

The Easter Prayer of an American HinJew: More Sugar, Please  
Anna Monday with Jon Monday

PART 1



Last Seder

Sri Ramakrishna observed that the scriptures are a mixture of sugar and sand and that it is, moreover, up to us to discriminate, to take the sugar and leave the sand. Often, identifying the sand is easy because it's just so boring, but sometimes it harbors unhelpful or even harmful notions—outmoded social mores, refuted pseudo-science, quack medicine. It can also harbor toxic ideas. The particular sand that concerns me here is the historically questionable narrative of Jesus's death, which has been digested and weaponized against Jews in Western society. It has, unfortunately, also made its way into Vedanta culture and is sometimes rehashed in Easter lectures at Vedanta Societies.

Understandably, the Easter lecture is a staple for most Vedanta Centers in America. After all, American culture is predominantly Christian; and hereditary Christians are warmed by an Easter observance. Most Western Vedantists come from either a Christian or Jewish family. Why have we chosen to either replace or supplement our family religions with Vedanta? I can only speak for myself: it is the wealth of holy company, people who have walked the walk to the spiritually-desired destination and radiate Divinity. The association has given me an insight into and appreciation of my own native Judaism. Christian/Vedantist interreligious scholar Huston Smith, in his interview with Bill Moyers, has eloquently described his own merger of faiths and his appetite for Vedanta. On Christmas Eve, he would go to his Methodist church service with his family but later would go to the Vedanta Society of St. Louis to hear Swami Satprakashananda's Christmas talk because, as he said, it fed his soul and revealed Christianity to him in a way he didn't receive in church. *[Watch the 4 minute clip here in which Smith eloquently describes his dual role of Christian and Vedantist and the Christmas service: <http://www.vedantawritings.com/HinJew.htm> ]*

I also salute the Vedanta Easter lecturers for leaving the comfort zone of Vedanta and delving into Christianity. Sometimes, the lecturing Swami draws out the sugar, capturing the essence of Jesus's personality in a positive way we can all appreciate; but sometimes, a recitation of traditional and unnecessary Jew-blaming makes its way onto the platform in the Easter story, seemingly as filler for want of more constructive material.

Here is an example of typical Western anti-Semitism prevalent in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when Vedanta came West. I believe it was accepted at face value as conventional wisdom from one of many trusted and respected Western, Christian-born Vedantists. Here is Judaism explained by Swami Atulananda, AKA Gurudas Maharaj:

December 16, 1958<sup>1</sup>

Gurudas Maharaj: Christ was crucified. But Pilate was not particularly responsible for it. Rather, he tried his utmost to save Jesus. Pilate's position was precarious. He had to keep the people under control or else he would be blamed by the Emperor. The people might revolt. He tried thrice. But the Jews would not hear him. The Jews said, "Oh, he says he is King of the Jews. It is sedition." The Jews thought that Christ had declared himself to be the king of a material kingdom. At the last moment, Pilate tried to save Jesus. One prisoner had to be released on that sacred day. There was a murderer, and Jesus, too. But the Jews preferred that the rogue be spared. So what could Pilate do? He yielded to the demand of the Jews.

The Jews didn't listen to the words of the Lord, so they had to pay the penalty. They have had no home, all these centuries, and have been driven away from everywhere. As a community they are well-knit. They are very strict observers of their own customs and rituals. The whole world observes Sunday as the day for prayers and rest.<sup>2</sup> But the Jews still cling to Saturday as their Sabbath day. In Christian churches men worship bareheaded; but in synagogues Jews keep their heads covered. Everything opposite—something like the Mohammedans doing just the opposite of what the Hindus do...

*Atman Alone Abides*<sup>3</sup>

Fundamentally, this excerpt illustrates that the centuries-old cultural implications generating anti-Semitism went blithely unnoticed in the East, where the book was published, or by the editor, a Westerner of that same generation. After all, this is a Western-based drama complete with its own subtle innuendo—codes and dog whistles, so that even fragmentary allusions carry with them volumes of history. I'm sure the inverse is also true; there's a lot we Westerners don't know about Indian cultural sensitivities. But in regard to just letting this statement speak for itself, it must be pointed out that in order to not offend the reader, the publishers frequently footnote and correct Swami Atulananda when he becomes too adamantly non-dualistic or when they feel he's misinterpreted a Vedanta scripture or gotten something wrong. These footnotes are in addition to the editor's footnotes,<sup>4</sup> but neither the editor, a Yankee, nor publisher saw a need to mitigate the above passage or similar statements or, better yet, leave it out entirely. After all, the mission of the book was not to chronicle absolutely every word Gurudas spoke. Unfortunately, Gurudas Maharaj is not the only, or even the most revered, Vedanta luminary to express versions of these ideas.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This was just seven years before Vatican II. Gurudas (born in 1870) was a very old man in 1958, his cultural attitudes having been formed by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when he met many of the pioneering monastic disciples of Sri Ramakrishna on their ventures West.

<sup>2</sup> Only Christians celebrate the Sabbath on Sunday. Islam has no Sabbath per se, but Friday is a holy day of prayer, overlapping with the Jewish Sabbath, which begins Friday at sundown.

