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THE SEARCH FOR JESUS HOAX

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SYNOPSIS

While largely ignoring credible scholarship, *The Search for Jesus*, Peter Jennings's TV special, presents what might be called two extremes of fundamentalism: The Jesus Seminar on the one hand and blind, solely subjective belief on the other, which includes heretical Oneness Pentecostalism. At either extreme, the emerging Jesus hardly resembles the Christ of the New Testament. According to the Jesus Seminar, Jesus is said to be the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier, while the story of His Virgin Birth was a cover-up; He wasn't born in Bethlehem; the betrayal of Jesus was a fabrication concocted by Christians as an anti-Semitic slur; His dead body was not buried but left on the cross and then eaten by birds and prowling dogs; and His resurrection is a story borrowed from the literature of Eastern pagan cults called mystery religions.

Such conclusions amount to little more than dogmatic assertions without defensible argumentation, suggesting a blind faith biased by emotion. In contrast, Christianity is rooted in discernible historical events. Through honest historical analysis we can know, rationally and beyond a reasonable doubt, that Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, rose from the dead, and appeared physically to authenticate His claim to be God in human flesh. In ruling out *a priori* the Christ of biblical faith, Peter Jennings and the Jesus Seminar have failed to find the Jesus of history.

On 26 June 2000, ABC's Peter Jennings hosted what might best be described as a two-hour, prime time, made-for-television infomercial for two extreme brands of fundamentalism. On the liberal extreme was the fundamentalism of the Jesus Seminar¹ — a band of rogue scholars infamous for making dogmatic assertions while failing to provide defensible arguments. On the other extreme were the Pentecostals of Alexandria, Louisiana — a fringe fundamentalist sect that explicitly denies the Trinity and holds that unless people are baptized into their group by their formula with the evidence of speaking in tongues they are not saved.²

Jennings began his narration of *Peter Jennings Reporting: The Search For Jesus* by promoting the Enlightenment's false dichotomy between faith and reason. As he put it, "We've tried to be respectful about what people *believe* as we have gone in search of what we can *know*" (emphases added). Translated: religionists peddle faith biased by emotion; reporters present facts backed by evidence.

As the broadcast progressed, a Jesus altogether different from the biblical Jesus emerged. According to Jennings, the Bible is not much help in reconstructing the historical Jesus. In his view, the Gospels contains four different and contradictory versions of Christ's life; there is no reliable evidence as to who wrote them; and there is a virtual consensus among scholars that whoever wrote the Gospels were not eyewitnesses and may have written them up to a hundred years after Jesus' death.

The portrait of Jesus that emerged was not particularly flattering. Contrary to His claim to be God in human flesh, Jesus turns out to be a mere man — He was the illegitimate son of Mary, and the story of His Virgin Birth was concocted as a cover-up; He wasn't born in Bethlehem; Judas's betrayal of Jesus was a story likely fabricated by Christians as an anti-Semitic slur; He was not buried, but left on the cross and then eaten by animals ranging from crows to prowling dogs; and His resurrection is a story borrowed from Eastern pagan cults called mystery religions.

Sadly, this is just the tip of an insidious iceberg. While this forum does not afford the opportunity to respond to every acrimonious allegation forwarded by *The Search For Jesus*, they are dealt with in full on the Christian Research Institute Web site at www.equip.org. As "we demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (2 Cor. 10:4-5), the refrain of an old hymn of the faith rings ever more true: "How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in His excellent Word." Let's begin by demolishing the following assertions articulated by Jennings:

Scholars told us early on that they don't take everything that they read in the New Testament literally because the New Testament has four different and sometimes contradictory versions of Jesus' life — the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. There is no reliable evidence about who the authors actually were. It is pretty much agreed that they were not eyewitnesses. In fact, the Gospels were probably written 40 to 100 years after Jesus' death.

