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**James, William.** William James (1842–1910) was a finite godist ( *see* FINITE GODISM ) in his worldview and a pragmatist ( *see* PRAGMATISM ) in his theory of truth and ethics ( *see* MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF ; TRUTH, NATURE OF ). He approached the world and God from an experiential point of view. His test for the truth of a worldview was simply “What concrete difference will its being true make in one’s actual life?” Truth, then, is not inherent in an idea. “Truth happens in an idea. It becomes true, is made true, by events.” The worldview that works best is true ( *Essays in Pragmatism* , 160–61; all citations in this article are from the writings of James).

**View of God.** For James, the worldview that worked best was a form of finite godism. Such a God avoided “the hallow unreal God of scholastic theology [theism], or the unintelligible pantheistic monster” ( *Pluralistic Universe* , 316). The pantheistic God swallows all individuals in the absolute unity of its consciousness ( *see* MONISM ; PANTHEISM ). The theistic God is so transcendently distinct from his creatures that they have nothing in common ( *ibid.*, 26; *see* THEISM ).

In view of these extremes, James believed that the line of least resistance was to accept a “superhuman consciousness” who was not all-embracing, who was finite in power and/or knowledge ( *ibid.*, 311). “All the evidence we have seems to me to sweep us very strongly towards the belief in some form of superhuman life with which we may, unknown to ourselves, be co-conscious” ( *ibid.*, 309). Such a God need not be infinite; for that matter there could be more than one. James readily saw polytheism as a possible worldview for a pragmatist. The important thing was to posit a larger power that is friendly to humankind and human ideals. Such a power “should be both other and larger than our conscious selves” ( *Varieties of Religious Experience* , 396).

Even to claim this much about God seemed to James an overbelief. All James knew for certain was that there is a “more” out there with which human beings feel connected as “a subconscious continuation of our conscious life.” Disregarding the overbeliefs and confining ourselves to what is common and generic, there is a saving experience that comes as a positive content of religious experience. This at least, James confessed, is literally and objectively true ( *ibid.*, 386, 388).

James speculated very little about his own overbeliefs. He concluded his classic *Varieties of Religious Experience* , “Who knows whether the faithfulness of individuals here below to their own poor overbeliefs may not actually help God in turn to be more effectively faithful to his own greater tasks?” (391).

Despite the particular differences various worldviews express about God, James felt assured that the one thing all religious experience had in common was that “they all agree that the ‘more’ really exists; though some of them hold it to exist in the shape of a personal god or gods, while others are satisfied to conceive it as a stream of ideal tendency embedded in the eternal structure of the world.” James also found generic agreement among religions that the god(s) acts, and that it is beneficial to give your life to him/them. The differences develop, he added, when religions explain what they mean by the union with the divine that comes with religious experience ( *ibid.*, 385). Anything beyond this was, to James, speculative overbelief. Christian theism, for example, would define *more* as *Yahweh* God and *union* as imputation to us of the righteousness of Christ. Such beliefs were mere speculation. This is only one way to conceptualize God ( *see* PLURALISM, RELIGIOUS ), and James did not regard it as the most practical way.

**The Nature of the Universe.** James declared himself opposed to both pantheistic and materialist/atheist conceptions of the world ( *see* ATHEISM ), but the distinctions between his thinking and that of the pantheist were often slight. The world is not reducible to matter, nor is it pure mind or spirit. In contrast to monism, James took a pluralistic view of the universe—that there are many diverse things. Still, such a universe is not truly distinct from God. “The theistic conception, picturing God and his creation as entities distinct from each other, still leaves the human subject outside of the deepest reality in the universe” ( *Pluralistic Universe* , 25). James’s distinctive views identify him as close in thought to what would later be called “pantheism.”

The theists’ God is too distinct (transcendent) from what he has created.

Theists are also wrong in supposing God to be complete and sufficient unto himself.

Creation was God’s free act, and he made it as a substance extraneous to himself and humankind is made of a third substance, which is other than both God and creation.

In a pantheistic view, similar to some forms of pantheism, God animates the world the way a soul does a body. This stands in contrast to naturalism, “the curdling cold and gloom and absence of all permanent meaning.” Naturalism places humankind “in a position similar to that of a set of people living on a frozen lake, surrounded by cliffs over which there is no escape” ( *ibid.*, 122).

**Miracles.** How such a God relates to the world is a little difficult to see until James labels the Christian miracle-working God as “grotesque” in conforming nature to human wants ( *see* MIRACLE ). “The God whom science recognizes must be a God of universal laws exclusively, a God who does a wholesale, not a retail business” ( *Varieties* , 372–74). James’s God is more organically connected with the world: “The divine can mean no single quality, it must mean a group of qualities, by being champions of which in alternation, different men may all find worthy missions. Each attitude being a syllable in human nature’s total message, it takes the whole of us to spell the meaning out completely” ( *ibid.*, 368).

Despite the naturalistic tone ( *see* NATURALISM ), James believed in the supernatural. He believed, rather, that Christianity surrendered too easily to naturalism, taking the precepts of the physical sciences at face value. As Immanuel Kant , James believed theistic supernaturalism unnecessarily confines itself to sentiments about life as a whole, which theism views too optimistically. In this over-optimistic, universalistic way of looking at the ideal world, practicality evaporates ( *ibid.* ). Such a “crasser” supernaturalism James rejects. His more “refined” supernaturalism admits “providential leadings, and finds no intellectual difficulty in mixing the ideal and the real world together by interpolating influences from the ideal religion among the forces that causally determine the real world’s details” ( *ibid.*, 392).

However he labeled it, James professed a wider view of reality than that accepted by science. He was willing to use the term *supernatural* , though not in a theistic sense. He would not, for example, accept the idea of “miraculous healings,” which were prevalent in the late nineteenth century. He objected to any supernatural interruption of a natural process. Such must be dismissed by the scientist as figments of the imagination. With almost prophetic awareness of the next century, James added, “No one can foresee just how far this legitimization of occultist phenomena under newly found scientist titles may proceed—even ‘prophecy,’ even ‘levitation,’ might creep into the pale” ( *ibid.*, 378).

But another sort of everyday miraculous was more gladly received—God’s subtle, even subliminal influences on us through the natural world. If “there be a wider world of being than that of our everyday consciousness, if in it there be forces whose effects on us are intermittent, if one facilitating condition of the effects be the openness of the ‘subliminal’ door, we have the elements of a theory to which the phenomena of religious life lend plausibility.” James was so impressed by the importance of these “transmundane energies” that he believed they influenced the natural world ( *ibid.*, 394).

This denial of the miraculous, except within stringent naturalistic guidelines, amounted to a denial of a life-changing conversion experience. James skeptically claimed that “converted men as a class are indistinguishable from natural men; some natural men even excel some converted men in their fruits.” Hence, “The believers in the non-natural character of sudden conversion have had practically to admit that there is no unmistakable class-mark distinctive of all true converts” ( *ibid.*, 192).

**Good and Evil.** James did believe that “saintliness” flowed from religious experience. He rejected Friedrich Nietzsche’s view that the saint is a weak individual. James pointed to such strong figures as Joan of Arc and Oliver Cromwell as counter-examples. James lauded the holy life, saying that it gave religion its “towering place in history” even when other aspects of faith did not stand up to practical common sense and empirical testing. “Let us be saints, then, if we can, whether or not we succeed visibly and temporarily” ( *Varieties* , 290).

There is, however, no absolute standard for the saintly life of good, for James was a relativist ( *see* MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF ), who believed that “there is no such thing as an ethical philosophy dogmatically made up in advance” ( *Essays* , 65). Each must find what works best for them. James offers only the general guideline that we should avoid “pure naturalism” on the one hand, because of its ineptness, and “pure salvationism” on the other, because of its other-

worldliness ( *Varieties* , 140). Between these we must find the expedient path of what works best. The human race as a whole helps in this process to determine the content of ethical philosophy so far as we contribute to the race’s moral life.

Despite his relative morality and tendency toward pantheism, James sharply parted with most pantheists in that he believed that evil is real, rather than an illusion. Both pantheism and theism, he charged, made too radical a break between concepts of absolute and relative morality. In effect, he sought to give quasi-absolute force to a set of universally accepted moral guidelines, even though they could not be called “absolutes.” While the system may seem to hold together by weak threads, the connecting linkage is pragmatism: “ ‘The true,’ to put it briefly, is only the expedient in the way of our thinking, just as ‘the right’ is only the expedient in the way of our behaving” ( *Essays* , 170).

**Human Beings.** Human beings have a spiritual, as well as a material, dimension. Through evolution from lower forms of life, humankind has reached a point of immortality ( *see* EVOLUTION, BIOLOGICAL ). At this point James takes on the naturalist’s assumption that the mind cannot survive death because it is merely a function of the brain. Even if thought is a function of the brain, this does not compel us to deny immortality because the spiritual aspect is undeniable. “Dependence on the brain for this natural life would in no wise make mortal life impossible—it might be quite compatible with supernatural life behind the veil hereafter” ( *Human Immortality* , 24, 38–39). Science can prove only the *concomitance* in the functioning of mind and brain; the *dependence* of the mind on the brain has not been proven ( *ibid.*, 42–43).

**History and Its Goal.** James was opposed to both optimistic and pessimistic views of human destiny. He could not agree with those who believed the world could not be salvaged. Optimism thinks the world’s salvation inevitable. Midway between the two was the doctrine of *meliorism* , which treats salvation as neither necessary nor impossible. As a pragmatist, James felt compelled to accept improvement in the world as probable but not inevitable. “Pragmatism has to postpone a dogmatic answer, for we do not yet know certainly which type of religion is going to work best in the long run” ( *Pragmatism and Other Essays* , 125, 132).

James’s realism led him to reject universalism’s belief that all must be saved. “When the cup is poured off, the dregs are left behind forever, but the possibility of what is poured off is sweet enough to accept” ( *ibid.*, 130). In justification of his conclusion, James offered this scenario:

Suppose that the world’s author put the case to you before creation, saying: “I am going to make a world not certain to be saved, a world the perfection of which shall be conditional merely, the condition being that each does its own ‘level best.’ I offer you the chance of taking part in such a world. Its safety, you see, is unwarranted. It is a real adventure, with real danger, yet it may win through. It is a social scheme of co-operative work genuinely to be done. Will you join the procession? Will you trust yourself and trust the other agents enough to face the risk?” [ *ibid.*, 127]

To such a proposal, James believed most people would prefer the risk of such an adventure to nonexistence. Such, he believes, is the world we have.

**Evaluation.** William James was a fascinating philosopher who fit into no mold. His views present an array of positive and negative characteristics for theists.

**Positives.** From a Christian perspective, James frequently appears to try to head in the direction of orthodox faith, though from a great distance.

**Materialism is rejected.** Theists concur with James's rejection of materialism. Humanity is more than matter. Of this immortality, James was certainly correct.

**Evil is real.** James had no illusions about evil ( *see* ILLUSIONISM ). He accepted its reality. He rejected a pantheism that affirmed God and denied evil. At the same time, he avoided the temptation of atheism to affirm evil and deny God.

**The principle of the Divine is affirmed.** While James was not a theist, he did believe in some sort of god and accepted that god's hand in creation. He saw the practical value of these beliefs on one's life.

**Holy living is commended.** James was willing to admit the significant role that religious beliefs played in his own life. He commended saintliness and its contribution to the value of religion.

