

ZONDERVAN
Charts

CHARTS OF

APOLOGETICS
AND
CHRISTIAN EVIDENCES

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Introduction to the Jesus Seminar

Proponents	<p>Fellows of the Jesus Seminar come from various academic, professional, and religious backgrounds that include Protestants, Jews, Catholics, atheists, professors, one pastor, some unidentified, and a film maker. Among the approximately 70 scholars and laypersons that comprise this group, several influential members have emerged in the public awareness. These include Robert W. Funk (co-chair), John Dominic Crossan (co-chair), Marcus Borg (Oregon State University), and Paul Verhoeven (film producer).</p>	
Founding	<p>The Jesus Seminar was initially founded in the early 1980s by the editorial board (Robert W. Funk, John Dominic Crossan, Burton Mack, and Robert Tannehill) of <i>Foundations & Facets</i>, a series published by Fortress Press. Currently the Seminar operates under the auspices of the Westar Institute based in Sonoma, California, and is sponsored by Polebridge Press. The institute functions as a theological think-tank which publishes its own research in <i>Foundations & Facets Forum</i>.</p>	
Purpose and Publications	<p>The fellows of the Jesus Seminar meet annually to make pronouncements regarding their various research projects. The primary aim is the "conception and execution of research and publication projects connected with the Jesus tradition. ... In connection with this work, the JESUS SEMINAR will create new instruments and tools and explore new and modified methodologies." One recent project evaluated 1,500 sayings of Christ in the Gospels and published the conclusions in <i>The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?</i> Other publications include Borg, <i>Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship</i>; Funk, <i>Honest to Jesus</i>; and Crossan, <i>The Essential Jesus</i>; <i>The Historical Jesus</i>.</p>	
Approach to Biblical Studies	<p>The Jesus Seminar rejects the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The inerrancy of the Bible • The deity of Christ • The miracles recorded in Scripture • The guilty until proven innocent model • The relatedness of religious faith and history 	<p>The Jesus Seminar accepts the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative critical scholarship • Jesus as Galilean sage, revolutionary, or peasant • Anti-supernaturalism • Historical skepticism and revisionism historians use to evaluate ancient literature • The bifurcation of faith and history
Philosophical Assumptions	<p>First is the acceptance of anti-supernaturalism, or the rejection of miracles. Scientific discoveries of Charles Darwin and Galileo require that scholars understand the universe as "secular" rather than conforming to the dogmatic pronouncements of earlier church creeds and councils. That is, the real Jesus will be discovered through historical investigation rather than through theological formulas. Faith and reason are viewed as separate domains which are mutually exclusive. The supernatural reflects the domain of faith; science is the domain of reason.</p>	
Methodological Assumptions	<p>"Seven Pillars of Scholarly Wisdom" guide the methodology while researching the sayings of Jesus.¹ These include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Distinguishing between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of Faith"; 2. The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are closer to the historical Jesus than is the gospel of John; 3. Mark was the first gospel to be written and serves as the basis for both Matthew and Luke; 4. The hypothetical source Q (<i>Quelle</i>) is given as the explanation for the common material found in Matthew and Luke but not found in Mark; 5. The liberation of the non-eschatological Jesus from the eschatological Jesus of Albert Schweitzer; 6. The distinction between Jesus' oral culture and our modern print culture, implying that authentic Jesus sayings are short, memorable, provocative sentences and stories; 7. The burden of proof is upon those who declare the Gospels to be historical since they are now assumed to be embellished by myth. 	
View of Jesus	<p>Jesus is viewed in two distinct ways: first, there is the "Jesus of history," the one who critical scholars are searching for and who is unlike the gospel portrayal of him as a supernatural divine figure that raises the councils foisted upon Jesus mythical embellishments that wrongfully elevated him to divine status. Second, the "Christ of faith" is described as the Jesus who is worshiped as God in many churches today. According to the Seminar, this Jesus is not an accurate representation of the "real" Jesus of history. Jesus, in some sense, needs to be liberated "from the scriptural and creedal and experiential prisons" in which he has been kept.²</p>	

¹ Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover et al., *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 2-5.
² Ibid.

