themselves about him; indeed, they could be at each others’ throats, as certain passages in Paul’s letters revealed. This Son and Savior was not identified with a recent human man or placed in an earthly setting, much less given a ministry of teaching and miracle-working in Galilee.

[Paul knew no details of the yet to be written, gospel ‘historical’ Jesus.] Instead, he was a heavenly deity who had done his redeeming work in the supernatural dimension.” (*The Jesus Puzzle* p. 5.)

This kind of thinking is very difficult for the modern mind. Remember that since every reader of this paper was born he or she has been constantly bombarded—well, except when you were in your church, synagogue, or mosque—with cause and effect, logical, scientific thinking. For the residents of Galilee two thousand years ago, however, nothing could have been more natural. The whole culture and the entire “civilized world” was saturated with this way of thinking. It was, as Doherty explains, “The view shared by a whole range of pagan salvation cults, each of which had its own savior god who had performed deeds in the mythical world. Like Paul’s Christ, savior gods such as Attis and Osiris had been killed; like Paul’s Christ, Osiris had been buried (after being dismembered); like Christ on the third day, Adonis and Dionysos had been resurrected from death. All these things were not regarded as historical; they had taken place in the world of myth and higher reality.” (Doherty, *op cit.* p. 16.)

In summary, all of the parts of the New Testament attributed to a probably historical Paul are of no help at all in establishing a “historical” Jesus, since they never speak of such a person.

There is no agreement on any information about this supposedly historical Jesus

By way of amplifying the above point, what I mean is that, normally, a very well-known historical person—even one existing as long as two thousand years ago—would certainly be much better known to historians than is Jesus. For example, we know much more about Alexander the Great, who lived 200 years before the Jesus character is said to have lived.

Let’s examine just a few points of reference that one might reasonably be expected to know about a person whose influence was so great that it literally change the course of history over the

next two millenium. (1) Looks? No one in the entire bible gives any definitive description of Jesus whatsoever. He is depicted in artistic works, ranging from the ninth century up to modern times, as everything from being rather short with a “male pattern baldness problem” to the tall, handsome Nordic Jesus with the neatly trimmed beard we all met in Sunday School. Secular scholar, Dr. William Harwood, an advocate of a “historical nobody” who served as a basis of the mythical Jesus, believes that Jesus was, “an odd looking man, balding, stooped, with joined eyebrows, and approximately 4 ft 6 in tall” (*Mythology’s Last Gods*, p. 63). Enough said. (2) Birth date? Biblical scholars of all stripes disagree as to the date of the mythical Jesus’ birth. Dates range from about 4 BCE (the one most often quoted) to about 7 CA. (3) Birthplace? The bible says Bethlehem. However, Jesus is constantly referred to as “Jesus of Nazareth.” Scholars now understand that this was probably a linguistic confusion and perhaps an early mistranslation. Jesus was a “Nazarene,” the title of a sect, not a name having geographical associations. Thus, as G. A. Wells explains, “‘Jesus the Nazarene’ is equivalent to, say, ‘Henry the Quaker’ or ‘George the Methodist.’” (Wells, *Did Jesus Exist*, p. 147.) Furthermore, modern archeology has established that there was no such city as Nazareth in the first century. Dr. Harwood, mentioned above, argue strongly for the city of Capurnaum as a probable birth city. (4) Personal character and/or moral worthiness? Although we heard all about the loving, compassionate Jesus in church, and how we ought to “turn the other cheek,” we were not given the quotations that urged his followers to bring those that would not have me for their leader and “slay them before me.” (Luke 19: 27.) We were told not to lie. However, we read about how Jesus lied when it suited him. (See Mattill, A. J. *Sweet Jesus*, p. 103) We remember the part about not stealing, but we heard nothing about Jesus’ habit of stealing pigs, wheat, donkeys, cash, cows, olive oil, and figs. (op. cit. p. 31-33.)