GOSPEL TRUTH OR GHASTLY TALES

As is consistently the case throughout Jennings' report of his alleged search for Jesus, dogmatic assertions are made without much attempt to offer credible proof. In other words, the suggestion that the Gospels contain contradictory versions of Christ's life is never substantiated. In reality, far from being contradictory, the Gospels are clearly complementary. Throughout the centuries, countless Bible scholars and commentaries have attested to that fact. Had all the Gospel writers said the exact same thing in the exact same way, they could have legitimately been questioned on the grounds of collusion.

Furthermore, even a cursory evaluation of the Jesus Seminar reveals that participants hold an anti-supernatural bias and thus reject the Gospel accounts concerning Christ's resurrection *a priori*. Using colored beads in a ballot vote, they reject the authenticity of statements attributed to Christ by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. In their view, fewer than 20 percent of Christ's sayings are credible. Seminar fellows clearly loathe the Gospel of John and yet love the Gospel of Thomas — this despite the fact that Thomas includes such patently ignorant and politically incorrect passages as the following conversation between Peter and Jesus: "Simon Peter said to them, 'Make Mary leave us, for females don't deserve life.' Jesus said, 'Look, I will guide her to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every female who makes herself male will enter the domain of Heaven.'"³

Nonetheless, Seminar scholars consider the Gospel of Thomas more dependable and important than even Matthew and Luke, particularly when it comes to recreating the original words of the historical Jesus.⁴ Their bias is revealed in the speculation that the Gospel of Thomas is earlier and more authentic than the biblical accounts despite the fact that it was clearly influenced by second-century Gnostic concepts that came into vogue long after the New Testament period.⁵

Finally, the notion that there is no reliable evidence about who wrote the Gospels, that the writers were not eyewitnesses, and that they probably wrote the Gospels 40-100 years after Jesus' death is completely *ad hoc*. The early Christian church offers virtual unanimous affirmation as to authorship and no competing claim to authorship even exists. The early church also explicitly acknowledged the canonical Gospels precisely because they were written by eyewitnesses or by their associates. While a plethora of alleged gospels, including the Gospel of Thomas, were rejected in accordance with strict criteria, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were *never* in doubt.

With regard to dating the Gospels, Jesus Seminar fellows stand in opposition to even their liberal counterparts. As New Testament scholar Craig Blomberg points out, the standard dating accepted by

liberal scholars sets "Mark in the 70s, Matthew and Luke in the 80s, and John in the 90s." Says Blomberg, these dates are well within the lifetimes of "eyewitnesses of the life of Jesus, including hostile eyewitnesses who would have served as a corrective if false teachings about Jesus were going around."⁶ Moreover, there are substantial reasons to suggest that the entire New Testament was completed by A.D. 70, including the fact that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (August A.D. 70) is repeatedly prophesied but is never mentioned in the New Testament as having happened.⁷

DEMIGOD OR DEITY

One of the more chilling claims made in *The Search For Jesus* is that Jesus is likely a mere man, whose virgin conception was really a story stolen from pagan mythology or, even worse, was concocted to cover-up His mother's promiscuity. Jesus Seminar cofounder John Dominic Crossan claims that there were dozens of virgin birth stories circulating in Greek and Roman mythology during the first century. Says Crossan, "They're all over Greek and Roman mythology, so what do I do? Do I believe all of those stories, or do I say all of those stories are lies except for our Christian story?" Crossan then offers as an example the myth of Caesar Augustus's birth, in which his mother became impregnated by the sun god Apollo: "His mother was in the temple of Apollo, she fell asleep. During the night she was impregnated by Apollo in the form of a snake, and therefore, of course, the child who was born was divine, Augustus, and of course millions of people would have said in the first century, '...look what's he's done. He's brought peace to the warring empire. He's got rid of the civil wars. He's our man.'"

Nor is simple mythology the end of it. Jesus Seminar chairman Robert Funk suggests that Jesus was the illegitimate son of a Roman soldier while the account of the virgin conception was a cover-up.⁸ Jennings explains the alleged evidence for this view: "After the birth stories Joseph pretty much disappears from the New Testament. In the Gospel of John someone criticizing Jesus says no one knows who His father was and an anti-Christian writer in the second century mentions a rumor that a Roman soldier made Mary pregnant."