<sup>3</sup> Sri Ramakrishna Math Madras, *Atman Alone Abides*, 47-48

<sup>4</sup> Here is one such footnote: On page 130, in response to his speculation "Swamiji may have met Catholic priests, come to know their doctrine, and introduced some of these ideas into the customs of our order," the publisher replies in a footnote: "Not necessarily. The Buddhists had a corresponding doctrine in the Trikaya conception of the Buddha—*Publisher*." Or another on page 151 in response to why Swamiji flaunted convention in America: "These explanations are very clever and original. But they are the speaker's own; others may have other and different explanations—*Publisher*."

<sup>5</sup> On a personal note, Gurudas was a hero figure for us, particularly in Northern California, where his pioneering work helping to establish that spiritual powerhouse, Shanti Ashrama, made him an object of wonder. He was the first Western sanyassin to complete his life as a monk. I was so discouraged to see the things he had said (this was not the only instance of anti-Semitism in the book). But heroes are products of their time and place and therefore often come with unwanted baggage. We

In the hopes of avoiding the further enshrining of these opinions in Vedanta culture. I aim to question the credibility of the Passion mythology and its intellectual offsprings: Jewish Deicide—that the Jews, not the Romans, killed Christ; and certain denigrating Supersessionist ideas—that Judaism is a religion of Law which was superseded, and obviated, by Jesus' religion of Love and that Jews are responsible for their own history of oppression because they did/do not accept Jesus as their Savior, i.e. to boil it down to its ultimate conclusion, that Judaism is an incomplete religion that has no right to exist separate from Christianity. These ideas appear not only at Easter but sometimes beyond and in our literature, often when Christianity is being discussed. I argue that the Gospels are flimsy historical evidence because

- They were not written as history, rather as allegory to evangelize.
- They were not written by eyewitnesses or associates of Jesus, rather quite a while later.
- Distortions of scripture, many of them intentional, took place in the course of multiple translations and editions to accommodate theology.
- And that Christian Supersessionism is mere opinion which can neither be proved nor disproved but which, in order to be entertained should be grounded in a deep study and understanding of both religions.

### **The Right of Religions to Define Themselves Rather than Being Defined by Outsiders**

I appreciate that when one describes another religion one wants to understand and accept that religion's own concept of itself. When this self-definition is disregarded, distortions arise. An example of a typical distortion many of us have encountered is the conventional wisdom, quite prevalent in even academia and sophisticated publications, that Hinduism is a polytheistic religion. If these intellectuals were to place the question to a practitioner of Vedanta, they might be set straight. However, they instead consult one another. And, Lord, the explanations of Kali worship! However, I believe that in taking Christianity at face value, too many in Vedanta culture have accepted the Christian view of Judaism as an integral part of the package. This is entirely unfair. At the 1893 Parliament of Religions, Rabbi Joseph Silverman addressed the topic *Popular Errors about the Jews* saying, "If one were to attempt to analyze the character of the Jew on the basis of what has been said about him in history, in fiction, or other forms of literature...he would find himself confused and baffled..."<sup>6</sup>

As James Carroll<sup>7</sup> writes, "...the New Testament records a polemical dispute—or rather, one side of a polemical dispute—between 'Christians' and 'Jews'..."<sup>8</sup> and later, "Largely because we are heirs to a Roman imperial culture that controlled the writing of history, we are inclined to read Rome's story through rose-colored lenses."<sup>9</sup> That the Roman Empire and the Church were both headquartered in Rome is no accident. Roman Emperor Constantine merged the early church and Imperial Rome in the 4<sup>th</sup> century.

Allowing a religion to define itself is not the same as presenting that religion's beliefs as a fact. In discussing Christianity, it is one thing to say "Literalist Christians believe the Earth is roughly 6,000 years old" and quite another to state flatly "The Earth is 6,000 years old." Vedanta is in no way obligated to indiscriminately convey every Christian belief when discussing a Christian theme.

One of Vedanta's most attractive features is its reverence for truth, which is synonymous with God. Truth supercedes dogma; questioning is encouraged; blind acceptance of mythology is not required. If the mythology of

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attempt to extract the sugar, and try not to fall into the sand trap. Stephen Greenblatt wrote a terrific article [Shakespeare's Cure for Xenophobia - What "The Merchant of Venice" taught me about ethnic hatred and the literary imagination](#) describing the hurdle any minority has to overcome in approaching history. It is also an important part of growing up to not need your heroes to be perfect, rather to recognize they are human.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. John Henry Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions, Volume II*, 1120

<sup>7</sup> James Carroll is an acclaimed writer, journalist, and former Paulist Priest. I've leaned heavily but not exclusively on his book *Constantine's Sword*. A short video of Carroll introducing his book to an inter-religious group on CSPAN's Book TV can be found here: <http://www.vedantawritings.com/HinJew.htm>. In the early 2000s, I wrote to Swami Prabhananda in India about the problems set down in this paper and mentioned the book. He wrote back that Swami Ranganathanada, then president of the order, had read that book and recommended it to others.

<sup>8</sup> James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword*, 69

<sup>9</sup> Ibid 79

the Jewish Deicide were demonstrably, or even probably, true, I'd say let the chips fall where they may. But since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christian scholars, who are practicing, believing Christians, have long questioned the veracity of the texts in their entirety and have devoted their careers to determining what was truly said or done by Jesus and what was added by lesser authorities. They separate the sugar and the sand.