**Universalism is rejected.** Unlike other liberal thinkers, James denied the illusory optimism of the universalist. He was willing to admit that all may not be saved and that some sort of hell exists. This is refreshing honesty from someone who rejected the divine authority of the Bible.

**Negatives.** Finite Godism Is Inadequate. James's finite god was limited indeed. For a discussion of the problems with this worldview, see PANENTHEISM , and WHITEHEAD, ALFRED NORTH .

**Antisupernaturalism is unfounded.** James's rejection of the supernatural was illogical ( *see* MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST ). His claim that supernatural religion saps human impetus to advance the good in life is contrary to his own analysis. He gave religion its "towering place" in human history by virtue of the selfless love of Christian supernaturalists. He concluded that saintly group of qualities is indispensable to the world's welfare" ( *Varieties* , 290). He admired theists whose beliefs had made considerable impact, among them Christ, Cromwell, and Stonewall Jackson. He further admitted that great educational and social institutions, including universities, hospitals, the Red Cross, the slavery abolition movement, and rescue missions, were started by people who believed in the supernatural.

**His view of evil is insufficient.** While James recognized the reality of evil, his finite godism left him without assurance of a final victory over evil. A finite god does not have the infinite resources necessary to assure the final triumph over evil. In this, James unwittingly offers a solution to his own problem. He admitted that "the world is all the richer for having a devil in it, so long as we can keep our foot upon his neck" ( *ibid.*, 55). That is precisely what a finite god cannot do. A limited God could lose, or at best, reach an endless draw. Only an infinitely good

and powerful God of theism can guarantee the outcome of the struggle with evil ( *see* EVIL, PROBLEM OF ).

**Pragmatism is unjustified.** The most serious internal criticism against pragmatism is that, pragmatically, it doesn't work. We would have to have infinite knowledge of all possible consequences to each alternative action or philosophy. We can never be sure how things will turn out. Only a theistic God could be an effective pragmatist, and he is not one.

One of James's Harvard colleagues, Josiah Royce, penetrated to the root problem of this pragmatic view of truth when he asked James if he would take the witness stand in court and swear "to tell the expedient, the whole expedient, and nothing but the expedient, so help him future experience."

**Relativism is self-defeating.** James denied all moral absolutes ( *see* ABSOLUTES, MORAL ). For him the right was the expedient in the way of living, as the truth was the expedient in the way of knowing. But it is impossible to deny all moral absolutes without implying a moral absolute.

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**Jefferson, Thomas.** Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), the author of the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the third President of the United States, was a deist ( *see* DEISM ). Some of his earliest writings earned a place for him in the hearts of historians as "the major penman of the American Revolution" (Ketcham, 4:259). His philosophical and religious views undergird his writings but are not generally made explicit, except in his letters. Chiefly from these letters can his deism be clearly discovered.

Jefferson's religious views are reflected in his abridgment of the Gospels, *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth* (1803). In an 1816 reference to it he called it "a paradigm of his doctrines, made by cutting the texts out of the book, and arranging them on the pages of a blank

book, in a certain order of time or subject. . . . A more beautiful morsel of ethics I have never seen." The fifty-seventh Congress evidently agreed, ordering an edition published in 1904.

**The Jeffersonian Worldview. *God and the World.*** Jefferson believed that there is one God, the Creator, Sustainer, and Manager of the universe. He held that this God is infinitely wise, good, righteous, and powerful. Influenced by Isaac Newton, Jefferson understood the world to be harmonious, under the rule of natural law, and open to human investigation. God created it that way. That all this is true is clear from the design of the universe:

I hold (without revelation) that when we take a view of the universe, in its parts, general or particular, it is impossible for the human mind not to perceive and feel a conviction of design, consummate skill, and indefinite power in every atom of its composition. The movements of the heavenly bodies, so exactly held in their course by the balance of centrifugal and centripetal forces; the structure of the earth itself, with its distribution of lands, waters and atmosphere; animal and vegetable bodies, examined in all their minutest particular; insects, mere atoms of life, yet as perfectly organized as man or mammoth; the mineral substances, their generation and uses; it is impossible, I say, for the human mind not to believe that there is in all this design, cause and effect up to an ultimate cause, a Fabricator of all things from matter and motion, their Preserver and Regulator. [Foote, 10]

**Miracles.** Jefferson also maintained that God had never broken into history through supernatural miracles or revelation ( see MIRACLE ; REVELATION, SPECIAL ). Such accounts to the contrary were fabrications, superstition, or fanaticism (Fesperman, 81).

Jefferson emphatically rejected the virgin birth of Christ. "The day will come," he said, "when the account of the birth of Christ as accepted in the trinitarian churches will be classified with the fable of Minerva springing from the brain of Jupiter" (Foote, 49). He also cut the resurrection from his supernatural-sanitized "Bible," ending it: "Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury. Now, in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulcher, wherein was never man yet laid. There laid they Jesus, and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulcher, and departed" ( *Life and Morals* , 132).

**Bible.** Obviously Jefferson regarded the Gospels as distortions wherever they intimated supernatural action by God. He charged the writers with "forgetting often, or not understanding, what had fallen from Him, by giving their own misconceptions as His dicta, and expressing unintelligibly for others what they had not understood themselves" (ibid., vii). Jesus' teachings had been rendered "mutilated, misstated, and often unintelligible" (ibid., 49) by a band of "dupes and impostors" who corrupted the true moral teachings. Worst in this bad lot was the apostle Paul, "the great Coryphaeus, and first corrupter of the Doctrines of Jesus" ( see BIBLE CRITICISM ).

Jefferson literally cut the miracles from the Gospels and retained only the moral teachings of Jesus. His views were not as radically deistic as were Thomas Paine 's. They most closely resembled the deism of Matthew Tindal in his *Christianity as Old as the Creation; or, The*

*Gospel: A Republication of the Religion of Nature* and those of the unitarian Joseph Priestley. Jefferson rejected all major theological teachings of Christianity, such as the deity of Christ, original sin, salvation by grace through faith alone, and the substitutionary death of Christ. He believed Jesus to be the greatest reformer and moralist in history.

It was up to those who understood the truth, such as Jefferson, to purify the truth of the errors that had been imposed upon it. He endeavored to assemble the redacted truth from various portions of the four Gospels, arranged in the order that seemed to him most natural (Fesperman, 81, 83–84).

**Human Beings.** As stated in the *Declaration of Independence* , Jefferson considered it "to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." These "unalienable rights" are grounded in nature, which is itself unchangeable. Since these rights are natural, they are universal ( see LAW, NATURAL ; MORALITY, ABSOLUTE NATURE OF ). Other natural rights, in Jefferson's view, were the right of association, the right to self-government, and the right to be free in regard to religion (Padover, 89–91, 143, 148, 155, 156).

God's creation of all people as equal had logical consequences. One was that slavery as an accepted practice in the United States had to be abolished. Jefferson attempted to accomplish this end by seeking to pass a plan he drafted, the "Report of Government for the Western Territory" (1784). This provided for the abolition of slavery in all the states after 1800 (ibid., 92–93). His legislation was defeated by one vote. Two years later he wrote of this decision: "The voice of a single individual . . . would have prevented this abominable crime from spreading itself over the country. Thus we see the fate of millions unborn hanging on the tongue of one man, and Heaven was silent in that awful moment! But it is to be hoped it will not always be silent, and that the friends of the rights of human nature will in the end prevail" (Foote, 18).

The human is a "rational animal" ( see ARISTOTLE ) who has been endowed "with an innate sense of justice." Both reason and the human sense of morality could go wrong, for neither "wisdom" nor "virtue" are hereditary. However, truth will eventually prevail, and human beings can "be restrained from wrong and protected in right, by moderate powers, confided to persons of his own choice" (Padover, 143, 131–135, 178, 91).

**God and Government.** It is clear from the *Declaration* that Jefferson did not envision the separation of God from government. Indeed, he believed governments owed allegiance to God. Inscribed in the marble of his memorial in Washington, D. C., is the quotation: "God who gave us life, gave us liberty. Can the liberties of a nation remain secure when we have removed a conviction that these liberties are a gift of God?"

Although Jefferson was in France as ambassador when Congress ratified the First Amendment (1789), he certainly agreed that "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion; nor prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This is not the "wall of separation" he is said to have espoused. The intent of the First Amendment is clearly that the federal government was not to establish a national religion in the English manner. It is interesting that five colonies had state religions when they ratified this amendment. It was actually in a fit of

pique over what the Baptist association in Danbury, Connecticut, had said about his beliefs that Jefferson wrote of the “wall of separation between Church and State.” He never used the phrase outside the context of this private letter, and other statements indicate that Jeffersonian “wall” should protect the state government from federal interference with regard to religion.

Jefferson left ample evidence of his views about church and state cooperation. He established a department of religion in the University of Virginia. He even proposed that students be required to attend church and refrain from swearing. In a treaty with the Kaskaskia Indians, Jefferson and Congress paid for the services of a missionary and a church building with tax funds. Congress did this more than once, being careful not to favor one religious group over another.

The central philosophy in this was that no religious view or group should be given legal sanction at the expense of another view or group. He said, “I am for freedom of religion, and against all maneuvers to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another” (Padover, 119). Besides maintaining that such action would violate the natural law right of free religion, Jefferson believed it would be disadvantageous for religion, since each sect is a check on the others.

*Christ and Religion.* Religion had been the cause of great evil in Jefferson’s view, and it was important that one opinion be balanced by opposing opinions. Millions had been burned, tortured, fined, and imprisoned, “yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity.” Past coercion had made half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites.

While Jefferson identified himself as a Christian, many agreed with the Danbury Baptists that he was not orthodox. He considered his redacted “Bible” proof “that I am a *real Christian*, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus” ( *Life and Morals*, viii). Jefferson admitted he was not a Christian who accepted the historic teachings of the Bible and church. “I am a Christian in the only sense in which I believe Jesus wished anyone to be, sincerely attached to his doctrines in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every human excellence, and believing that he never claimed any other” (Foote, 4).

*Evil.* People have both good and evil qualities. Indeed “experience proves, that the moral and physical qualities of man, whether good or evil, are transmissible in a certain degree.” A primary function of government is to protect people from injuring each other and to be attentive to the needs and desires of the masses. When a government fails to perform this function, its officers “become wolves.” This is not an unusual occurrence. The tendency of people to wield abusive power over others “seems to be the law of our general nature, in spite of individual exceptions; and experience declares that man is the only animal which devours his own kind.” The kind of government that tends to promote this evil is that run by kings, nobles, or priests. “There is scarcely an evil known in [Europe] which may not be traced to their king as its source” (Padover, 164, 97, 103). When governments become tyrannical, it is the *obligation* of the governed to overthrow it.

*Ethics.* Following John Locke’s natural law tradition, Jefferson held that the natural moral law applies to nations and to individuals: “It is strangely absurd to suppose that a million human

beings, collected together, are not under the same moral laws which bind each of them separately” (Foote, 42). The source of human morality is “love for others,” which has been “implanted” by nature. It is this “moral instinct . . . which prompts us irresistibly to feel and to succor” the distress of others. Moral actions are relative. Actions deemed virtuous in one country are considered vicious in another. This occurs because “nature has constituted *utility* to man [as] the standard . . . of virtue” (Padover, 150–51).