When I first heard these sobering claims, I could not but think that if these men are going to suggest that Jesus was illegitimate rather than divinely immortal and that His mother was a fornicator, they had better be certain they are correct. If wrong, they are guilty of blaspheming God. A far more circumspect course of action would have been to exercise restraint just in case they might be mistaken. In fact, Jennings and Jesus Seminar fellows Crossan and Funk *are* dead wrong.

First, Jennings's assertion that the Virgin Birth of Jesus is very similar to a story told about Augustus and the Roman sun god Apollo would be laughable if it were not exceedingly blasphemous. A sun god in the form of a snake having sex with a woman has no correspondence whatsoever to a Savior being born of a virgin. Nor are there "dozens of stories" like that of the Virgin Birth as Crossan asserts. Once again he merely makes a dogmatic assertion without providing a defensible basis for it. The truth of the matter is that historical evidence for the veracity of extrabiblical virgin birth stories is nil. It should furthermore stretch even Jennings's credulity beyond the breaking point to believe that monotheistic Jewish authors such as Matthew and Luke would cloak their narratives in pagan mythology. The eminent historian and scholar Raymond E. Brown explains that the known stories of gods having sex with women have nothing in common with a virgin birth. Says Brown:

Non-Jewish parallels have been found in the figures of world religions (the births of the Buddha, Krishna, and the son of Zoroaster), in Greco-Roman mythology, in the births of the pharaohs (with the god Amun-Ra acting through the father) and in the marvelous births of emperors and philosophers (Augustus, Plato, etc.). But these "parallels" consistently involve a type of *hieros gamos* where a divine male, in human or other form, impregnates a woman, either through normal sexual intercourse or through some substitute form of penetration. They are not really similar to the non-sexual virginal conception that is at the core of the infancy narratives, a conception where there is no male deity or element to impregnate Mary....So no search for parallels has given us a

truly satisfactory explanation of how early Christians happened upon the idea of a virginal conception — unless, of course, that is what really took place.⁹

Furthermore, Jennings's statement that "someone in the Gospel of John says that no one knows who his father was and an anti-Christian writer in the second century mentions a rumor that a Roman soldier made Mary pregnant" is completely *ad hoc*. The statement attributed to the Gospel of John is made out of whole cloth, and lending credence to the slander of an unnamed second-century writer is about as reprehensible as saying that some unnamed source suggested that Jennings used to have sex with little boys before he did his *World News Tonight* broadcast. Not only would there be no way to falsify such a slanderous statement but also it would sully, with tremendous injustice, the name of a respected broadcaster. This analogy may sound extreme, but I am speaking of a purely hypothetical rumor only leveled against a television journalist, while Jennings and others actually entertain an unsubstantiated accusation against the mother of the holy Incarnate Son of God.

Finally, Jennings clearly blows the cover on his anti-supernatural bias when, after saying that whether Jesus is the Son of God is a matter of faith, he then proceeds to offer offensively naturalistic explanations, such as Mary may have been impregnated by a Roman soldier. I wrote an entire book primarily to demonstrate that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not based on blind faith but rather is rooted in history and evidence, and that through the resurrection His claim to be the Son of God is vindicated.¹⁰ As Dr. Simon Greenleaf, the famous Royall Professor of Law at Harvard and undoubtedly the greatest American authority on common law evidence of the nineteenth century, meticulously documents, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is one of the most well-attested facts of ancient history. Through this and many other infallible proofs we can, indeed, know that Jesus Christ is God.

BETHLEHEM OR BUST

Jesus Seminar fellow Marcus Borg gave one of the more curious suggestions in *The Search For Jesus* with his claim that Jesus was not born in Bethlehem. The reasoning used to come to this conclusion would be interesting if it were not so insidious. First, the assertion is made that only two Gospels deal with the place of Christ's birth, and they tell it differently. Luke says Jesus was born in a manger while Matthew says Jesus is born at home. Further, it is argued that there is no record outside the Gospels that Caesar Augustus ordered a worldwide taxation. Moreover, a man was taxed where he worked and women were not even counted. Therefore, Mary and Joseph would not have had to travel to Bethlehem. Finally, it is suggested that people were known by the place where they were born. Since Jesus is known as Jesus of Nazareth, He must have been born there — not Bethlehem.