## PART 2

### The History of the Historians

Before discussing the Gospels in depth, we should define the scriptures involved. Christian factions themselves are not in complete agreement on what writings should comprise the New Testament. However, the four canonical gospels, consisting of the three synoptic<sup>10</sup> gospels—Mark, Luke, and Matthew—and the Gospel of John, as well as writings of Paul are the core of most mainstream New Testaments. The order of the synoptic gospels is still debated and actually launched the study in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century that evolved into modern New Testament critical scholarship. Some scholars include as a legitimate Gospel the Gospel of Thomas,<sup>11</sup> the only Gospel to purportedly be written by a disciple of the living Christ. The writers of the gospels are sometimes referred to as the Evangelists. The narrative portion of Jesus' life is the most historically suspect element of the Gospels. It should also be pointed out that the "Old Testament," which has been modified by the Christian Church, is not the same as Jewish scripture or the Jewish Bible, where textual fidelity is sacrosanct.<sup>12</sup>

Also, the time period being focused on here is the lifetime of Jesus and the two centuries afterward as this period marked the separation of Christianity from Judaism but was before the Catholic/Protestant split. There were two major historians writing about this period, Tacitus, a Roman, and Josephus, a Jew, both working for Imperial Rome.

The attempt to purify the New Testament was not a late 20<sup>th</sup> century politically correct attempt at Cumbaya or even a post-Holocaust "Oooops!" It didn't even take Jews into account. In the early 19<sup>h</sup> century, inspired by the scientific techniques and ideas of the Age of Enlightenment, the quest for the "historic Jesus" was undertaken by Protestant scholars who were convinced that the New Testament had been corrupted, "...the gospels contained a good bit of mythology and too many miracles for comfort." They aimed to make the Gospels less "Catholic." They felt that "The essence of Christianity would be obvious from the pristine purity of its original form, and Protestant claims to represent the true form of Christianity would have to be acknowledged."<sup>13</sup>

The conclusion that both the New Testament and Christian version of the "Old Testament" had been tampered with was, and is, a slam dunk: when those who could read various versions through time and in the original languages compared manuscripts, they saw that the later versions were not pristine, that things had been added and subtracted, mostly intentionally.<sup>14</sup>

As early as 1802, Thomas Jefferson was creating his own version of the New Testament. "Jefferson was devoted to the teachings of Jesus Christ. But he didn't always agree with how they were interpreted by biblical sources, including the writers of the four gospels, whom he considered to be untrustworthy correspondents."<sup>15</sup>

"...Jefferson was convinced that the authentic words of Jesus written in the New Testament had been contaminated. Early Christians, overly eager to make their religion appealing to the pagans, had obscured the words of Jesus ...thoroughly muddled Jesus' original message...Jefferson [was sure that] the authentic words of

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<sup>10</sup> From Wikipedia: The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are referred to as the **Synoptic Gospels** because they include many of the same stories, often in a similar sequence and in similar wording. They stand in contrast to John, whose content is comparatively distinct.

<sup>11</sup> Legend has it that Thomas went to India. The Thomas Christians were founded in his wake

<sup>12</sup> The Torah is printed onto scrolls. If a scribe makes a mistake in copying, no erasure or crossing out is allowed. The entire section is discarded.

<sup>13</sup> Burton L. Mack, *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q & Christian Origins* 17

<sup>14</sup> Christian Fundamentalism had its origin as a reaction to biblical criticism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>15</sup> Smithsonian, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/how-thomas-jefferson-created-his-own-bible-5659505/?no-ist>

Jesus were still there. The task...was one of 'abstracting what is really his from the rubbish in which it is buried, easily distinguished by its lustre from the dross of his biographers, and as separate from that as the diamond from the dung hill.'" His technique was to place "the text of the New Testament...in four parallel columns in four languages [Greek, Latin, French and English]...Jefferson omitted the words that he thought were inauthentic and retained those he believed were original."<sup>16</sup>

### Through a Glass Darkly—Are the Gospels Authoritative History?

Were the Gospels even *intended* to be history? In all fairness to the Gospels themselves, it should be pointed out that many scholars recognize that "If we want to read the gospels as eye witness accounts, historical records and so on, then not only are we in for some tough going, I think there's evidence within the material itself that it's not intended to be read that way"<sup>17</sup> and "In spite of the desire to not give the evangelists too much credit as creative writers, real composition was finally acknowledged, naïve assumptions about reporting history vanished, and the authorial intention of the evangelists came to be called theology."<sup>18</sup> The recognition of clear intent is why the faith of biblical scholars and devotees of Christ need not be upset by the inconsistencies and questionable history.

For somebody who thinks the four gospels are like four witnesses in a court trying to tell exactly how the accident happened, as it were, this [the differences between the four gospels] is extremely troubling. It is not at all troubling to me because they told me, quite honestly, that they were gospels. And a gospel is good news ... "good" and "news" ... updated interpretation. So when I went into Matthew, I did not expect journalism. I expected gospel. That's what I found. I have no problem with that.<sup>19</sup>

The gospels are not biographies in the modern sense of the word. Rather, they are stories told in such a way as to evoke a certain image of Jesus for a particular audience...we have to think of them as a kind of preaching, as well as story telling. That's what the gospel, The Good News, is really all about.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the people in the early Christian movement couldn't read so they wouldn't have been reading the gospels....Probably the greatest contact they would have had is hearing these read or preached in connection with church services. Certainly what we think of today as literal interpretation of the scripture would not really have been available in quite the same way to people in the ancient world. I think it's important to understand that what contemporary Americans, for example, think of as a literal reading of scripture is really a product of the late 19th and early 20th century, as development or part of fundamentalism's reaction to Biblical scholarship and Biblical criticism as it had developed in the 19th century.