Evaluation of the Jesus Seminar

Category	Critical Evaluation
Proponents	First, the Jesus Seminar's claim that it offers a "scholarly consensus" on their projects as a result of approximately 70 scholars is misleading, since over half of the 6,900 members of the Society of Biblical Literature and thousands of others who have scholarly training were not involved in Seminar research. Second, though there were a few members from Canada and South Africa, the Seminar is mostly composed of North American scholarship. The absence of British and conservative participation in the studies precluded facing any challenging peer review. Third, most of the members did not hold a distinguished academic position and were considered the more "radical" proponents in Jesus scholarship. Also, most major universities, seminaries, and graduate schools were not represented.
Founding	During the initial founding, those connected with the original <i>Foundations & Facets</i> publication were invited to become charter fellows of the Seminar. Their ranks quickly swelled to about 200 before shrinking to about 70 in the early 1990s. When the nature, scope, and methodology of their work became clear, several fellows quit the project.
Purpose and Publications	The general aim and conclusions of the group have come under considerable criticism due to the unusual nature of their "new" methods and tools. Despite these criticisms, Seminar publications continue to be widely read, not necessarily because of new evidence, but because of novel approach leading to unorthodox conclusions.
Approach to Biblical Studies	The Seminar's approach to biblical studies appears to be symptomatic of its reliance on Enlightenment ideas that seek to elevate human reason as the final and paramount criterion for truth and its uncritical acceptance of the Enlightenment's anti-supernaturalism. The bifurcation between religious faith and history has created a chasm that has separated facts from values, when in fact the two domains are inextricably linked. For the Christian, the importance of history's link to faith holds a prominent role, since to deny the historical nature of crucial events such as the crucifixion and resurrection is essentially to deny the spiritual significance and effect—Christianity cannot be real without the historical events. It is also problematic to separate facts and values on a social/moral level, since moral and immoral actions extend to historical events/facts (e.g., murder). And though there can be a distinction between the two domains, it appears problematic to posit a radical dichotomy.
Philosophical Assumptions	Most prominent among the Seminar's philosophical assumptions is the insistence that modern scientific discoveries have dismantled the supernatural worldview of times past. There are several problems with eliminating miracles in favor of scientism. First, if science is the test for truth and rationality, certain realities such as the laws of logic, values, freedom, and virtue would be considered obsolete and anachronistic, since they do not fit within the confines of scientific observable testability. Second, science relies on certain principles to engage in the scientific endeavor—such as honesty, nobility, and knowledge—which themselves cannot be tested by science. Third, the laws of nature are no longer assumed to be fixed in unalterable rigid patterns; rather, they can be described as flexible descriptions of how the universe <i>generally</i> operates and not how it <i>necessarily</i> operates. Finally, whatever occurs in the natural world can have a supernatural source beyond the world.

Evaluation of the Jesus Seminar (continued)

Category	Critical Evaluation
Methodological Assumptions	<p>The Seven Pillars of Scholarly Wisdom pose several problems:</p> <p>(1) This separation unnecessarily detaches Jesus from the realm of fact (history); hence, any Jesus that is discovered with faith characteristics is automatically eliminated from consideration. (2) To eliminate the gospel of John due to its portrayal of Jesus as "spiritual" is unfounded and necessarily excludes, prior to evaluating the evidence, any Jesus that is nonsecular. Further, secondary differences do not determine historicity. (3) It is possible that Mark serves as a source for Matthew and Luke. (4) Q may not exist; dissimilarity can be accounted for in other ways due to diversity of theological purpose and audience. (5) This pillar was established in the 1970s and '80s prior to any review of the evidence and deliberations concerning the sayings of Christ. Antisupernatural bias limits their view of an eschatological Jesus. (6) This pillar wrongfully assumes that 1st-century culture was not able to preserve large quantities of material from memory, when in fact just the opposite is the case. (7) Historians have long held that ancient documents are presumed innocent until proven guilty by statements contrary to fact or internal contradictions.</p>
View of Jesus	<p>It appears that the Seminar initiated its research with the assumption that the historical Jesus ought to be separated from the Jesus worshiped by faith. However, how can one come to this conclusion before the research has been conducted? The Christological bifurcation at the outset of the study necessarily ensures that the only kind of Jesus that will be discovered is a finite, natural, and fallible man denuded of any divine attributes and completely detached from the realm of fact. As such, it is not difficult to understand how the Jesus Seminar determined that 82% of the gospel sayings of Jesus are inauthentic.</p>

Response based on Joseph M. Holden, *An Examination and Evaluation of the Jesus Seminar* (unpublished master's thesis, 1997), Southern Evangelical Seminary.

Jesus Seminar and the Bible

Jesus Seminar	Orthodox Christianity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Post</i>-Enlightenment view of the Bible. • Bible is a <i>natural</i> book. • Investigation <i>determines</i> revelation. • Bible is mythically embellished. • Bible is guilty until proven innocent. • Rejects what the Bible says about itself. • Biblical miracles do not occur and are considered violations of the laws of nature. • Gospels are separated from history. • Bible has been redacted (meaning changed). • Synoptic Gospels written AD 70–90. • <i>Man</i> is the efficient and instrumental cause of the Bible. • If the Bible is inspired, the interpreter must be inspired. • If inerrancy was true, we would have the originals. • Reject New Testament reliability because of the great span of time between Christ's death and the writing of the Synoptic Gospels after AD 70. • The Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) are closer to the historical Jesus than the gospel of John. • Similarities in the words used prove the gospel writers were dependent on a common source. • Gospel of Thomas is an early Christian document. • Q (<i>quelle</i> = source) is a source to help explain the content and similarities common to Matthew and Luke which are not found in Mark. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pre</i>-Enlightenment view of the Bible. • Bible is a <i>supernatural</i> revelation. • Investigation <i>discovers</i> revelation. • Bible is historical. • Bible is innocent until proven guilty. • Accepts what the Bible says about itself. • Biblical miracles are real and are exceptions to the laws of nature. • Gospels are based in history. • Bible has been edited (no change of meaning). • Synoptic Gospels written AD 45–68. • <i>God</i> is the efficient cause and <i>man</i> is the instrumental cause of the Bible. • Can have fallible interpretation of a divinely inspired revelation. • Inerrancy is possible without the originals since we have good copies. • Accept New Testament reliability because of the close proximity of time from the death of Christ to the writing of the Synoptic Gospels in the mid-1st century. • All the Gospels accurately reflect Jesus. • Thematic similarities are expected when writers are reporting the same events. • Gospel of Thomas is a Gnostic document. • Q (<i>quelle</i> = source) is a questionable source. It is not necessary to explain the composition of the Gospels. Similarities can be accounted for due to reporting the same events. Differences are due to each writer's unique theological purpose.