At times, the statements made in *The Search For Jesus* are so bizarre that one hardly knows where to begin to refute. Take, for example, Borg's presumptuous argument that Matthew and Luke provide different (i.e., contradictory) information concerning Christ's birth in Bethlehem, and, therefore, neither one is to be trusted. In reality, there is nothing in Matthew that contradicts Luke. To present the appearance of a contradiction Borg says that according to Matthew Jesus was "born at home." Matthew, however, says nothing of the sort — Borg simply fabricates this statement.

Far from being contradictory, the differences between the Gospel accounts are clearly complementary. Luke adds details to Matthew's account, such as Christ's birth taking place in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn. Differences between the Gospels not only demonstrate that they did not rely on one another but also add weight to their authenticity. In the words of historian Dr. Paul Barnett, "The differences in the narratives indicate that not only were Matthew and Luke isolated from each other when they wrote, but also that the sources on which they depended were quite separate. Yet from these underlying source strands we have detailed agreement about where Jesus was born, when, to which parents, and the miraculous circumstances of his conception."¹¹

Furthermore, Jennings' statement that there is no record outside of the Gospels that Emperor Caesar Augustus ordered a worldwide taxation is not only presumptuous but also patently false. In truth, Caesar Augustus was famous for his census taking — so famous, in fact, that credible historians do not even

debate the issue. The Jewish historian Josephus, for example, refers to a Roman taxation of A.D. 6.¹² Considering the scope of this taxation, it is logical to assume that it took a long time to complete. It no doubt began with Caesar Augustus about 5 B.C. and was completed approximately a decade later. Luke, a meticulous historian, notes that the census was first completed when Quirinius was governor of Syria.¹³ In fact, as historian Paul Maier explained during a *Bible Answer Man* broadcast, “The Romans took 40 years to get a census done in Gaul. For a province 1,500 miles away from Rome in Palestine to take a decade is pretty quick. And since that census would finally come in under Quirinius’s administration, it would be called correctly by Luke his census.”¹⁴

Given Luke’s impeccable credentials as a historian, it would have been far more circumspect for Jennings to give him the benefit of the doubt. One need only remember the experience of the brilliant archeologist Sir William Ramsay who set out to disprove Luke’s historical reliability. Through his painstaking Mediterranean archeological trips, he discovered that, one after the other, the historical allusions of Luke proved accurate. If, as Ramsay points out, Luke does not err in referencing a plethora of countries, cities, and islands, there is no reason to doubt him concerning this census.¹⁵

Jennings’s assertion that men were taxed where they lived and women didn’t count is also spurious. Maier cites a first-century Roman census in Egypt, in which taxpayers living elsewhere were ordered to return to their homelands for registration.¹⁶ Furthermore, a Roman census from Bacchius, Egypt, dated A.D. 119, historically documents that women and children were registered by their husbands or fathers.¹⁷

Finally, Borg’s assertion that Jesus was known as Jesus of Nazareth and thus must have been born there instead of in Bethlehem is also dead wrong. Countless counterexamples undermine his hypothesis. For instance, Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 175–195) was probably a native of Smyrna, where as a boy he perhaps studied and taught at Rome before moving to Lyons;¹⁸ Lucian of Antioch (c. 240–312) was born at Samosata but completed his education and eventually led the theological schools at Antioch;¹⁹ Paul of Constantinople (d. c. 351) was a native of Thessalonica and became bishop of Constantinople.²⁰ These men were born in one place but later moved to another with which their names became associated, as did Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem but lived the vast majority of His life in Nazareth. History shows that in the broader context of people’s lives several factors influence how they may be known.