Matthew, even when he has Mark in front of him, will change what Jesus says. And that's what's most important for me, to understand the mind of an evangelist. It is that Matthew is saying, "I will change Mark so that Mark's Jesus speaks to my people." Now, there's a logic to his change. He's not just changing it to be difficult. He will change Mark, but what Jesus says in Mark does not make sense to Matthew's people... What is consistent about the gospels is that they change consistent with their own theology, with their own communities' needs.<sup>21</sup>

As these comments illustrate, the Gospels don't claim to be eye witness or even accurate accounts of Jesus' life; they are also not written by Jesus' contemporaries. The Gospels were not written until after Jesus's death, the

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<sup>16</sup> PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/jefferson.html>

<sup>17</sup> [Allen D. Callahan](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html): Associate Professor of New Testament, Harvard Divinity School, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html>

<sup>18</sup> Q, 25

<sup>19</sup> [John Dominic Crossan](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html): Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies DePaul University <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html>

<sup>20</sup> [L. Michael White](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html): Professor of Classics and Director of the Religious Studies Program University of Texas at Austin <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html>

<sup>21</sup> [John Dominic Crossan](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html): Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies DePaul University <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html>

estimate being between 40 to 100 years later (other estimates vary: 60 or 75 years to 110 or more). Scholars posit the existence of the Q Gospel, a source for the sayings in the synoptic gospels. Q is thought to be a “sayings gospel,” that is the words of Jesus only, no biography, which is consistent with the format of other Christian writings of the earlier time, later unearthed. The historical accuracy of the narrative element is considered questionable. Also, given the nature of oral tradition upon which the gospels fed, the possibility of accuracy of short sayings is given more credence than longer, more elaborate statements.

To condense the above opinions, it seems that any liberties are excused by the fact that the reader is forewarned; unfortunately, the warning has been forgotten. By way of example, “docudramas” have become a popular film format. They tell us before the action even starts that this film is “Inspired by True Events” or “Based on True Events.” The ratio of fact to fiction varies. The filmmaker has seen an essence in an event and wants to express his idea through that story in a dramatically satisfying way. If we’re intrigued, we go online and see what was accurate and what was invented. Only the most naïve consumer thinks that all the action took place in exactly the way it is presented. The docudramatarian can’t be faulted.

This understanding of the meaning of Gospel explains why scholars can read the gospels with eyes wide open and remain faithful Christians. As James Carroll states:

If I seem to be going to some length here to dilute, if not refute, the Jew hatred we so easily detect in the New Testament, and that would flower in anti-Jewish violence, it is to make the case that the Jew hatred that stamps the beginning of Christianity is not essential to this religion. If I believed it were...I could...have nothing to do with this religion.<sup>22</sup>

## Context

“To read the New Testament apart from context of the Roman war against the Jews—as it almost always is—amounts to reading *The Diary of a Young Girl* without reference to the Holocaust...”<sup>23</sup>

James Carroll writes of a friend who teaches college. He gives his students a comprehensive quiz at the beginning of each session. One of the questions is “What religion was Jesus?” Some answer Catholic, most answer Christian, and a few answer Jewish. The results are consistent from term to term. The paradigm buster here is not that Jesus was a Jew, rather that there was no such thing as Christianity in Jesus’ lifetime. This is crucial in understanding who were writing the Gospels to whom: Jews were addressing other Jews. The finger-pointing was a family feud. As an example of recent intra-polar conflict, the Bernie people, far left, and the Hillary people, center left, are much more heated in disputation with one another than with Trump supporters, of whom they expect no possibility of accord. Or bringing it all back home, a Jewish joke: A Jew is stranded on a desert island. He builds two synagogues—one to worship in, the other as the one he will never set foot in.<sup>24</sup>

Early Christianity was a seamless part of the Jewish religious community, which had many different schools of thought, not unlike today, factions heatedly contending at this very stressful time of brutal Roman occupation. These political tensions only made the disagreements more vital, real life crises rather than abstract sophistry. The Romans kept close watch on the unrest of their subjects’ movements and writings, exercising harsh measures to keep control of occupied populations, who had no recourse to the Roman legal system, most not being citizens of Rome. The Judean People’s Front scene from Monty Python’s *The Life of Brian* sums it up pretty well—the People’s Front of Judea shouted contempt for the Judean People’s Front but whispered their resentment at Rome.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Constantine’s Sword*, 91

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid* 90

<sup>24</sup> Along those lines, this Ross Douthat article, *Expect the Inquisition*, about intra-Catholic squabbles:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/20/opinion/catholic-church-pope-francis.html>

<sup>25</sup> View the clip <http://www.vedantawritings.com/HinJew.htm>

Christian and Jewish communities were freely interactive. The attribution of catacombs and sites of worship and burial, once assumed to be Christian because of the presence of such symbols as fish and cups, are now in question in that both Jews and Christians shared these, and other, symbols. “For centuries...Christians’ celebration of Easter coincided exactly with Passover, and their observance of the Sabbath continued to take place on Saturday. It took the order of Constantine...to draw fast distinctions between Jewish and Christian observances, but the purpose of such decrees was to clarify the minds of Christians, who continued to think of themselves as Jewish.”<sup>26</sup>