Jefferson considered the greatest moral teachers to have been Epicurus and Jesus. He considered himself a follower of both, though he identified most closely with Epicurus. Concerning this he wrote, “I . . . am an Epicurean. I consider the genuine (not the imputed) doctrines of Epicurus as containing everything rational in moral philosophy which Greece and Rome have left us” (Padover, 175).

*Human Destiny.* The human soul does survive death. While on his deathbed Jefferson penned these words as a farewell to his surviving daughter:

Life’s visions are vanished, its dreams are no more;  
Dear friends of my bosom, why bathed in tears?  
I go to my fathers, I welcome the shore  
Which crowns all my hopes and which buries my cares.  
Then farewell, my dear, my lov’d daughter, adieu!  
The last pang of life is in parting from you.  
Two seraphs await me long shrouded in death;  
I will bear them your love on my last parting breath. [Foote, 68]

Jefferson spoke of the Judge of all humanity in the *Declaration*, but he did not define what he meant by the term. He did not omit Jesus’ references to rewards in heaven for the righteous and punishment in hell for the wicked from his abbreviated Bible. Just how literally he took this is another question.

*Evaluation.* Since Jefferson was a deist his views fall under the same critique. This includes his denial of miracles ( *see* MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST ) as well as his rejection of God’s immanence ( *see* THEISM ). His views on the Bible were also unfounded ( *see* BIBLE, ALLEGED ERRORS IN ; BIBLE CRITICISM ; BIBLE, EVIDENCE FOR ).

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### **J-E-P-D Theory. See PENTATEUCH, MOSAIC AUTHORSHIP OF .**

**Jesus, Non-Christian Sources.** Negative Bible critics charge or imply that the New Testament documents are unreliable since they were written by disciples of Jesus or later Christians. They note that there is no confirmation of Jesus in any non-Christian sources. Several factors undermine the validity of this criticism ( *see* BIBLE CRITICISM ).

**The Evidence.** There is overwhelming evidence that the New Testament is a reliable record composed by contemporaries and eyewitnesses of the events ( *see* BIBLE, HISTORICITY OF ; NEW TESTAMENT, DATING OF ; NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF ; NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPTS ). There are more manuscripts, earlier manuscripts, better copied manuscripts, and manuscripts written by more people who were closer to the events than for any other piece of ancient history. Archaeology is continually confirming details of their writing ( *see* ARCHAEOLOGY, NEW TESTAMENT ). If the New Testament record is unreliable, we have no hope for any reliable knowledge of ancient happenings.

The objection that the writings are partisan involves a significant but false implication that witnesses cannot be reliable if they were close to the one about whom they gave testimony. This is clearly false. Survivors of the Jewish holocaust were close to the events they have described to the world. That very fact puts them in the best position to know what happened. They were there, and it happened to them. The same applies to the court testimony of someone who survived a vicious attack. It applies to the survivors of the Normandy invasion during World War II or the Tet Offensive during the Vietnam War. The New Testament witnesses should not be disqualified because they were close to the events they relate.

Related to the charge that Jesus lacks testimony by unbelievers is that there is strong evidence, but a lack of weak evidence.

Suppose there were four eyewitnesses to a murder. There was also one witness who arrived on the scene after the actual killing and saw only the victim’s body. Another person heard a second-hand report of the killing. In the trial the defense attorney argues: “Other than the four eyewitnesses, this is a weak case, and the charges should be dismissed for lack of evidence.”

Others might think that attorney was throwing out a red herring. The judge and jury were being distracted from the strongest evidence to the weakest evidence, and the reasoning was clearly faulty. Since the New Testament witnesses were the only eyewitness and contemporary testimonies to Jesus, it is a fallacy to misdirect attention to the non-Christian secular sources. Nonetheless, it is instructive to show what confirming evidence for Jesus can be gleaned outside the New Testament.

**The Sources.** Some excellent resources have been made available to give fuller descriptions of this testimony. Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* , devotes a chapter to the non-Christian evidence. F. F. Bruce wrote the popular-level analysis of the evidence in *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable* , and Bruce’s *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* is a more in-depth and thoroughly documented study. A recent work on the subject is by Gary Habermas in one chapter of *The Historical Jesus* .

**Ancient Historians.** A surprising amount of information about Jesus can be drawn from historians who were contemporary to him or lived soon after. These include:

**Tacitus.** The first-century Roman Tacitus is considered one of the more accurate historians of the ancient world. He gives the account of the great fire of Rome, for which some blamed the Emperor Nero:

Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures of a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their center and become popular. [ *Annals* 15.44]

This passage contains references to Christians, named after Christus (Latin for *Christ* ), who suffered the “extreme penalty” under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius. The “superstition” which started in Judea and had made its way to Rome was most likely the resurrection of Jesus.

**Suetonius.** Suetonius was chief secretary to Emperor Hadrian (reign, 117–138). Two references are important:

Because the Jews at Rome caused continuous disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he expelled them from the city. [ *Claudius* , 25]

After the great fire at Rome. . . . Punishments were also inflicted on the Christians, a sect professing a new and mischievous religious belief. [ *Nero* , 16]

These brief references establish a few things. There was a man named *Chrestus* (or Christ) who lived during the first century. Certain Jews caused disturbances relating to this man. Suetonius,

writing many years later, was not in a position to know whether the disturbances were instigated by Christ or by Jews against his followers. At any rate Claudius became annoyed enough to throw every Jew out of the city (including Paul's associates Aquila and Priscilla) in 49. Also, Christians were persecuted after the Rome fire, and they had professed a new religious belief.

*Josephus*. Flavius Josephus (37/38–97) was a Jewish revolutionary who changed allegiance to the Romans in the Jewish revolt in time to save his life. He became a historian, working under the auspices of Emperor Vespasian. His *Antiquities* dates to the early 90s and contains two passages of interest. The first refers to James, “the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ” (20:9). This confirms the New Testament facts that there was a man named Jesus, who was known as “Christ” and had a brother named James. The second reference is much more explicit and controversial:

Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats. . . . He was [the] Christ . . . he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. [ *Antiquities* 18:3]

The genuineness of this passage has been questioned by scholars from all areas of belief because it seems doubtful that a Jew who lived and worked outside the Christian context would have said such things about Jesus. Even the apologist-theologian Origen (ca. 185–ca. 254) said that Josephus did not believe Jesus was the Messiah ( *Contra Celsum* 1:47). Despite these concerns, there are reasons in favor of accepting most of the text as genuine. First, there is good textual evidence for the mention of Jesus, and no textual evidence against it. Second, the text is written in the style of Josephus. Third, some of the words most likely did not come from a Christian. Fourth, the passage fits its context both grammatically and historically. Fifth, the reference to Jesus in *Antiquities* 20 seems to presuppose an earlier mention. Finally, an Arabic version of the text contains the basic elements without the questionable parts:

At this time there was a wise man named Jesus. His conduct was good and [he] was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who became his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion, and that he was alive; accordingly he was perhaps the Messiah, concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders. [cited in Habermas, 186]

Even without portions that are likely Christian interpolations, this text is an extraordinary witness to the life, death, and influence of Jesus. It notes that Jesus was known as a wise and virtuous man who had Jewish and Gentile disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified. The disciples reported that he had risen from the dead on the third day. The idea had been attached to his proclamation that he was the Messiah.

*Thallus*. Thallus wrote around A.D. 52. None of his works are extant, though a few fragmented citations are preserved by other writers. One such writer is Julius Africanus in about 221, who quotes Thallus in a discussion of the darkness which followed the crucifixion of Christ:

On the whole world there pressed a most fearful darkness; and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down. This darkness Thallus, in the third book of his *History* calls, as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun. [ *Extant Writings* , 18 in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* ]

Africanus identifies the darkness which Thallus explained as a solar eclipse with the darkness at the crucifixion described in Luke 23:44–45 .

*Government Officials*. Other non-Christian sources were ancient government officials, whose occupations put them in a unique position to have official information unavailable to the public.

*Pliny the Younger*. Pliny the Younger was a Roman author and administrator. In a letter to the Emperor Trajan in about 112, Pliny describes the early Christian worship practices:

They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath, not to do any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery, never to falsify their word, nor deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up; after which it was their custom to separate, and then reassemble to partake of food—but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. [ *Letters* 10:96]

This passage confirms several New Testament references. The most notable is that early Christians worshiped Jesus as God. Their practices also betray a strong ethic, probably that of Jesus. There is also a reference to the love feast and Lord's Supper. Later in the same letter, Pliny calls the teaching of Jesus and his followers “excessive superstition” and “contagious superstition,” which may refer to Christian belief and proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus.

*Emperor Trajan*. In reply to Pliny's letter, Emperor Trajan gives the following guidelines for punishing Christians:

No search should be made for these people; when they are denounced and found guilty they must be punished; with the restriction, however, that when the party denies himself to be a Christian, and shall give proof that he is not (that is, by adoring our gods) he shall be pardoned on the ground of repentance, even though he may have formerly incurred suspicion. [ibid., 10:97]

This sheds some light on how the early Roman government viewed Christianity. They were to be punished for not worshiping the Roman gods, but the persecution was not without restrictions.

*Hadrian*. The Christian historian Eusebius (ca. 265–339) records a letter from Emperor Hadrian to Minicius Fundanus, the Asian proconsul. Not unlike Trajan's letter to Pliny, Hadrian gives some instruction on handling Christians:

I do not wish, therefore, that the matter should be passed by without examination, so that these men may neither be harassed, nor opportunity of malicious proceedings be offered to informers. If, therefore, the provincials can clearly evince their charges against

the Christians, so as to answer before the tribunal, let them pursue this course only, but not by mere petitions, and mere outcries against the Christians. For it is far more proper, if anyone would bring an accusation, that you should examine it. [ *Ecclesiastical History* , 4:9]

The passage confirms that Christians were often accused of breaking laws and were punished, but that temperance was encouraged.

*Other Jewish Sources.* In addition to the Jewish writers of the New Testament and Josephus, other Jewish witnesses refer to the life of Jesus.

*Talmud.* Talmudic writings of most value concerning the historical Jesus are those compiled between 70 and 200 during the so-called *Tannaitic Period* . The most significant text is Sanhedrin 43a:

On the eve of Passover Yeshu was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, "He is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Any one who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf." But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover! [ *Babylonian Talmud* ]

This passage confirms the crucifixion, the timing of the event on the eve of Passover, and the accusation of sorcery and apostasy. This text also informs us of the herald who went out preceding the death of Jesus (cf. John 8:58–59 ; 10:31–33 , 39 ). Another reference in this section mentions five disciples of Jesus. Most of the other references to Jesus and Christianity in *the Talmud* are much later and of questionable historical value.

*Toledoth Jesu.* One rather later witness is *Toledoth Jesu* , an anti-Christian document compiled in the fifth century. This document explains that the body of Jesus was secretly moved to a second grave because the disciples were planning to steal the body. When the disciples came to the tomb, Jesus' body was gone, so they concluded that he was resurrected. Meanwhile the Jewish authorities were being informed of the true location of Jesus' body. Though quite late, this document probably reflects common early opinion (cf. Matt. 18:11–15 ).

