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# Editorials

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## NEW JESUS NOVELS ARE NEITHER NEW NOR NOVEL

Solomon said, “there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:9), and the Apostle Paul predicted that people would “turn their ears away from the truth and be turned aside to fables” (2 Timothy 4:4). Fables are myths and fiction.

Solomon’s statement applies to Satan’s lies and to novels written about Jesus that turn the Bible on its head, redefining and reshaping Jesus into someone who bears no resemblance to the Jesus of the Gospels.

The so-called “Jesus Quest” has added to the confusion. The Gospels are ignored or twisted to create a range of fictional Jesuses: an itinerant cynic philosopher, eschatological prophet, a man of social change, a sage with great wisdom, or a marginal Jew. These books present every kind of Jesus but the biblical one. There is no other true Jesus but the one found in the Gospels.

As early as 1835, German cynic David Friedrich Strauss suggested that the Gospels were myths and then created his own Jesus — devoid of miracles and deity — in his book, *Life of Jesus*. Strauss, a pantheist and Darwinist, was booted out of his seminary. (See the entry for Strauss in Elgin S. Moyer’s *Who Was Who in Christian History*.)

*The Da Vinci Code* created a Jesus who is not divine, but a person imbued with the idea of divinity by misguided Church councils that got the vote wrong.

Deepak Chopra has come up with what he calls the “Third Jesus.” This is a Jesus made in the image and likeness of Chopra — a mongrelized, Buddhist Christ.

Anne Rice, author of several famous vampire novels, has joined the “let’s create a Jesus” movement with her two novels about Jesus in which she tries to fill in some of the gaps in Jesus’ early life with both Gnostic and fictional accounts. According to the *Christian News*:

“The content of these novels is taken from apocryphal writings like the Gospel of Thomas as well as her own imagination. She conjures up things Jesus said to his parents, things he felt and events in his life that are not given to us in the Bible. In the first novel, *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*, she depicts Jesus as a 7-year-old boy who gets the things he wishes for, like the death of another young boy who annoys him. No Christian would commend anything Rice has ever written. Her earlier works were a glorification of evil themes. Her novels on the life of Jesus violate the strict commands of the Bible not to add to or take away from the Word of God. And finally, her spiritual biography tells of her return to cafeteria Catholicism where she picks and chooses which parts of the Catholic faith she will accept. For

(continues on page 21)

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instance, she still condones homosexuality and gay marriage" ("Vampire Author's Fictionalized Jesus Promoted by James Dobson," *Christian News*, Nov. 17, 2008, pg. 3).

More recently, the novel *The Shack* presented a Jesus who is a middle-aged, presumably Jewish, carpenter. God the Father takes on physical form as a woman, even though God is Spirit, according to John 4:24. It is fanciful and wrong. Some say, "Oh, it's only a novel." And while that may be true, it is a novel that can teach untaught people *something* — and that something is misleading and wrong. It is also another example of wittingly or unwittingly adding to the Scriptures.

All of this fiction suggests strongly that the eyewitnesses in the Gospels had nothing substantial to offer us and that the picture of Jesus presented by people who walked with Him and talked with Him is not all that urgent, compelling, or important. So current authors go ahead and make things up about Jesus.

Distorted presentations of Jesus have been around since the days of the early Church. The Gnostics did it in the third and fourth centuries A.D. The *Protoevangelium of James*, which began being distributed around A.D. 200, contains in its 12 pages bizarre legends about the infancy of Jesus. Its publication date rules out authorship by James, the brother of Christ. Furthermore, it was rejected by Jerome, an early Church leader, and a number of popes. It is sometimes referred to as part of the *Pseudepigrapha*, or false writings. However, over time, the Roman Catholic Church began to give it faint recognition and its legends were taught in some Catholic schools.

In this brief novel, the parents of Mary are identified as Joachim and Anna. These names have become enshrined as fact in the Crusader Church at the Bethesda pool in the Old City of Jerusalem. In the story, Mary, at age 16, becomes pregnant with Jesus. Mary then gives birth *outside* of Bethlehem in a desert cave. Whoever wrote it was unaware of the geography of Bethlehem and depicted the outskirts of Bethlehem as desert. Bethlehem's environs are lush grazing fields and rich olive groves. The legend also asserts that Joseph had not been there for the birth of Jesus, but was somewhere in the area looking for a midwife. The midwife, Salome, expresses doubt that a virgin could conceive and is stricken with a skin condition on one of her hands. An angel tells Salome that if she touches the child, she will be healed and when she does touch the infant Jesus, she is.

There is also *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, a sixth-century work that purports to be an account of miracles performed throughout Jesus' boyhood. (See *The Other Gospels, Non Canonical Texts* by Ron Cameron.) *The Infancy Gospel* is written in Syriac, which is akin to Aramaic.

We know that no miracles took place during the infancy or boyhood of Jesus. The first miracle took place at the wedding feast at Cana, as recorded in John chapter 2, when He was about 30 years old. John wrote that after the water was turned into wine, "This *beginning* of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory" (John 2:11, emphasis added).

If Jesus had been doing miracles prior to Cana, John would not have written that He started to do them in Cana. His boyhood in Nazareth was uneventful, according to Luke 2:51-52. Luke wrote that Jesus and His family went to Nazareth and that Jesus was subject to His parents as He "increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man." This indicates a normal Jewish childhood and upbringing.

As well, in support of John 2, Luke 4:16-20, where Jesus mentions the dawning of the Messianic age, strongly implies that Jesus' Messianic miracles had their inauguration at the start of His public ministry and not before. The people of Nazareth did not know Him as a miracle worker, but only as "Joseph's son" (Luke 4:22). The simple son of a carpenter could not be taken seriously. They had known Him as an ordinary child and were so offended at His claims of Messiahship that they sought to throw Him from a cliff.

So we see that people in Nazareth never saw anything different about Jesus and simply knew Him as "Joseph's son." If there was anything different or sensational or miraculous about Him, they would have said so. To them He was just a carpenter's offspring.

No doubt more books will be published that purport to portray Jesus in a new or different light. Perhaps one could apply Matthew 24:23 to this troubling trend: "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it."

There is nothing new under the sun and when one turns from the truth, all that is left is fiction, fables, and myths. We have one dependable, unchanging source for all we need to know about Jesus. It is rich, full, and inexhaustible. It has sustained believers through 20 centuries of heresy and confusion. No one can improve on the New Testament's eyewitness accounts. We stake our lives and our eternity on them.

—GRF

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## NEWS UPDATES

(continued from page 3)

once enjoyed has devolved into infamy, tragedy, and financial straits.

In August 2007, the Whites announced that their 18-year marriage was ending. And then just a few months later, they were one of six religious ministries targeted by the Senate Finance Committee headed by