Perhaps more critical than all of the above inconsistencies and silences is the confusion about what, exactly, was J.C.’s central message? The problem of discerning a “central message” is confounded not because there isn’t one, but because there are too many. If one asks the average Christian what was Jesus’ essential message to us, they look at you as if you must be the stupidest person they have ever met. Then, they explain patiently that, “God so loved the world that he sent his only begotten son to die for us so as to atone for our sins, and that if you would simply believe in him, you could have a sort of second life, ever-lasting, in a place called heaven.” Now, at first you must try to ignore the sheer imbecility of what you just heard, and ask a few follow-up questions. You may ask something like, “Well, how can I ‘believe on him’ as the bible phrases it, when I am not clear about his full message and his teachings?” The Christian has a ready answer. “You can read the bible and there you will learn all about his wonderful message to us.”

“I already did that,” you might say, “but then I became even more confused.” As mentioned above, there seems to be hundreds of messages, often with conflicting ideas and pronouncements. You might also add that you were a bit confused as to whether you should pay more attention to Peter’s Jewish ‘works-based’ Christianity, or to Paul’s Gentile ‘faith-based’ Christianity. You confess further confusion when you read about the early Gnostic Christian’s ‘knowledge’ (Gnosis) based Christianity. Despite all your reading, you say, you are still “unclear on the concept.” At this point the Christian will generally say something like, “Jesus loves you anyway” and walk away.

The summary point here is that because of the great amount of hopelessly conflicting information and the lack of any definitive information on *everything* about Jesus—his looks, lineage, biography, nature (three in one; one in three?), character, moral worthiness, message, etc.—it is clear, at least to this writer, that there is simply no one underneath this great pile of b.s. to see.

You can't have it both ways

This last point can be briefly explained. Despite its simplicity, I think it is a very powerful argument for a completely fictional Jesus. It has been said “many times in many ways,” as the song lyric goes, but Frank Zindler recently stated it quite succinctly.

Zindler notes that many liberal Christian apologists will readily agree that, “While the gospels cannot be taken literally, they are at least evidence of *somebody* [emphasis in original] extraordinary. But these same apologists miss the irony of Jesus being so obscure that no secular record of him survives. (It is ironic also that despite being a well-known public figure and rabble-rouser, Jesus nevertheless is so colorless and forgettable that the authorities have to bribe Judas to point him out!)” (*The Jesus The Jews Never Knew*, p. 5) This last point Zindler puts in parenthesis because it assumes that the reader might think that at least some part of the gospel fables might be true. I believe, as does Zindler, that this is extraordinarily unlikely, to the point of a vanishing possibility.

In conclusion, I believe that in this article I have at least “hit the highlights” of the arguments for a purely fictional Jesus with his purely fictional “gospel.”

Clarence Darrow may have summarized the pure-myth position most succinctly when he said, “I don't believe in Jesus because I don't believe in Mother Goose.” No, Virginia, I'm afraid that it is time now to grow up. There really isn't any Santa Claus. And even though there may have been a Christian bishop, born in 270 CE, who was rumored to have secretly shared his inherited wealth with the poor, this has nothing whatsoever to do with the myth of the fat guy in a red suit who, on December 25th, drops down the chimney's of every world-wide Christian family who has one or more children to deliver presents, with the aide of a sleigh pulled by flying reindeer. Additionally, there is also no Tooth Fairy, no Mother Goose, and *Jesus never was!*

Bibliography

Note: Some of the books listed here support a historical myth, or a philosophical myth position (positions 2 or 3, described earlier). Some, like Burton Mack, Robert Price and others seem to adopt an agnostic stance on the historicity matter, although they have often done some of the best research which has lead to a nearly complete destruction of any chance for such a historical Jesus. All the books in this bibliography are highly recommended. I have undoubtedly left out others that by chance I have not read or just didn't consider for inclusion. For those readers who wish to “zero in” on the pure myth (position 4) supporters, I have indicated these books with an asterisk.

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