*Other Gentile Sources.* There were Gentile sources for the life of Christ other than the Romans. These include:

*Lucian.* Lucian of Samosata was a second-century Greek writer whose works contain sarcastic critiques of Christianity:

The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account. . . . You see, these misguided creatures start with the general conviction that they are immortal for all time, which explains the contempt of death and voluntary self-devotion which are so common among them; and then it was impressed on them by their original lawgiver that they are all brothers, from the moment that they are converted, and deny the gods of Greece, and

worship the crucified sage, and live after his laws. All this they take quite on faith, with the result that they despise all worldly goods alike, regarding them merely as common property. [ *Death of Pelegrine* , 11–13]

Following Habermas, several things can be ascertained from this text. Jesus was worshiped by Christians. He had introduced new teachings and had been crucified for his teachings. His teachings included the brotherhood of believers, the importance of conversion, and the importance of denying other gods. Christians lived according to Jesus' laws. Further, the followers of Jesus believed themselves immortal and were characterized by contempt for death, voluntary self-devotion, and renunciation of material goods. Despite being one of the church's most vocal critics, Lucian gives one of the most informative accounts of Jesus and early Christianity outside the New Testament.

*Mara Bar-Serapion.* A Syrian, Mara Bar-Serapion wrote to his son Serapion sometime between the late first and early third centuries. The letter contains an apparent reference to Jesus:

What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as a judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of Samon gain from burning Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger; the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea; the Jews, ruined and driven from their land, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lived on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise king die for good; he lived on in the teaching which he had given. [British Museum, Syriac ms, add. 14, 658; cited in Habermas, 200]

This passage confirms four specific teachings of the New Testament: (1) Jesus was thought to be a wise and virtuous man. (2) Jesus was considered by many to be the king of Israel. (3) The Jews put Jesus to death. (4) Jesus lived on in the teachings of his followers.

*Gnostic Sources.* Immediately after the time of Christ, several non-Christian groups flourished in loose connection with the church. One of the more successful was the gnostics ( *see* GNOSTICISM ).

*The Gospel of Truth.* This second-century book was perhaps written by Valentinus (135–160). It confirms that Jesus was a historical person in several passages:

For when they had seen him and heard him, he granted them to taste him and to smell him and to touch the beloved Son. When he had appeared instructing them about the Father. . . . For he came by means of fleshly appearance. [30:27–33; 31:4–6]

In another passage we read that

Jesus was patient in accepting sufferings . . . since he knows that his death is life for many . . . he was nailed to a tree; he published the edict of the Father on the cross. . . . He draws himself down to death through life. . . . Having stripped himself of the perishable



rags, he put on imperishability, which no one can possibly take away from him. [20:11–14, 25–34]

These quotations affirm that Jesus was the Son of God and the Word, who became a man and took on a fleshly body. He taught his followers about his Father. Jesus suffered and was crucified. His death brings life for many. Jesus was raised from the dead in an imperishable body.

*The Apocryphon of John* was a second-century gnostic work that opens with a supposedly historical account of an encounter between Arimanius the Pharisee and John, son of Zebedee, the disciple. John is reputed to have said that Jesus “has gone to the place from which he came” (1:5–17). This was an apparent reference to the ascension. Arimanius replied that John had been deceived by Jesus. There is no evidence outside *The Apocryphon* that this event occurred.

*The Gospel of Thomas* (140–200) is a collection of some spurious and some actual events and sayings of Jesus. It tells us several things about the identity of Jesus. Jesus identifies himself as the resurrected One, the Son of Man, the Son of his Father, and the All of the Universe. As in the Bible, the disciples fail to recognize the true identity of Jesus. *The Gospel of Thomas* refers to the death and exaltation of Jesus. It is a thoroughly gnostic document, and for this reason, as well as the late date, it has limited historical value.

*The Treatise on Resurrection* is a gnostic work from the late second century. Despite its heavy gnostic philosophy, *Treatise* does affirm several teachings: Jesus was truly deity. Despite this, Jesus, the Son of God, took on flesh. Jesus died, rose again, and conquered death for those who have faith in him. Its value as a source is also limited.

*Other Lost Sources.* Beside these non-Christian sources for the life of Christ, some documents are hinted at but have not been found.

*The Acts of Pontius Pilate.* Although a purportedly official document, *The Acts of Pontius Pilate* does not survive, it is referred to by Justin Martyr in about 150 and by Tertullian in about 200. Justin writes:

And the expression, “They pierced my hands and my feet,” was used in reference to the nails of the cross which were fixed in his hands and feet. And after he was crucified, they cast lots upon his vesture, and they that crucified him parted it among them. And that these things did happen you can ascertain from the “Acts” of Pontius Pilate. [ *First Apology* , 35]

Justin also claims that the miracles of Jesus can be confirmed in this document (ibid., 48).

*Phlegon.* Phlegon (b. ca. 80) was a freed slave of Emperor Hadrian. None of Phlegon’s writings are extant, but he is mentioned several times by later writers. He spoke of Christ’s death and resurrection in his nonextant *Chronicles* , saying, “Jesus, while alive, was of no assistance to himself, but that he arose after death and exhibited the marks of his punishment, and showed how his hands had been pierced by nails” (cited in Origen, 4:455; cf. Habermas, 210; Anderson,

19). Phlegon also mentioned “the eclipse in the time of Tiberius Caesar, in whose reign Jesus appears to have been crucified, and the great earthquake which then took place” (Origen, 14). Julius Africanus confirms the same quotations (Julius Africanus, 18).

Habermas summarizes from the Phlegon references that Jesus predicted the future, that there was an eclipse at the time of the crucifixion, and that it occurred during the reign of Tiberius. After his resurrection, Jesus appeared and showed his wounds, especially the nail marks from the crucifixion (Habermas, 211).

**Summary.** The primary sources for the life of Christ are the four Gospels ( *see* NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF ). However, there are considerable reports from non-Christian sources that supplement and confirm the Gospel accounts. These come largely from Greek, Roman, Jewish, and Samaritan sources of the first century. In brief they inform us that: (1) Jesus was from Nazareth; (2) he lived a wise and virtuous life; (3) he was crucified in Palestine under Pontius Pilate during the reign of Tiberius Caesar at Passover time, being considered the Jewish king; (4) he was believed by his disciples to have been raised from the dead three days later; (5) his enemies acknowledged that he performed unusual feats they called “sorcery”; (6) his small band of disciples multiplied rapidly, spreading even as far as Rome; (7) his disciples denied polytheism, lived moral lives, and worshiped Christ as Divine. This picture confirms the view of Christ presented in the New Testament Gospels.

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**Jesus, Uniqueness of.** See CHRIST, DEITY OF ; CHRIST, UNIQUENESS OF ; WORLD RELIGIONS AND CHRISTIANITY .

**Jesus of History.** See CHRIST OF FAITH VS. JESUS OF HISTORY ; JESUS, QUEST FOR THE HISTORICAL ; JESUS SEMINAR .

**Jesus, Quest for the Historical.** For over 100 years there has been a quest to identify the historical Jesus and differentiate this person from the Christ of Faith ( see CHRIST OF FAITH VS. JESUS OF HISTORY ). Actually, there have been several quests. All but the last have rejected the historicity of the New Testament as a whole and undermined orthodox Christianity and the Christian apologetic.

The quests for the real Jesus can be divided into four time periods: (1) the first or “old” quest, 1778–1906; (2) the “no quest” period, 1906–1953; (3) the “new” quest, 1953–1970; and (4) the third quest, from 1970 (see Holden, chap. 2).

**The First-Quest Period.** The quest for the historical Jesus grew out of the posthumous publication by Gotthold Lessing of Hermann Reimarus’s *Fragments* . In the fragment “On the Intention of Jesus and His Disciples,” Reimarus separated what the apostles said about Jesus from what Jesus actually said about himself. This partition between the Christ of Faith and the Jesus of history remains a core tenet of much of modern New Testament research ( see JESUS SEMINAR ). It is rooted in the antisupernaturalism of Benedict Spinoza , English Deism , and the fact/ value dichotomy of Immanuel Kant .

In 1835, David Strauss published his desupernaturalized work, *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* . Under the influence of David Hume , Strauss dismissed the reliability of historical and supernatural elements in the Gospels as “outrageous” and “myths.” This led to later attempts to demythologize the Gospel records ( see MYTHOLOGY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT ).

Albert Schweitzer brought this period to a close in 1906 with his *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* . He argued that Jesus’ message was eschatological in nature and that the supposedly objective research into the man had produced a figure molded into the biases of the researchers. “There is nothing more negative than the result of the critical study of the life of Jesus,” wrote Schweitzer. “He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in historical garb” (Schweitzer, 396).

**The No-Quest Period.** Schweitzer severely damaged the confidence of the quest for the historical and inaugurated a time during which such research was in disrepute. Rudolph Bultmann regarded such work as methodologically impossible and theologically illegitimate. In *Jesus and the Word* (1958), he wrote, “I do indeed think that we can know almost nothing concerning the life and personality of Jesus, since the early Christian sources show no interest in either, are moreover fragmentary and often legendary; and other sources about Jesus do not

exist” (Bultmann, 8). Bultmann signaled the shift from historical quest to existential encounter. Building on Strauss, he began to demythologize the Gospels and reinterpret them in an existential way.

**The New Quest.** A student of Bultmann, Ernst Kasemann began the “new quest” in a 1953 lecture. He rejected Bultmann’s method as docetic ( see DOCETISM ), because Bultmann disregarded the humanity of Jesus. While he kept most of the presuppositions of the former quest, Kasemann’s goals differed. The old quest sought discontinuity between the Christ of Faith and the Jesus of history amid assumed continuity, the new quest was concerned with the person of Christ as the preached word of God and his relation to history. The major work of the new quest is Gunther Bornkamm’s *Jesus of Nazareth* (1960).

**The Third Quest.** The most recent research into the historical Jesus is largely a reaction to the “new quest.” It is multifaceted, including some from the radical tradition, a new perspective tradition, and conservatives. In the “conservative” category are I. Howard Marshall, D. F. D. Moule, and G. R. Beasley-Murray. They reject the idea that the picture of the New Testament Jesus was somehow painted by Hellenic Savior cults ( see MITHRAISM ; APOTHEOSIS ).

The new perspective group places Jesus in his first-century Jewish setting. This group includes E. P. Sanders, Ben F. Meyer, Geza Vermes, Bruce Chilton, and James H. Charlesworth. The radical tradition is exemplified by the Jesus Seminar and their interest in the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Q* document. More about this group can be found in the article, Jesus Seminar. The Jesus Seminar uses many of the methods of Strauss and Bultmann, but unlike the latter, the group is optimistic about recovering the historical individual. Their results to date, however, have yielded very different views, based on a small fragment of New Testament sayings they believe to be authentic.

**Evaluation. False Assumptions about Method and Premises.** With the exception of the conservative resurgence, all the quests have been built on false premises and proceed with fallacious or questionable methods. Most of these are examined in detail in other articles cited. False premises include:

Antisupernaturalism. Miracle accounts and any other references to the supernatural are immediately rejected. This is unjustified ( see MIRACLE ; MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST ; NATURALISM ).

Fact/value dichotomy. Kant ’s assumption that one can separate fact from value is clearly false, as is evident in the impossibility of separating the fact of Christ’s death from its value. There is no spiritual significance in the virgin birth unless it is a biological fact. Nor can one separate the fact of a human life from its value; a murderer inescapably attacks the individual’s value as a human by taking the person’s life.