Early Christianity claims Paul as a non-Jewish Christian, pointing to a supposed name change as a demonstration of his re-alignment, but “...long after his supposed conversion, he is ‘Saul, who is also called Paul.’ (Acts 13:9) Paul being the Latinized version of Saul...Not only was this Saul-Paul dichotomy unknown to the man himself, but so would have been our idea of the conversion it supposedly symbolized...[his] awakening to Jesus Christ could not have been such a radical demarcation between separate religions to him. Paul died thinking of himself a Jew, and this emphasis on conversion as a moment of ontological change amounts to a denigration Paul would not have recognized.”<sup>27</sup>

The Roman occupation of the Jewish lands was a brutal one. The Romans were responsible for “leveling of towns, mass killing and [according to Josephus] 2,000 [were] crucified just outside the walls of the city. In the Christian memory—the Gospel of Matthew—the Roman crime is forgotten while the Jewish one is highlighted.”<sup>28</sup> As brutal as Roman Imperial rule was, according to both Josephus and Tacitus, Pontius Pilate stood out “as one of the worst provocateurs.” Even by the gruesome standards of the day, Pilate seems to have been excessively savage, so much so that he was recalled to Rome for one of his massacres.

In addition to the political occupation, the Romans attempted a religious occupation. They demanded that their emperors be worshipped as gods. This was blasphemy to the Jewish population, who resisted these dictums. When statues of Roman Emperors were to be placed in synagogues the people were outraged. Roman Emperor and famous madman Caligula went so far as to order that his own statue be placed in THE Temple (Jews have many synagogues but only one Temple). Jews revolted. The outcome was never in question; the Romans were militarily far superior. Jerusalem was leveled and the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. Add to all this upheaval the fact that the Jewish factions were trying to decipher what God’s message was in all this.

Carroll writes of the deicide stories:

Is it possible that the dominant memory of Christianity’s foundational events, a memory that features Jesus’ conflict with the Jews, by omitting or distorting the full political and social context within which these events unfolded has enshrined a falsehood?

...What happens when “facts” are remembered without regard for the social and political ground out of which they grew? ...partially remembered “facts” can turn the truth on its head. The “longest lie” is what Crossan calls the web of distortions that are thus woven into the primal Christian narratives.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *Constantine’s Sword* 145.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* 138

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid* 138

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid* 69-70 Carroll later writes, page 88 “Earlier I cited Dominic Crossan’s 1995 characterization of the claim that the Jews murdered Jesus as ‘the longest lie,’ but in a subsequent work, in 1998, he amended that judgment. The authors of the foundational Christian documents, writing years after the event, ‘did not say this: I know that the Roman authorities crucified Jesus, but I will blame the Jewish authorities; I will play the Roman card; I will write propaganda that I know is inaccurate. If they *had* done that, the resulting text would have been a lie.’ Crossan does not attribute such veniality to the Gospels, because to do so would impose a post-Enlightenment notion of history on a far more complex phenomenon. This concern for ‘how it happened’ is a contemporary preoccupation of ours, but no such emphasis informed the way the ancients wrote history. Reports of the words and deeds of Jesus evolved as his movement grew, and so did the understanding of who his friends and enemies were...’As Christian Jewish communities are steadily more alienated from their fellow Jews, so the “enemies” of Jesus expand to fit those new situations. By the time of John in the 90s, those enemies are “the Jews”—that is, all those other Jews except the right ones. If we had understood (the literary genre) gospel, we would have understood that. If we had understood gospel, we would have expected that. It is, unfortunately, tragically late to be leaning that.”

## Deicide

In terms of the execution of Jesus, we know from the Roman historian Tacitus, and the Jewish historian Josephus that there was a movement, that the founder was executed, and that the movement continued ... three very important things. So, the brute facts, as it were, are as certain as historical things can be.<sup>30</sup>

But these “brute facts” are ALL that is certain about the narrative portion of the life of Jesus. While I don’t attribute the resulting two millennia of violence to an excess of genuine religiosity, rather to baser human instincts that express themselves as sectarian violence, the charge of Deicide is the rationale for unleashing the impulse for violence against a largely defenseless minority, in this case the Jews. So, beside common sense, what is the case?

Of the nuts and bolts of the execution, L. Michael White states: “I think we have to realize that the evidence that we have by the mode of execution, by virtue of the trial stories as told in the gospels and by virtue of what appears in the story of his actual death, suggest that it ultimately fell to Pilate and Pilate alone to make the decision on what would happen to this figure Jesus.