More importantly, because the Bible says Jesus was born in Bethlehem, we can rest assured that He was born in Bethlehem! While Borg’s scholarship is consistently suspect, the Bible is demonstrably divine rather than human in origin. We therefore should believe the Bible over Borg. Several approaches show the God-breathed nature, and thus utter trustworthiness, of Scripture, one of which, as I alluded to earlier, is through Jesus’ historically verifiable claim to deity and resurrection from the dead in vindication of that claim.²¹ In the Gospels, Jesus repeatedly validated the Old Testament and guaranteed the veracity of the New Testament.²² Speaking as God, Christ’s pronouncements are true, and, therefore, so is everything the Bible teaches, including all that pertains to His miraculous birth.

ANTI-SEMITIC SLUR OR ANTI-INTELLECTUAL SOPHISTRY?

The anti-intellectual sophistry in *The Search for Jesus* reached perhaps its climax when Jesus Seminar fellow Funk suggested that Judas might well have been invented as an anti-Semitic slur. According to Funk, the story of Judas’s betrayal of Jesus was “probably a fiction because Judas looks to many of us like the representation of Judaism or the Jews as responsible for His death. If it is a fiction it was one of the most cruel fictions that was ever invented...because of the untold hostility that has persisted between Christians and Jews all down through the centuries.” John Dominic Crossan affirms that these scholars view Judas as the “typical quintessential Jew” because “‘Judas’ meant ‘Jew.’” These comments and their inclusion in the program represent little more than vindictive prejudice itself and may well signify a new low in New Testament studies. Even Crossan sees the flaw: “The trouble is, of course, that that was not the way people in the first century would have heard it, because [Judas] was an ordinary name. There’s a lot of evidence that somebody — I’m deliberately putting this very vaguely — somebody close to Jesus betrayed Him.”

In response it should be emphasized first that, as Crossan admits, Judas was a rather common name. There are several men named Judas in the Gospels, one of whom was a truly devoted disciple of Christ (Luke 6:16), while another wrote the New Testament epistle Jude (see Matt. 13:55; Jude 1). First-century Gospel readers would have hardly taken the name Judas to signify Judaism.

Furthermore, New Testament writers clearly proclaimed that salvation through the Jewish Messiah was given first to the Jewish people and then to the rest of the world (Matt. 15:24; Rom 1:16). Additionally, Peter's vision followed by Cornelius's receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 10) and the subsequent Jerusalem council (Acts 15) clearly demonstrate both the inclusive nature of the church as well as the initial Jewish Christian resistance to Gentile inclusion (see also Gal. 2:11–14). While the early Christians were certainly not anti-Semitic, at least some initially manifested the opposite prejudice!

Far from being anti-Semitic, the New Testament simply records the outworking of redemptive history as foretold by the Jewish prophets who prophesied that one of Christ's companions would betray Him (Ps. 41:9; John 13:18). As should be obvious to Jennings and the fellows of the Jesus Seminar, there is nothing subtle about the crucifixion narrative. The Jewish Gospel writers explicitly state that it was their leaders who condemned Christ of blasphemy. There would be no motive to fabricate a fictional Judas to represent the quintessential Jew.

Finally, as is obvious to any unbiased person from a scholar to a schoolchild, the New Testament is anything but anti-Semitic. Jesus, the 12 apostles, and the apostle Paul were all Jewish! In fact, Christians proudly refer to their heritage as the Judeo-Christian tradition. In the Book of Hebrews, Christians are reminded of Jews from David to Daniel who are members of the hall of fame of faith. Indeed, Christian children grow up with Jews as their heroes! From their mothers' knees to Sunday school classes, they are treated to Old Testament stories of great Jewish men and women of faith from Moses to Mary and from Ezekiel to Esther. The Bible goes to great lengths to underscore the fact that when it comes to faith in Christ there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile (Gal. 3:28) and that Jewish people throughout the generations are no more responsible for Christ's death than anyone else. As Ezekiel put it, "The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son" (Ezek. 18:20). The "cruel fiction" referred to by Funk is not Judas but the notion that Christianity is anti-Semitic. Truly, Jennings and others owe the world an apology for fomenting bigotry and hatred by entertaining the obviously absurd notion that the story of Judas was fabricated because "Judas meant Jew."