A false separation. The quests cannot substantiate the disjunction between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of fact. They assume, without proof, that the Gospels are not historical and that they do not set out the historical person of Jesus.

Denial of Historicity. At the core of the quests is a denial of the historical nature of the Gospels. But their historicity has been substantiated beyond that of other ancient books ( see NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS, RELIABILITY OF ; NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF ; NEW TESTAMENT, NON-CHRISTIAN SOURCES ).

Misunderstanding of “myth.” Most quests have not understood the nature of “myth.” Simply because an event is more than empirical does not mean it is less than historical. The miracle of the resurrection, for example, is more than a resuscitation of Jesus’ body—but it is not less than that. As C. S. Lewis noted, those who equate the New Testament with mythology have not studied too much New Testament; they have not studied enough myths ( see MYTHOLOGY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT ).

*False Assumptions about Extra-Biblical Documents.* In the most recent radical quest there is a misdirected effort to date the New Testament late and to place extra-biblical documents of *Q* and *The Gospel of Thomas* . But it is well-established that there are New Testament records before 70, while contemporaries and eyewitnesses were still alive. Further, there is no proof that *Q* ever existed as a written document. There are no manuscripts or citations. *The Gospel of Thomas* is a mid-second-century work too late to have figured in the writing of the Gospels.

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**Jesus Seminar.** The Jesus Seminar is a consortium of New Testament scholars, directed by Robert W. Funk, who were organized in 1985 under the auspices of the Estar Institute of Santa Rosa, California. Seventy-plus scholars meet twice a year to make pronouncements about the authenticity of the words and deeds of Christ. The Seminar is comprised of liberal Catholics and

Protestants, Jews, and atheists . Most are male professors, though their number includes a pastor, a filmmaker, and three women. About half are graduates of Harvard, Claremont, or Vanderbilt divinity schools.

**Writings.** One of the intents of the organization is to publish critical books for a wider range of people than normally read such studies. So the group has a growing literary output. Among the works so far published: Marcus Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* and *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* ; John Dominic Crossan, *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* , *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Peasant* , and *The Other Four Gospels: Shadows on the Contours of Canon* ; Funk, *The Five Gospels and The Parables of Jesus* ; and Burton Mack, *Jesus: A New Vision* , *The Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* , *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* , and *Who Wrote the New Testament: The Making of the Christian Myth* . The group’s crowning effort has been a translation of the Gospels edited by Robert J. Miller, *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars’ Version* .

*Aims of the Seminar’s Work.* While Seminar members produce critical works, from its inception the Jesus Seminar has sought to make its views available to the general public, rather than just the scholarly community: “We are going to try to carry out our work in full public view; we will not only honor the freedom of information, we will insist on the public disclosure of our work” (Funk, *Forum* , 1.1). To this end the Seminar has sought publicity from every possible source. A TV summit, many articles, interviews with the press, tapes, and even a possible movie are part of this public information campaign for anti-supernatural theology. Funk frankly confessed the radical nature of the work when he said, “We are probing what is most sacred to millions, and hence we will constantly border on blasphemy” (ibid., 8). This is an honest and accurate disclosure of what has happened.

*Procedures of the Seminar.* The group has used colored beads to vote on the accuracy of Jesus’ sayings. A red bead means words that Jesus probably spoke. Pink indicates words that could probably be attributed to Jesus. Gray represents words probably, though not certainly, came from later sources. Black indicates words that Jesus almost certainly did not speak.

The vote was based on a variety of Christian writings other than the four canonical Gospels, including the fragmentary *Gospel of Peter* , the supposed but not extant *Q* or *Quelle* (“source”) document, the second-century Gospel of Thomas , and the non-extant *Secret Mark* . *Thomas* is usually treated as a fifth Gospel, on a par with the four canonical books.

*Results of the Voting.* The results of their work is the conclusion that only fifteen sayings (2 percent) can absolutely be regarded as Jesus’ actual words. About 82 percent of what the canonical Gospels ascribe to Jesus are not authentic. Another 16 percent of the words are of doubtful authenticity. The following chart breaks down the proportions of each Gospel in each category and the percentage of “authentic” sayings of Christ. Notice that *Thomas* had a higher percentage of authentic “red” votes than did either Mark or John.

Gospel Sayings	Red	Pink	Gray	Black	Authentic
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Matthew (420 sayings)	11	61	114	235	2.6 %
Mark (177 sayings)	1	18	66	92	0.6 %
Luke (392 sayings)	14	65	128	185	3.6 %
John (140 sayings)	0	1	5	134	0.0 %
Thomas (202 sayings)	3	40	67	92	1.5 %

**Conclusions of the Seminar.** Several radical conclusions emerge from the work of the Jesus Seminar which seriously affect historic orthodox Christianity, to the extent that they are taken seriously by the public:

1. The “old” Jesus and “old Christianity” are no longer relevant.
2. There is no agreement about who Jesus was: a cynic, a sage, a Jewish reformer, a feminist, a prophet-teacher, a radical social prophet, or an eschatological prophet.
3. Jesus did not rise from the dead. One member, Crossan, theorizes that Jesus’ corpse was buried in a shallow grave, dug up, and eaten by dogs.
4. The canonical Gospels are late and cannot be trusted.
5. The authentic words of Jesus can be reconstructed from the so-called “*Q* document,” *The Gospel of Thomas*, *Secret Mark*, and *The Gospel of Peter*.

As Funk stated clearly, the Seminar concluded that “the narrative contexts in which the sayings of Jesus are preserved in the Gospels are the creation of the evangelists. They are fictive [fictional] and secondary” (“The Emerging Jesus,” 11).

**Evaluation.** For a more extensive evaluation of the *Gospel of Thomas* and *Q* Document, see those articles. Most issues raised by the Seminar are covered in BIBLE, EVIDENCE FOR ; BIBLE CRITICISM ; CHRIST, DEATH OF ; MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST ; NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF and RESURRECTION, EVIDENCE FOR . A few other points can be made:

**A Radical Fringe of Scholarship.** The Jesus Seminar represents a radical fringe of New Testament scholarship, though one that unfortunately includes a large number of mainline

scholars and pastors. The fact that some of their views are adopted by many contemporary scholars is not the point, for truth is not determined by majority vote. Most of the proofs they offer, in addition to the voting procedure, are unconvincing and often nonexistent except for quotations from one another and other liberal scholars as unimpeachable sources. While radical scholars are making considerable noise at the end of the twentieth century, in the broad range of Christian history they are a small minority.

**Unjustified Antisupernaturalism.** The radical conclusions of the group are based on radical presuppositions, one of which is an unjustified rejection of any miraculous intervention in history by God ( see MIRACLES, ARGUMENTS AGAINST ). One of the chief grounds for rejecting the authenticity of the canonical Gospels is the assumption that any reference to a miracle is not credible. This presupposition crept into biblical scholarship by way of David Hume and David Strauss. David Hume’s antisupernaturalism is without foundation.

**Unfounded Acceptance of Late Dates.** Flowing from the presumption of antisupernaturalism is the tendency to posit dates as late as possible for the writing of the Gospels (at earliest, 70 to 100, and in some arguments later). By doing this they can create enough time between the events and the recording for eyewitnesses to die off and a mythology to develop around the founder of Christianity. Thus they can say that 84 percent of the sayings of Jesus were invented later. However, there are problems with these late dates, and as archaeology broadens understanding of the first-century sources, the position is becoming untenable. Among problems:

Manuscript evidence from the very early second century strongly argues for an Asian origin in the first century.

Gospels are cited in other first-century works ( see BIBLE, EVIDENCE FOR ).

The Gospel of Luke was written before Acts, which has strong evidence for a date of no later than A.D . 60–62 ( see ACTS, HISTORICITY OF ). This is well within the lifetime of Jesus’ contemporaries.

The writings of Paul speak of the historicity of the most crucial events in the Gospels, the death and resurrection of Christ. Even critical scholars date 1 Corinthians to ca. A.D . 55–56. This would place it within a quarter century of Jesus’ death in 33.

Some critical scholars admit early dates for the basic Gospels. The late Bishop J. A. T. Robinson argued that they were written between 40 and 60. This would place the first records as close as seven years after the events they report.

Even the later dates of the 60s through the 80s do not allow time for mythological distortions to develop. It has been demonstrated that even two generations is too short a period to allow legendary tendencies to wipe out the hard core of historical fact ( see MYTHOLOGY AND THE NEW TESTAMENT ).

**Uncritical Acceptance of *Q*.** The method by which the Jesus Seminar was able to come to their radical conclusions with a flourish of scholarly activity was simple. They demoted the first-century and eyewitness contemporary accounts of Jesus’ life (the four Gospels) to late works of

mythology and replaced them with nonextant works, such as *Q*, and clearly apocryphal writings, such as *The Gospel of Thomas*. But *Q* is a purely hypothetical document. There are no manuscripts. No one ever quoted such a book or referred to its existence. It is a purely hypothetical literary reconstruction based on unjustified presuppositions. It stands in contradiction to the known evidence.

Use of *Thomas* is questionable on a number of accounts. It is clearly a second-century work, well out of range of contemporaries to the events. It has a heretical agenda, for its teaching is gnostic ( *see* NAG HAMMADI GOSPELS ). Its claim to be written by an apostle places it in the category of legend. Interestingly, its use to disprove the resurrection overlooks the fact that the work purports to be the words of the resurrected Christ.

Scholars of the Jesus Seminar also use *Secret Mark* and *The Gospel of Peter*. *Peter* is a second- or even third-century apocryphal work that is infamous for its outlandish legends. No one living in recent history has ever seen *Peter* or the copy of Clement's letter that supposedly contained it. How then can its content be used for scholarly judgment on the authenticity of the Gospels?

*Circular Reasoning*. The reasoning process of the Jesus Seminar is a sophisticated form of the logical fallacy known as *Petitio Principii*, or begging the question. Its circular reasoning begins with a desupernaturalized view of a first-century religious figure and concludes at the same point.

**Conclusion.** Despite their desire and achievements for drawing wide publicity, nothing is new in the Jesus Seminar's radical conclusions. They offer only another example of unsubstantiated negative Bible criticism. Their conclusions are contrary to the overwhelming evidence for the historicity of the New Testament and the reliability of the New Testament witnesses. They are based on an unsubstantiated antisupernatural bias.

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**John, Gospel of.** The Gospel of John is an important link in the argument for the deity of Christ and the truth of Christianity. Granting truth is knowable ( *see* TRUTH, NATURE OF ) the overall argument can be stated ( *see* APOLOGETICS, OVERALL ARGUMENT ):

1. The theistic God exists.
2. In a theistic universe, miracles are possible ( *see* MIRACLE ).
3. Miracles in connection with truth claims are acts of God that confirm the truth of God claimed by a messenger of God ( *see* MIRACLES, APOLOGETIC VALUE OF ).
4. The New Testament documents are historically reliable.
5. In the New Testament Jesus claimed to be God.
6. Jesus proved to be God by an unprecedented convergence of miracles.
7. Therefore, Jesus was God in human flesh.