“My own feeling is that there's very little role by the Jewish authorities. Maybe the Temple leadership at most but there's probably no direct historical evidence for an actual trial before the Sanhedrin and the Jewish leadership and clearly the decision to execute on a capital crime was a Roman decision. Certainly it is the case that the idea of the masses of the Jewish people gathered around the Temple had some voice in the death of Jesus is not part of history but a legacy of some later tradition.”<sup>31</sup>

Of the fluid nature of the gospels and accelerating Jew-blaming therein, Crossan comments: “When you turn, however, to the details, to the blow by blow, moment by moment, word by word accounts that you find in Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John, ... what's interesting there is that it looks like it's a single stream of tradition, not four independent witnesses. Mark is copied into Matthew and Luke and may well be copied into John, so it's only a single source for all of this. What you find throughout that source, is that as this group ... the Christian Jews, we're talking about ... a group of Jews similar to the Essene Jews or the Pharisaic Jews or the Sadducean Jews, or the Zealot Jews ... as the Christian Jews become more and more marginalized and alienated from the majority ... of their own people, the enemies of Jesus in this story similarly get increased. So Mark talks about the crowd being against Jesus, but by Matthew, 15 years later, say in the year 85, it's all the people. And by the time you get to John in the 90's, it is the Jews who are against Jesus in the passion.”<sup>32</sup>

Also consider another important source: Paul. James Carroll quotes Jon Levenson: “Paul never blames the Jews for the death of Jesus or ascribes the founding of the Church to God’s wrath against the people of the old covenant. Indeed, he does not attribute Jesus’ demise to the Jews at all—an extraordinary datum in light of the reports...in the canonical Gospels.”<sup>33</sup>

## PART 3

### Supersessionism, The Gospel of John, and the Gnostic Gospels

While Jewish Deicide can be argued in a rational way using scholarship, linguistics, archeology, carbon dating, objective historical records, Supersessionism, the doctrine that Christianity has transcended and replaced Judaism and that therefore has eliminated the justification for Judaism to exist as a unique religion, is based on theological opinion, not on empirical fact. The Supersessionist ideas sometimes repeated in Vedanta culture are that Christianity is a religion of Love while Judaism is a religion of Law and that Jewish suffering is proof of the guilt of the charge of Deicide or rejection of Christ. Supersessionism is a very short, very slippery slope to the

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<sup>30</sup> John Dominic Crossan: PBS, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html>

<sup>31</sup> L. Michael White, Professor of Classics and Director of the Religious Studies Program University of Texas at Austin, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/arrest.html>

<sup>32</sup> John Dominic Crossan, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/gospels.html>

<sup>33</sup> *Constantine’s Sword*, 142



inevitable conclusion that all Jews should convert to Christianity; that Judaism is no longer a legitimate religion; and that, therefore, Jews cannot realize God by practicing Judaism. (The Ba'al Shem Tov<sup>34</sup> didn't get the memo.) These ideas are clearly a denigration of Judaism.

We group the concept of Supercessionism and the Gospel of John together because they are of a piece: the 2<sup>nd</sup> century aggressive consolidation of the Christian church also determined the fates of the gnostic gospels and the Gospel of Thomas. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, the movement instigated by the Early Christian Church to sever the two faiths started in earnest. Distinctions between the two were codified and also fabricated. While many followers of Jesus were content to remain both Christians and Jews, the Church wanted them to make a firm choice. One of the means was by moving the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. Christian theology also added a layer of eternal heaven and eternal damnation, a concept alien to Judaism.

The Christian preacher, Marcion, who is credited with assembling the first canon but also accused of heresy, led a campaign to entirely dispense with the Jewish scriptures as part of Christian canon. This debate went on for two centuries until Augustine helped settle the issue. The "Old Testament" was ultimately kept because many argued these scriptures were necessary to establish Jesus as the Messiah, the Fulfiller of prophecy as laid down in Jewish Scripture. In some instances, text in the "Old Testament" was altered to accommodate the prophecy after the fact as were the qualifiers for the role of Messiah.

Retaining the Jewish scriptures also allows the Christian New Testament to be concise and lean as the "Old Testament," in addition to being a spiritual document and the cradle of formative Western myths, takes care of the business of organizing society at a time when there was scant civilization among the demographic being served, establishing norms of behavior, genealogy, medical advice to safeguard the community from epidemics, regional history, and other less exciting functions. Ask the unlucky Bar/Bat Mitzvah whose Torah section involves how to treat rashes, a challenging topic to wring inspiration from.<sup>35</sup>

Another aspect of the Church's drive to separate was to create notions of Jesus as a religious innovator. We have often heard the idea that Judaism's religion of Law was supplanted by Jesus' religion of Love. It is stubborn conventional wisdom. However, this statement simply suggests a lack of meaningful familiarity with Judaism. As an example of this false distinction, James Carroll point out:

Christians recite this prayer [Our Father]...an invitation...to think of the Almighty One, the Ineffable, in the most intimate way. Ironically, this aspect of Jesus' spirituality, which for most Christians has had the effect of distancing him from Judaism, actually shows him participating in its vital and at that time multifaceted manifestation. As Catholic scholar John Pawlowski has written, "In particular, Jesus' stress on the intimate link with the Father picks up on a central feature of Pharisaic thought." Indeed, there is evidence that, by the time of Jesus, Jews were regularly praying to God as Father." [But we were taught that]...The intimacy Jesus claimed to have with God the Father was made to seem quite unique, entirely his. More than anything else, to us, it set him apart from Jews<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Baal Shem Tov, 18th century Jewish mystic. His followers became Hassidic Judaism.