BURIAL OR BUNK?

No doubt the most egregious error in *The Search For Jesus* is the denial of Christ's burial and resurrection. In the *Practical Apologetics* section of this issue (pp. 62–63), I refute the common refrain that the biblical account of death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is a myth borrowed from ancient mystery religions. There is no need to recapitulate that information here, but it is necessary to explode the bunk communicated by the Jesus Seminar regarding Christ's burial. In a dialogue with Jennings, Crossan contends that the story of Jesus' burial is based on hope not history: "Was Jesus buried at all?...The purpose of crucifixion was state terrorism and the function was to leave the body on the cross for the carrion, crows, and the prowling dogs. It was not simply that it made you suffer a lot. It meant that you didn't get buried. That's what made it one of the supreme Roman penalties. Lack of burial. As I read those stories, I feel terribly sympathetic for the followers of Jesus because I hear hope there, not history." Obviously, Crossan sets himself apart from "the followers of Jesus."

Contrary to Crossan's contention, the account of Christ's burial is based on history not hope. The late liberal scholar John A. T. Robinson of Cambridge conceded that the burial of Christ "is one of the earliest and best-attested facts about Jesus."²³ This statement is not merely a dogmatic assertion, but rather stands firmly upon sound argumentation.

First, liberal and conservative New Testament scholars alike agree that the body of Jesus was buried in the private tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Philosopher and theologian William Lane Craig underscores this fact by noting that, as a member of the Jewish court that condemned Jesus, Joseph of

Arimathea is unlikely to be a Christian fiction. The noted New Testament scholar Raymond Brown explains, “Joseph’s being responsible for burying Jesus is ‘very probable,’ since a Christian fictional creation of a Jewish Sanhedrist doing what is right for Jesus is ‘almost inexplicable,’ given the hostility towards the Jewish leaders responsible for Jesus’ death in early Christian writings. In particular, Mark would not have invented Joseph in view of his statements that the whole Sanhedrin voted for Jesus’ condemnation (Mark 14:55, 64; 15:1).”²⁴

Furthermore, no competing burial story exists. Craig points out in *Jesus under Fire* that “if the burial of Jesus in the tomb by Joseph of Arimathea is legendary, then it is strange that conflicting traditions nowhere appear, even in Jewish polemic. That no remnant of the true story or even a conflicting false one should remain is hard to explain unless the Gospel account is substantially the true account.”²⁵

The account of Jesus’ entombment in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea is substantiated by Mark’s Gospel and is, therefore, far too early to have been the subject of legendary corruption.²⁶ Likewise, Paul substantiates Christ’s burial in a letter to the Corinthian Christians in which he recites an ancient Christian creed dating to within a few years of the crucifixion itself (1 Cor. 15:3–7).²⁷

Finally, as Craig emphasizes, the earliest Jewish response to the resurrection of Jesus Christ presupposes a known tomb that became empty. Instead of denying that the tomb was empty, the antagonists of Christ accused His disciples of stealing the body. Their response to the proclamation, “He has risen — He is risen indeed,” was not “His body is still in the tomb,” or “He was thrown into a shallow grave and eaten by dogs.” Instead, they responded, “His disciples came during the night and stole him away.”²⁸ In the centuries following the Resurrection, the fact that Jesus’ tomb was empty was forwarded by Jesus’ friends and foes alike.²⁹

In short, early Christianity simply could not have survived an identifiable tomb containing the corpse of Christ. The enemies of Christ could easily have put an end to the charade by displaying the body. Perhaps Jesus Seminar cofounder John Dominic Crossan understands that were he to allow for the historicity of Christ’s burial, he would have to allow for the historicity of His resurrection as well.

Much more could be said, but one thing should already be abundantly clear. While Jennings claimed to be a respectful reporter in search of what we can know about the Jesus of history, in reality he spent the better part of two hours peddling his own extreme brand of fundamentalism. Far from providing bare facts backed by evidence, he peddled blind faith biased by emotion. To accept Jennings’ claims on the basis of unsubstantiated rumor would be truly reprehensible.