John's Gospel speaks to the fifth premise, recording Jesus' explicit claims to deity:

The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. [ 5:22–23 ]

I tell you the truth . . . before Abraham was born, I am! [ 8:58 ]

I and the Father are one. [ 10:30 ]

Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. [ 17:5 ]

Other claims to Christ's deity claims are unrecorded in the Synoptics as they are in John (for instance, 9:35–38 ; 13 ; 13–15 , and 18:6 ). Clear statements of an eyewitness apostle about Christ's deity come from John:

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [ 1:1 ]

No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. [ 1:18 ]

Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him. [ 12:39–41 ]

"My Lord and my God." [The confession of Thomas to the risen Christ, 20:28 ]

Because these statements have no parallels in the other Gospels, negative critics have dismissed their authenticity. Apologists frequently avoid the issue by sticking to Jesus' claims to deity in the Synoptics (for example, Matt. 16:16–17 ; Mark 2:5–10 ; 14:61–65 ) and instances where he accepted worship (for example, Matt. 28:9 ; Mark 5:6 ; 15:19 ).

We cannot afford to bypass John entirely, however. If, as some critics claim, John created these sayings or does not accurately report them, the Gospel accounts are undermined, as well as the rich theological teachings found in John ( *see* NEW TESTAMENT, DATING OF ; NEW TESTAMENT DOCUMENTS, RELIABILITY OF ).

**Arguments against Historicity.** Several arguments are used against the authenticity of John's record:

*John was written in the second century, so an eyewitness could not have composed it.* Allegedly, the writer put statements that attribute deity into the mouth of Jesus and his disciples.

*If John had been written during the second century, that in itself would not make it unreliable.* It is not uncommon for other records from antiquity—which critics accept—to be written centuries after the events about which they speak. The earliest life of Alexander the Great was written 200 years later, yet it is used by historians as a reliable source of information. But there is no evidence that John was written so late. No testimonial or documentary evidence contradicts the explicit claims to be an eyewitness of what Jesus said and did. John records: "This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true" ( John 21:24 ). In context the statement clearly identifies the author as the apostle John. There is no evidence to the contrary, so the *prima facie* case for an authentic Gospel is strong.

That case is strengthened by the freshness and vividness of the book, which is lacking in ancient accounts from many years after the events they relate. Background explanation, personal detail, and carefully related private conversation (e.g., John 3 , 4 , 8–10 , 13–17 ) betray the work of an eyewitness (cf. John 2:6 ; 4:6 ; 6:10 ; 12:3 , 5 ). For example, John ( 5:2 ) mentions five colonnades at the pool of Bethesda. Excavations between 1914 and 1938 uncovered this pool and found it to be just as John described it. Since that pool did not exist in the second century, it is unlikely any second-century fraud would have had access to such detail about persons, places, geography, and topography.

Another charge by critics is that John is too different, both in events and language, to be covering the same man and events as the Synoptic Gospels. Language issues will be discussed below. That the events differ proves too much. If John were written as long as a century after the Synoptics to promote a theological agenda, the tendency would be to refer to some of the same occurrences, simply filling them with new meaning. This does not happen. Yet there is overlap at the obvious points (the crucifixion and resurrection) and in other touchstone occurrences—Jesus walking on water, feeding the 5000, his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and particularly the last supper. There is no substantial difference among these accounts.

The second-century hypothesis received a fatal blow with the discovery in Egypt of the "John Rylands fragment" of the Gospel, which can be dated as early as 114. John was written in Asia Minor. If copies were circulating in a small town the other side of the Mediterranean by 114, the original was certainly a first-century work.

Tradition has placed John as the last of the Gospels to be written, sometime during the 90s. However, recent research into the Dead Sea Scrolls has caused a few scholars to date John before 70, because of its affinity with Qumran (Guthrie, 261–62). Evidence particularly noted is the simplicity of language and the light-darkness motif so common in Qumran thinking ( John 1:4–9 ; cf. 8:12 ). Even liberal scholars, such as John A. T. Robinson, dated John as early as 40–65 (Robinson, 352). This would place it within a decade of the actual events. This may be a bit too early, but it reflects what has been learned about the author's first-hand acquaintance with the events recounted.

The first-century origin of John, while eyewitnesses were still alive, seems beyond serious dispute. This strongly suggests John's historicity.

*John Does Not Use Parables.* John's Gospel is distinctive in that it contains none of the parables so characteristic of the Synoptic Gospels. This is taken by some critics as evidence that John is a less trustworthy account. But given other similarities on essential events and teaching, it is difficult to see how the absence of parables proves that John's report is untrustworthy. Nonetheless, four points can be made:

*This is an argument from silence.* Silence at this point proves nothing logically except that John chose to confine his writing to other matters. He may have done so deliberately, particularly if his was the last Gospel to be written. There is no reason why John should repeat material already available. With three other Gospels in circulation for twenty or thirty years, John's purpose may have been largely supplementary. He was selective, noting that much more happened than could possibly be told ( 20:30–31 ; 21:24–25 ).

*Jesus uses parabolic speech in John.* Craig Blomberg observes that, although John contains no narrative parables, the book presents Jesus as fond of metaphors and figurative or proverbial language (Blomberg, 158). Jesus identifies himself as the good shepherd who seeks to rescue the errant sheep ( 10:1–16 ; cf., Matt. 18:12–14 ; Luke 15:3–7 ). Discipleship means servanthood ( 13:4–5 , 12–17 ; cf., Luke 22:24–27 ). John introduces sowing versus reaping ( 4:37 ); the apprentice son ( 5:19–20a ); slavery versus sonship ( 8:35 ); working and walking in the daylight ( 9:4 ; 11:9–10 ); the thief, the gatekeeper, and the sheepfold ( 10:1–3a ); the growth of a grain of

wheat ( 12:24 ); the vine and vinedresser ( 15:1–6 ); and the pain of a woman in childbirth ( 16:21 ; Blomberg, 158). Rather than showing that John’s report is not authentic, such parabolic expression connects the Jesus in John with the Jesus of the Synoptics.

*The book covers different times and places.* John relates more private conversations, whereas Jesus spoke in parables to the unbelieving crowd ( Matt. 13:13–15 ). Events recorded are not found in the Synoptics. John deals with the early and late ministries of Christ, whereas the Synoptics deal largely with the middle and Galilean ministries. It is understandable that Jesus said things a little differently at different times and places, as does any good itinerant preacher.

*John was reaching a new audience.* The absence of narrative parables suggests that this preacher’s audience is not linguistically Semitic. John uses terms with almost universal religious appeal to minimize communication barriers (Carson, 46). This fits with a date of later than 70, when the Romans conquered Jerusalem and the Gospel was reaching a more diverse, non-Jewish audience.

*Jesus’ Sayings Are a Different Style.* The assumption is made that any dissimilarity in style proves John creates rather than reports the words of Jesus. Logically this does not follow. There are at least three other possible explanations for dissimilarities: (1) The Synoptics may be more accurate than John. (2) John may be more accurate than the Synoptics. (3) They both may be accurately reporting largely different events, and some of the same events in different ways. Evidence supports the latter alternative.

*The sayings are largely the same.* If John is late and inaccurate, then why does he sometimes report Jesus’ statements in the same words as the Synoptics? John and Mark report that Jesus told the paralytic: “Take up your bed and walk” ( Mark 2:11 ; John 5:8 ). Jesus’ words to the disciples who saw him walking on the water are, “It is I. Do not be afraid” ( Mark 6:50 ; John 6:20 ). When Jesus appeared to the disciples, he said: “Peace be with you!” ( Luke 24:36 ; John 20:19 ).

However, it is not necessary for reliable reporting to use the exact words, so long as the same meaning is conveyed. At numerous points the substance of what Jesus said is the same in John and in the Synoptic parallel. When feeding the five thousand, Jesus said, “Make the people sit down (cf. John 6:10) and Mark says Jesus commanded them to “make them all sit down” ( 6:39 ). In John Jesus defended the woman who anointed him with “Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of my burial” ( 12:7 ). Mark records: “She has come beforehand to anoint my body for burial” ( 14:8 ). Of Judas’ betrayal Jesus said in John, “I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me” ( 13:21 ). Mark records, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me” ( 14:18 ). In John 13:38 Jesus said to Peter, “Will you really lay down your life for me? I tell you the truth, before the cock crows, you will disown me three times!” Luke reads, “I tell you, Peter, before the cock crows today, you will deny three times that you know me” ( Luke 22:34 ). Here John agrees with one Synoptic and Mark deviates, mentioning two, rather than three, crowings ( Mark 14:30 ). In John 18:11 Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword away!” Matthew 26:52 reads, “Put your sword back in its place.”

John records specific teachings that closely resemble the Synoptic Gospels:

Jesus is the “Son of man” ( 1:51 ; 5:27 ; 8:28 ; cf. Matt. 9:6 ; 16:13 ; 20:18 ; Mark 2:10 ; 8:31 ; 10:45 ; Luke 12:40 ; 19:10 ; 24:7 , in all 80 occurrences).

Jesus taught with authority ( 2:18 ; 5:27 ; 10:18 ; cf. Matt. 7:29 ; 9:6 ; 28:18 ; Mark 1:22 , 27 ; Luke 4:32 , 5:24 ).

One must be born again to enter the kingdom of God ( 3:3 ; cf. Mark 10:15 ).

An abundant harvest awaits the laborers ( 4:35 ; cf. Matt. 9:37–38 ).

A prophet is without honor in his homeland ( 4:44 ; cf. Mark 6:4 ).

Jesus corrected Jewish tradition, especially about the Sabbath ( 5:9b–16 ; 7:22–23 ; cf. Matt. 12:1–13 ; Mark 2:23–3:5 ; Luke 13:10–17 ).

Unbelievers will be judged according to their works ( 5:29 ; cf. Matt. 25:46 ).

Jesus has unique Sonship with God, including the right to call God *Abba*, Father ( 5:37 ; 17:11 ; cf. Matt. 3:17 ; 18:10 ; Mark 14:36 ; Luke 3:22 ; 9:35 ; 23:46 ).

Jesus is the light of the world ( 8:12 ; cf. Matt. 5:14 ).

Jesus taught, in part, to harden hearts of those opposed to him ( 9:39 ; cf. 12:39–40 ; Mark 4:12 ; 8:17 ).

The good shepherd rescues his flock ( 10:1–16 ; cf. Matt. 18:12–14 ; Luke 15:3–7 ).

The Father reveals the Son; no one knows the Father but the Son ( 10:14–15 ; 13:3 ; 17:2 , 25 ; cf. Matt. 11:25–27 ).

Jesus was tempted to abandon the way of the cross ( 12:27 ; cf. Mark 14:35–36 ).

Receiving Jesus means receiving the Father ( 12:44–45 ; cf. Matt. 10:40 ; Mark 9:37 ; Luke 10:16 ).

True discipleship means servanthood ( 13:4–5 , 12–17 ; cf. Luke 22:24–27 ).

The disciple is not greater than his master ( 13:16 ; cf. Matt. 10:24 ; Luke 6:40 ).

The Holy Spirit will give the disciples their message to authorities ( 14:26 ; 15:26 ; cf. Matt. 10:19–20 ; Mark 13:11 ).

The disciples will be expelled from synagogues ( 16:1–4 ; cf. Matt. 10:17–18 ; Mark 13:9 ).

The disciples will be scattered over the world ( 16:32 ; cf. Mark 14:27 ).

Christians have authority to retain or forgive sins ( 20:23 ; cf. Matt. 18:18 ; Blomberg, 157–58).