<sup>35</sup> In the synagogue, the Torah is studied in order every Sabbath, so if a child gets a certain Bar Mitzvah date, he or she must comment on that portion

<sup>36</sup> *Constantine's Sword*, 74

Text of the Lord's Prayer 1662 Anglican:

Our Father, which art in heaven,  
Hallowed be thy Name;  
Thy kingdom come;  
Thy will be done  
in earth, as it is in heaven:  
Give us this day our daily bread;  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive them that trespass against us;  
And lead us not into temptation,  
But deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom,  
the power, and the glory,

The manufactured separation of Christianity from Judaism of course didn't stop with the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. The campaign to separate Jesus from his roots has persisted with great success. Quick! Picture Jesus in your mind: pale skin, golden brown hair, blue eyes, tidy beard, pointy nose, perfectly at home in the western E.U.<sup>37</sup>

The second century also saw the advent of orthodoxy, and its inevitable complement, heresy. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, created a list of accepted and forbidden writings. He championed the Gospel of John, the last gospel to be written, the furthest from the source, as the most important gospel and declared Gnosticism heresy. The essence of the theological clash and why the Gnostic Gospels virtually disappeared until they were literally dug up in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is here explained. Elaine Pagels writes:

...they're all similar [the canonical Gospels] in that they all see Jesus as the pivotal person, the one on whom everything depends, the Messiah, the Savior, the Lord. These other gospels [Gnostic], many of them, see Jesus as a teacher, as a kind of figure of enlightenment, a kind of bodhisattva figure, but one whom you and I could emulate, whom we could perhaps become. And that's a very different kind of emphasis. I think the gospels of the New Testament were chosen because they do share this conviction of the importance and uniqueness of Jesus, which also becomes the importance and uniqueness of the church as the only means of salvation.<sup>38</sup>

The Gnostic Gospels were unearthed in 1945, in Nag Hammadi Egypt They had been placed in a jar and hidden in a cave in hopes of saving them from destruction during the purge, when possession of them became a crime. The manuscripts of the Nag Hammadi cache are grouped together as the Gnostic Gospels, although the only thing connecting *all* of them is that they were declared heretical. But many of them share similar philosophical/theological viewpoints. Fragments of the Gospel of Thomas had been found earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and this Nag Hammadi finding supplemented the Gospel.<sup>39</sup> Thomas purports to be an eyewitness account of Jesus written by the disciple Thomas, "Doubting Thomas." Not knowing the importance of the papers, the farmers used some of the old manuscripts to start fires in the stove, but eventually the manuscripts made their way to the larger world.

The fact that these writings were discovered nearly 2 millennia after the life of Jesus demonstrates that empirically-based history is still expanding.

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For ever and ever.  
Amen.



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<sup>38</sup> .[Elaine Pagels, [Elaine H. Pagels](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/emergence.html): The Harrington Spear Paine Foundation Professor of Religion Princeton University <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/emergence.html>

<sup>39</sup> For another opinion on the history of Thomas, Allen D Callahan writes "This Gospel of Thomas—which may have been written within a few decades after Jesus' death-- apparently circulated freely among Christians for hundreds of years. Then, in 367, Athanasius, the Bishop of Alexandria, declared that it and numerous other "secret illegitimate books" were heretical and therefore should not be included in the official New Testament canon. [Allen D. Callahan](#): Associate Professor of New Testament, Harvard Divinity School.

Of Gnostic philosophy, Pagels states, "The Gnostic writings criticize common Christian beliefs, such as the virgin birth or the bodily resurrection, as naïve misunderstandings...the 'living Jesus' of these texts speaks of illusion and enlightenment, not of sin and repentance, like the Jesus of the New Testament. Instead of coming to save us from sin, he comes as a guide who opens access to spiritual understanding. But when the disciple attains enlightenment, Jesus no longer serves as his spiritual master: the two have become equal--even identical."<sup>40</sup> The Gnostics also practiced gender equality, which made the movement popular with women.

Like Judaism, they stress the idea that God is within and that knowledge of God can be achieved. Here are some of their heretical declarations:

"...to know oneself, at the deepest level, is simultaneously to know God; this is the secret of gnosis." Another gnostic teacher, Monoimus, says: "...Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of a similar sort. Look for him by taking yourself as the starting point. Learn who it is within you who makes everything his own and says, 'My God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body.' Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, love, hate...If you carefully investigate these matters you will find him in yourself."<sup>41</sup>

### John v Thomas

There was not room in the Early Church for both the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Thomas. Again, Elaine Pagels writes:

Thomas is a fascinating book. More than any other early gospel it is part of the dynamic out of which the Christian canon is formed. One of its central messages is that there is divine light within each person. Reacting to Thomas's teaching, the author of the gospel of John has Jesus always declaring that Jesus is the only light of the world. John aimed to negate and suppress other teachings like Thomas's. In fact, in John's gospel, the disciple Thomas is characterized as a fool. I was quite shocked that something really strikes John as wrong with Thomas and his ideas about Jesus.

I have come to believe firmly that John was written to refute Thomas. This becomes clear not only in John's characterization of Jesus as the only light of the world, but also in the way that the early Church reads John and the special place to which it elevates John. The early Church theologian Irenaeus was so convinced that John had the correct teaching that he rejected Thomas and other early gospels from a place in his list of "true" gospels. Not only did he reject these writings, but he also wrote commentaries on how to read John correctly, so believers would avoid being taken in by the many other readings of John available that he considered incorrect. Eventually, by the fourth century, the gospel of John had become so situated in the Church that theologians and bishops used it as the basis for the early Christian creeds. The creeds then become instructions about how to read the gospels.<sup>42</sup>

The Gospel of Thomas is a "sayings" gospel consisting of teachings sometimes set in parables or short dialogs. It has no biography, no crucifixion, no resurrection, no miracles, no messianic claim, no Virgin Birth.