NOTES

1. In an interview with Lee Strobel, scholar Gregory Boyd stated, “Ironically, [participants in the Jesus Seminar] have their own brand of fundamentalism. They say they have the right way of doing things, period. In the name of diversity, they can actually be quite narrow.” (Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998], 114.)
2. The Pentecostals of Alexandria, Louisiana, belong to the United Pentecostal Church International (UPCI), a Oneness denomination that holds to a contemporary version of the ancient heresy known as modalistic Monarchianism. For an excellent discussion and defense of the doctrine of the Trinity in relation to the Oneness view, see Gregory A. Boyd, *Oneness Pentecostals and the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1992).
3. Gospel of Thomas, 114, in Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 532.
4. See *ibid.*, 8–19. See also James R. White, “The Jesus Seminar and the Gospel of Thomas: Courting the Media at the Cost of Truth,” *Christian Research Journal*, Winter 1998, available at www.equip.org.
5. See, e.g., Gregory A. Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God?* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1995), 133–36.
6. Craig Blomberg in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 33.
7. See, e.g., Matthew 23:35–36, 38; 24:1–2; cf. Mark 13:1–2; Luke 21:5–6; also cf. John 2:18–22. This is an argument from *significant* silence.
8. Cf. Robert W. Funk, *Honest to Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 288, 294.
9. Raymond E. Brown, *The Virginal Conception and Bodily Resurrection of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1973), 62, 65.
10. See Hank Hanegraaff, *Resurrection* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1999), part one.
11. Paul Barnett, *Is the New Testament Reliable? A Look at the Historical Evidence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press), 119.

12. *Antiquities* 18.1.1–2.
13. As Dr. Paul Maier explained during the 12 November 1999 *Bible Answer Man* broadcast, “Quirinius took a census in 6 A.D. rather than at the time of Christmas, and critics say Luke made a bad error here [in Luke 2:2]. We’re not sure that he did. It could be a translation problem. The first reading ideally would be that this is the *first* census when Quirinius is governor of Syria, in which case we’re ten years off. However, the word *protos* in Greek can also be translated as follows: This was *before* that census taken by Quirinius that everyone knew about. That’s one translation. The one I prefer is, ‘This census was *first completed* when Quirinius was governor of Syria.’”
14. *Ibid.*
15. See William M. Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, rep. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1953); William M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1962).
16. Paul L. Maier, *In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter, and the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1991), 4–5.
17. *Ibid.*, 4–5.
18. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. two (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 251; cf. J. D. Douglas, gen. ed., *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 516.
19. Douglas, 607.
20. *Ibid.*, 756.
21. See Hanegraaff, part one.
22. See, e.g., Matthew 5:18; 15:6; Mark 7:8; Luke 24:25–27, 44–47; John 10:35; 14:25–26; 16:13; cf. 15:26–27.
23. John A. T. Robinson, *The Human Face of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 131, as quoted by William Lane Craig in Paul Copan, ed., *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up? A Debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 27.
24. William Lane Craig, “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” in Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland, eds., *Jesus under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 148; see also Raymond E. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, vol. 2 (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1240.
25. Craig, “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” in Wilkins and Moreland, 149.
26. *Ibid.*, 147–48; See also William Lane Craig, “Contemporary Scholarship and the Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ,” *Truth 1* (1985): 89–95, from the Leadership University Web site at <http://www.leaderu.com/truth/1truth22.html>. For arguments establishing early dates for the writing of Mark, see John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), chaps. 6–8; Boyd, chap. 11.
27. Craig, “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” in Wilkins and Moreland, 147; see also Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ* (Joplin, MS: College Press, 1996), chap. 7.
28. Adapted from Craig, “Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?” in Wilkins and Moreland, 152. See Matthew 28:13.
29. Scholar D. H. van Daalen has noted, “It is extremely difficult to object to the empty tomb on historical grounds; those who deny it do so on the basis of theological or philosophical assumptions”; as quoted in William Lane Craig, “Contemporary Scholarship and the Historical Evidence.”