“Johannine” type passages are in the Synoptics. Matthew 11:25–27 records a typical “Johannine” type passage that presents Jesus using the same straightforward, nonparabolic discourse that John attributes to him. In fact, it sounds so Johannine that, unless one knew it came from Matthew, the assumption would be that it came from John. Luke 10:21–22 also is in the Johannine style. Thus, the so-called “Johannine” style of Jesus’ sayings is not unique to the Gospel of John. Rather, it could represent an actual mode of speaking Jesus often used.

*The “I Am” Sayings of Jesus Are Unlike What Jesus Said in the Synoptics.* Since the seven “I am” statements ( 4:26 ; 6:35 ; 8:12 , 58 ; 10:9 , 11 ; 11:25 ; 14:6 ) are exclusive to John, some claim it unlikely that Jesus said them, at least in that form.

Actually, the sword of this argument cuts both ways. One could argue equally that the Synoptic sayings cannot be trusted because they differ from the Johannine statements. But it is not accurate to say that the Synoptics have no statements of Jesus using this implied identification with *JHWH* of the Old Testament. “I am he” (Gk: *ego eimi* ) is based in the Old Testament proclamation of God to be God (cf. Deut. 5:6 ; 32:39 ; Ps. 46:11 ; Isa. 40–45 , passim). In Matthew 11:25–27 and Luke 10:21–22 the Synoptics use a similar style of expression. Most explicit is Jesus’ statement to the high priest in Mark 14:62 , “ *I am* [the Christ].” In a demonstration of power approaching an epiphany, Jesus told the disciples, “Take courage! *I am* he. Don’t be afraid” ( Mark 6:50 , emphasis added).

Also, where would John or the other authors get this remarkable form? Ancient apocryphal writers tried to make their style conform to a format that was accepted as genuine. No other known first-century religious leader used statements like these. The closest nonbiblical parallel comes from the Jewish Qumran *Damascus Document* . It states “Seekest thou the God of Gods? I am He,” followed in the next chapter by “I am He, fear not, for I am before the days were” (cited in Stauffer, 179; note how God makes similar statements in Ps. 46:2 and Isa. 43:1 ).

The content of John’s “I am” statements is implied in the Synoptics. Craig Blomberg has noted that all four Gospels depict a man whose words would last forever, who forgave sins, who related humanity’s destiny to himself, who demanded absolute loyalty, who offered rest for the weary and salvation for the lost, who promised to be with his followers always, and who guaranteed that God would answer prayers in his name (166). The form’s use by Jesus in both the Synoptics and John reveals his self-claim to deity. As Stauffer argued, “ ‘I am He’—meant: where I am, there God is, there God lives and speaks” (Stauffer, 194–95).

Arguments for the general authenticity of John apply to the “I am” sections. There is no good reason to suspect that John and the Synoptics are not independently authentic. These sections agree in all major areas of overlap, often down to details. John also uses third-person statements like those more common in the Synoptics. In John 10:1–7 he obviously turns to first-person because his hearers don’t understand the meaning of his third-person illustration.

“I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. . . .” *Jesus used this figure of speech, but they did not understand what he was telling them. Therefore Jesus said again, “I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep.”* [ John 10:1 , 6–7 , emphasis author’s]

Jesus may have used the shorter, simpler style quoted by John on many occasions for emphasis or when the audience did not understand.

Since John stresses the antagonism of Jewish leaders to Jesus (see John 5:16 , 18 ; 7:1 ; 10:31 , etc.), it is understandable that “I am” statements would occur in John.

There is no proof John created the seven “I am” or the seven “signs” (miracles) by which John supported Jesus’ theme (cf. 20:30–31 ). Both were chosen for inclusion in the Gospel to make his point. It happens that there is no overlap of “sayings” in John with those in the Synoptics. Why should there be if he is consciously supplementing the already available Synoptics from the wealth of material that “even the world itself could not contain” ( John 21:25 )?

There is overlap between John and the Synoptics at some points, in particular the signs or miracles Jesus performed. Jesus’ walking on the water and feeding the five thousand in John 6 , and his resurrection in John 20 appear in the Synoptics with no significant variation from John’s accounts. If the book shows no inauthentic additions or exaggerations in reporting the signs of Jesus, there is no reason to doubt John’s reporting of what Jesus said.

Finally, it was John who wrote that Jesus promised divine activation of the memories of the apostles about “everything . . . [Jesus] said” ( John 14:26 ; 16:13 ). If memories were supernaturally activated by the Holy Spirit, there is no real problem understanding how the writers of the Gospels could closely reproduce what Jesus said decades later.

*The Brevity of Jesus’ Sayings Shows That They Are the Words of John.* Another charge regarding the style of Jesus’ discourse is that the brevity shows the work of a writer as well as a redactor. This overlooks that not all John’s accounts of Jesus’ words are brief (cf. John 3:3–21 ; 5:19–47 ; 6:26–58 ; 10:1–18 ). The “Upper Room” discourse covers three chapters ( John 14–16 ), rivaling the Sermon on the Mount of Matthew 5–7 in length. John 17 relates the longest prayer of Jesus.

On the other side, the Synoptics record brief statements of Christ. Matthew provides the pithy “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God, what is God’s” ( 22:21 ). Mark records, “Everything is possible for him who believes” ( 9:23 ), and Luke, “Man shall not live by bread alone” ( 4:4 ). Note such statements as Luke 18:27 ; 23:34 , 43 , 46 .

Why should brevity be a sign of inauthenticity? One could just as easily use this argument to conclude that Lincoln never gave the Gettysburg Address. Obviously there were times when Jesus spoke expansively and times when his words were crisp and succinct.



John shows careful attention to accuracy in Jesus' words. He distinguishes what Jesus said (which the disciples usually did not then understand) from what the disciples later came to understand what he had meant. Jesus said, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." John adds, "After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken" ( John 2:19 , 22 ; cf. 20:9 ). What Jesus actually said to John is distinguished from what the other disciples mistook him to say ( 21:22–23 ). Other Gospels make the same distinction (cf. Mark 3:30 ). So, the brevity of statements recorded in John is no sign that Jesus did not actually say these things.

*The "Verily, Verily" ("Amen, Amen") Statements Are Unique to John.* Again, it is supposed by critics that John's unique use of "Verily, verily" ( KJV ) in the mouth of Jesus indicates that Jesus never really used this form of emphasis ( John 1:51 ; 3:3 , 5 , 11 ; 5:19 , 24 , 25 ; 6:26 , 32 , 47 , 53 ; 8:34 , 51 , 58 ; 10:1 , 7 ; 12:24 ; 13:16 , 20 , 21 , 38 ; 14:12 ; 16:20 , 23 ; 21:18 ). This phrase is not used in the Synoptics, but "Verily, verily I say unto you" ( John 13:38 ) has parallels in "Verily I say unto you" ( Matt. 26:34 and Mark 14:30 ). The doubling may indicate emphasis (see Blomberg, 159). The NIV "I tell you the truth" and the NKJV "Most assuredly" capture the idea of emphasis in a single phrase.

There is no reason to suppose that Jesus did not speak that way on occasion. Jesus' discourses in John are generally at different times (early and late ministry) and in different places (Judea, rather than Galilee), and even to different people (e.g., the Samaritan woman would not have the same false political expectations of the Messiah as did the Jews— 4:25–26 (see Carson, 58). John gives more private conversations than do the Synoptics. John records Jesus' private discourse to Nicodemus (chap. 3 ), to the woman at the well (chap. 4 ), to the adulteress (chap. 8 ), and to the disciples (chaps. 13–16 ). During his ministry Jesus avoided making explicit public claims to be the Messiah. Yet he did not hesitate to do so in private ( 4:25–26 ) and before the high priest ( Mark 14:61–65 ). Jesus used speech appropriate to the occasion.

Some evangelical scholars suggest that John's doubling of *verily* (" *amen* ") was for homiletic reasons. Behind this view is the contention that the Gospel of John was composed as a sermon (cf. 20:30–31 ). Thus, D. A. Carson argues (46). Accordingly, Jesus may have actually said " *amen* ," but John doubled as a rhetorical device. While this is possible, it seems better to conclude that any doubling resulted from the writer's desire to express for a reader an emphasis that only a listener could have detected in the tone of Jesus' voice when he said it. Better yet, there is no reason why Jesus could not have actually said " *amen, amen* " on these occasions, just as John records. There are no parallel passages in the Synoptics that contradict this.

*There Are Vocabulary Differences in John.* Some 150 words of Jesus' mouth in John are not found in the other Gospels (Carson, 45). Many of these are so general that Jesus should have said them as part of his normal discourse, if he used them at all. This is offered as evidence that John created, not reported, what Jesus said.

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kjv King James Version  
niv New International Version  
nkjv New King James Version

Such an argument neglects to take into account that any good communicator uses words to fit the occasion. And since it is generally acknowledged that Jesus spoke in Aramaic, there is room for a different word choice in Greek by the recorder as translator. All of this brings up a point that applies to various arguments about the Gospels' quotations of Jesus. A discourse or dialogue may be reported verbatim or in a condensed version (Westcott, cxv–cxix). The style and purpose of reporting may vary. Carson notes, "At some point capturing the flavour of a discourse by including an array of verbatim phrases and quips may be important; at another, it may be far more strategic to zero in on the essential argument and outline it fairly, even if the language used is quite different from that of the original address" (46). Thus, many conservative scholars are willing to accept that not all Jesus' statements may be preserved *ipsissima verba* (in the exact words) but only *ipsissima vox* (with the same meaning).

Tense and other grammatical markers also influence word selection, as Carson points out. If the "historic present" is used relatively frequently in narrative, but infrequently in the discourses, the pattern has been shown to give no support to current source theories that attempt to assign these sections to different redactors (Carson, 45).

The argument against the authenticity of these statements is a form of the *petitio principii* fallacy, that is, begging the question. The only reason there is a problem is because these different modes of expression found in John are not taken into consideration in determining what constituted Jesus' style. But this begs the question by assuming that John's expressions are not part of the authentic way Jesus spoke.

*The Record and Order of Events Differ.* Another argument against the reliability of John's account is that the order of events is sometimes different. The vast majority of John 1–17 and 21 appears in none of the other Gospels, so relative sequence is not an issue.

John places the cleansing of the temple early in Jesus' ministry ( 2:13–22 ) but it is placed late in the Synoptics (cf. Mark 11:15–19 ). Jesus was fulfilling prophecy when he attacked the buying and selling in the Court of the Gentiles. He was making a vital point about extending the kingdom to the Gentile world. So it is entirely possible that Jesus did this object lesson twice, once near the beginning of his work, and after he arrived in the city for his final struggle. This is supported by differences in the accounts. John does not speak of the open hostility of the temple leadership, as does Mark, who intimates that this final cleansing reinforced their intention to kill him, "for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching" ( Mark 11:18 ). This antagonism from the authorities characterized Jesus' later ministry. That he used the same Old Testament text to rebuke them should be expected, since he was confronting them over the same sins (cf. Matt. 4:4 , 7 , 10 ).

None of the Gospels claim to be written in chronological sequence. Topical message, rather than sequence, orders the text. Within an overall chronology, if a pericope of the same event is placed in a different place, it may be serving a slightly different literary purpose. Matthew and Luke place the order of the three temptation events in a different order (cf. Matthew 4 and Luke 4 ). The argument that John's sequence shows that it is a late and unreliable record does not follow. It could be supplementary material or written with different themes in mind. Regardless

of sequence, the events that John shares with the Synoptics show considerable agreement in detail as noted by Blomberg (156–57):

In both, Jesus gives sight to the blind, raises the dead, and cures an official's son at a distance ( John 4:46b–54 ; Luke 7:1–10 par.).

In both, Jesus defies traditional Sabbath law interpretations ( John 9:6–7 ; Mark 8:23–25 ).

Both tell of Jesus refusing to work miracles simply to satisfy his opponents ( John 6:30–34 ; Mark 8:11–13 pars.).

Both report attempts to arrest Jesus that fail ( John 8:59 ; 10:39 ; Luke 4:29–30 ).

Both describe his friendship with Mary and Martha ( John 11:20 ; 12:2–3 ; Luke 10:38–42 ).

In both, he is accused of demon possession ( John 10:19–21 ; Mark 3:22 ).

In both, John the Baptist is the voice crying in the wilderness of Isaiah 40:3 and the forerunner of the Messiah ( John 1:23 / Mark 1:2–3 pars.).

John's baptism with water is contrasted with the Messiah's coming baptism with the Spirit ( John 1:26–27 , 33 / Mark 1:7–7 pars.).

The Spirit anoints Jesus, as testified by the Baptist ( John 1:32 / Mark 1:10 pars.).

The five thousand are fed ( John 6:1–15 / Mark 6:32–33 pars.).

Jesus walks on the water ( John 6:16–21 / Mark 6:45–52 ).

Gerhard Maier lists additional similarities between John and Matthew (cited in Blomberg, 159). This is particularly interesting since Matthew is usually viewed as the least similar to John by the critics.

Both use Old Testament quotations and announce their fulfillment.

Both record frequency, extent, location, and instructional nature of extended sermons of Jesus.

Both share elaborate farewell speeches (the Upper Room and Olivet Discourses).

Both emphasize the private instruction of the disciples.

Both cite an evangelistic purpose, with the Gospel being offered "first to the Jew and then to all the Gentiles."

*John Has a Late Christology.* An often-stated reason for rejecting John's accuracy in reporting Jesus' words is its supposed "late" and "highly developed" Christology, which stressed

his full deity (for example, in John 1:1 ; 8:58 ; 10:30 ; 20:29 ). This objection is based on an unjustified dialectical view of doctrinal development. Critics, following F. C. Baur, read a Hegelian ( *see* HEGEL, G. W. F. ) developmental view into the Gospel record (Corduan, 90–92). They begin with the view that John must have been late, since his views were a synthesis of the earlier conflict between the thesis of Peter and the antithesis of Paul. But this thesis-antithesis view is itself indefensible.

Mark (held by most of these same critics to be the earliest Gospel) has deity claims by and about Christ. For example, when Jesus claimed to forgive sins the Pharisees saw this as a claim of deity and responded, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ( Mark 2:7 ). And when Jesus was asked under oath whether he was the Messiah (whom the Old Testament said would be God— Ps. 45:8 ; Isa. 9:6 ; Zech. 12:10 ), Jesus responded clearly: "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" ( Mark 14:62 ). The reply clearly acknowledges his claim to be God, and the Sanhedrin used it to condemn Jesus of "blasphemy" (vs. 64 ). Outside the Gospels, Paul's Roman epistle (ca. 56), which is believed by many to be earlier than the Gospels, has a strong description of Christ's deity, proclaiming him "God over all" ( Rom. 9:5 ).

Many of Jesus' strongest deity claims come in the context in which he is challenged or confronted by the crowd. While this applies to both John and the Synoptic Gospels (cf. Mark 2:7–10 ; 14:61–62 ; John 10:24 , 30–33 ), John emphasizes the antagonism of "the Jews" (see John 5:16 , 18 ; 7:1 ; 10:31 ). It is understandable that he would pay special attention to the clear claims to deity.

It was not the primary purpose of the Synoptics to stress the deity of Christ. Matthew's Jewish emphasis was on the long-awaited Messiah. Mark stressed Jesus as a Servant ( Mark 10:45 ). Luke stressed Jesus' humanity. John's express purpose was to show that Jesus was God incarnate ( 1:1 , 14 ; 20:31 ). It is no surprise that there are more claims to deity in his Gospel. At the very climax of his Gospel John reports that Thomas declared Christ's deity, proclaiming him as "My Lord and My God" ( 20:28 ). If this is not accurate, then John is misrepresenting the central point of his book, that Jesus' miracles led his disciples to recognize his true identity as God (see 20:28–31 ).

**Conclusion.** Arguments against the authenticity of the sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel seem to be based more on *a priori* philosophical grounds than on actual historical and textual evidence. There are reasonable explanations for differences based on where, when, to whom, and under what circumstances Jesus spoke. Most of these are accounted for on the reasonable premise that John wrote a later and consciously supplementary Gospel. He deliberately avoids repeating what the other Gospels have said unless it is really important to the theme. As seen in the areas of overlap, the parallels of John to the Synoptic Gospels are substantial.

There is no real evidence in any of these cases that John is creating, rather than reporting, what Jesus said. To the contrary, John's account is so fresh, vivid, private, detailed, and personal that it manifests an intimate, first-hand witness by the one writing it. There is reason to believe that John preserved the original words of Jesus or the same meaning, if not the exact words.

The reasons for accepting the authenticity of John's Gospel are as good or better than those supporting the Synoptics. All can be accepted in good conscience as historical. Matthew and Mark parallel Luke, and Luke discusses its own historiographical method and accuracy ( *see* ACTS, HISTORICITY OF ):

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. [ Luke 1:1–4 ]

If Matthew and Mark tell substantially the same story as Luke, then they are just as historically reliable as Luke. And if John's parallel material does not deviate in substance from the Synoptics, the burden of proof is on the critics to show solid reasons why his testimony should not be taken as historically reliable ( *see* NEW TESTAMENT, HISTORICITY OF ).

John's differences in language use from the Synoptics can be explained largely by location (Judean), date (early and late ministry), and nature (many private conversations). The "I am" claims can be understood as shorter, simpler statements Jesus made to those who did not at first understand him. Indeed, the fact that John's account is so intimate, fresh, and detailed argues strongly for its authenticity.

John's link in the apologetic argument is one of the strongest in the chain. Indeed, it is the only Gospel that claims to be written by an eyewitness apostle ( John 21:24–25 ). Carson concludes: "It is altogether plausible that Jesus sometimes spoke in nothing less than what we think of as 'Johannine' style, and that John's style was to some degree influenced by Jesus himself. When all the evidence is taken together, it is not hard to believe that when we listen to the voice of the Evangelist in his description of what Jesus said, we are listening to the voice of Jesus himself" (Carson, 48).

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**Josephus.** *See* FLAVIUS JOSEPHUS .

**Joshua's Long Day.** *See* SCIENCE AND THE BIBLE .

**Judaism.** *See* BIBLE, EVIDENCE FOR ; CHRIST, DEITY OF ; CHRIST, MIRACLES OF ; TRINITY ; PROPHECY, AS PROOF OF BIBLE .

**Justin Martyr.** Justin Martyr (100[?]-164) was one of the early-second-century Christian apologists ( *see* CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS ). He was born of pagan parents in Samaria. He embraced Christianity in 130. Later, he taught at Ephesus, where he engaged in, and wrote, *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew* (ca. 130). Eventually, he opened a Christian school in Rome. There he wrote his *First Apology* (ca. 155). *Second Apology* (ca. 161) was addressed to the Roman Senate. His emphasis on Greek philosophy and reason has led some to wrongly conclude that he was a rationalist. Like other early church fathers, Justin believed in the inspiration and divine authority of Scripture.

**Alleged Rationalism.** Cited as evidence of his alleged rationalism is Justin's statement that even Greeks who "lived a reasonable and earnest life" knew Christ the Logos (2.8). He went so far as to say that Christ "is the Word of whom every race of men were partakers; and those who lived reasonably (*meta logou*) are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists" (1.46).

**The Role of Reason.** These citations notwithstanding, it is unwarranted to conclude that Justin believed that pagans could be philosophized into the kingdom. His critics misunderstand a subtle view of faith and reason.

Justin stated emphatically that his faith was in Christ, not Socrates; it was in Christianity, not philosophy. He wrote: "And the right Reason [Christ], when He came, proved that not all opinions nor all doctrines are good, but that some are evil, while others are good" (ibid., 2.9). Justin believed Christianity superior to Greek philosophy, declaring, "Our doctrines, then appear to be greater than all human teaching. . . . For whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well, they elaborated by finding and contemplating some part of the Word. But since they did not know the whole Word, which is Christ, they often contradicted themselves" (ibid., 2.10). Christian teachings "are more lofty than all human philosophy" (ibid., 2.15). Justin stated that no one trusted in Socrates enough to die for him, as they did for the teachings and presence of Christ (ibid., 2.10).

Like many other early Fathers, Justin believed that what truth there was in Greek philosophy was borrowed from divine revelation of Hebrew Scripture (ibid., 1.60). At best, Greek philosophy had only partial and dim truth, but Christianity had truth completely and clearly. Hence, “whatever things were rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians” (ibid., 2.13).

**View of Resurrection.** Since Justin was so close in time to the apostles and since the resurrection is so crucial to Christianity, his view of the resurrection is of more than passing interest ( *see* RESURRECTION, EVIDENCE OF ).

**Resurrection Is Possible.** Against those who denied the resurrection, Justin confronted those who said they were believers yet thought it impossible that God could raise the dead. God, he said, had demonstrated his power in creating the first man, “for he was made from the earth by God. . . . But now we are demonstrating that the resurrection of the flesh is possible” (in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* , 1.294–99). Justin declares, “Let the unbelieving be silent, even though they themselves do not believe. But, in truth, He has even called the flesh to the resurrection, and promises to it everlasting life. For where he promises to save man, there He gives the promise to the flesh” (Justin., chap. 8).

**A Physical Resurrection** (*see* RESURRECTION, PHYSICAL NATURE OF ). Justin admitted that there were those who maintained that Jesus had appeared only in a spiritual, with only the appearance of flesh. Such people robbed Christians of a great promise (ibid., chap. 2). “If the resurrection were only spiritual, it was requisite that He, in raising the dead, should show the body lying apart by itself, and the soul living apart by itself. But now He did not do so, but raised the body, confirming in it the promise of life.” Otherwise, why did Christ rise in the body in which he had been crucified and let the disciples handle his body when they doubted? “And they were by every kind of proof persuaded that it was Himself, and in the body, they asked Him to eat with them, that they might thus still more accurately ascertain that He had in verity risen bodily” (Justin, chap. 9). Justin Martyr observed that Jesus also proved the possibility of flesh ascending to heaven, showing that the dwelling place of the physical resurrection body of Christians is in heaven.

“The resurrection is a resurrection of the flesh which died. For the spirit dies not; the soul is in the body, and without a soul it cannot live” (ibid., chap. 10).

**Conclusion.** The first apologists, like Justin, were not as systematic as such later apologists as Thomas Aquinas. Nevertheless, Justin was far from a rationalist in his use of reason. He believed firmly in the superiority and necessity of divine revelation. However, there is no doubt that Justin, like classical apologists after him, used reason to explain and defend the Christian faith ( *see* CLASSICAL APOLOGETICS ).

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