John to a greater extent than the synoptic gospels, which were written to a primarily Jewish audience, was written for Gentile audiences looking to attract converts in a larger geographical range, using the carrot of salvation, but only through Christ [John 14:6], and the stick of eternal damnation for not accepting Christ. John is not considered a synoptic Gospel in that it differs in many important ways. The Jesus Seminar finds that the "voice" of Jesus in John differs from his "voice" in the synoptic gospels. In effect, they doubt that Jesus actually spoke the words attributed to him in much of John, including all the "I am" statements. Here is a list of some of the differences they site<sup>43</sup>:

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/story/pagels.html>

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/37185-john-vs-thomas.html>

<sup>43</sup> Robert W. Funk, Roy W. Hoover, and The Jesus Seminar, *The Five Gospels*, 11

Synoptic	John
Jesus speaks in parables and aphorisms	Jesus speaks in long, involved discourses
Jesus is a sage	Jesus is a philosopher and mystic
Jesus espouses the causes of the poor and oppressed	Jesus has little or nothing to say about the poor and oppressed
[THESE NEXT 2 ROWS ARE THE "I OR THOU?" POSITIONS]	
God's imperial rule is the theme of Jesus' teaching	Jesus himself is the theme of his own teaching
Jesus has little to say about himself	Jesus reflects extensively on his own mission and person

However, given the job description of the Evangelist, he is not accountable for factual accuracy, rather to theological correctness. But that frees us, the readers, from taking him literally. John is the narrowest in appraising God's loving mercy and the most vitriolic in condemning the Jews. Text from John is frequently quoted by the most virulent anti-Semites. James Carroll writes of this gospel

[Because this Gospel was circulated in Gentile communities,] They who now heard this story and retold it, were not Jews. Therefore, they could only experience the disheartening, self-hating, imperium-inspired polemic of the Jesus movement from outside. And from outside, there could be no loving assumption that the ultimate aim of his struggle, whatever else it accomplished, was a renewal of Israel. The hateful polemical language used by those outside the initiating, faction-torn [Jewish] community would begin to fall differently on the ear, the way it falls on modern ears.<sup>44</sup>

**John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."**

Vedanta is very broad. Thereby Vedantic minds can become very agile and argue for almost anything. We have struggled to reconcile this statement "No one comes to the Father except through Me" with Vedanta, whose liberalism in approaching God and assurance of the inevitable victory of light over darkness is encapsulated by Krishna's statement in the Bhagavad Gita (4:11)

Whatever path men travel  
It is my path:  
No matter where they walk  
It leads to me.  
It is my path.<sup>45</sup>

The explanation usually given is that Jesus was talking from the standpoint of the Incarnation, unified with Godhead, not from the single personage of Jesus. This is not, however, how this statement is generally taken. Rather, it is taken on its face, which is how it was almost certainly intended; it couldn't possibly be expressed more bluntly. So what can we make of it in light of the universality of all religions? Given the freedom granted the Evangelists in writing theology rather than history coupled with the Church politics at the time, and that it is so at odds with what we feel to be a universal truth, I think the Hakim's Razor solution is that Jesus didn't say this. As Funk writes, "As in the majority of other cases in this gospel [John], the evangelist has freely created lines for Jesus to speak that reflect his own point of view or that of the community."<sup>46</sup>

And what about the Beatitudes, the most oft-quoted in Vedanta culture being "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." (Mathew 5:8)? There is no reservation here, no condition to be fulfilled other than purity of heart. Funk comments: "the evangelist appears to contradict the teaching of Jesus in the synoptic; there he advocates unbrokered access to God; all have immediate access to the Father without benefit of priest or religious authority."<sup>47</sup>

**If You're Not Guilty, Why Am I Hitting You?**

<sup>44</sup> *Constantine's Sword*, 91

<sup>45</sup> Swamo Prabhavananda, translator, *Bhagavad Gita: The Song of God*, 1944, 62

<sup>46</sup> *The Five Gospels*, 450

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid* 421

Another popular Christian Supersessionist concept is that the suffering of the Jews is proof of Jewish guilt of the murder of Christ. This a masterpiece of circular logic as the very people promoting this idea are the same people who have perpetrated the suffering, in the name of Christ, using the justification that the Jews deserve to suffer because they killed Christ, the proof of which is demonstrated by their suffering—and so on and so on and so on. This “you made me hit you” justification is common among abusers.

This notion gets a Vedantic twist in the idea that Jews have suffered for the past few millennia because in not accepting Jesus as the Messiah, Jews lack someone to suffer vicariously for them and therefore are left to the effects of their own group karma. This does not, I believe, take into account that the suffering is manmade, not an Act of God—the Temple didn't spontaneously combust, tornadoes didn't single out Jewish trailer parks—and is typical of the fate of minority communities to this day, same as it ever was. Furthermore, it also doesn't take into account European history. Since the Reformation, Catholics and Protestants both enthusiastically savaged one another for hundreds of years, killing, torturing, imprisoning, destroying cultural treasures, even though both had a Messiah, one and the same Messiah, to take on their karma by suffering on their behalf. Elaine Pagels says of this lethal sectarian conflict as it is influenced by the Gospel of John: “If you read it as John intended, you think, 'God is on our side; we of course are on the side of good,'...Now we could be Lutherans fighting against the Catholic Church, we could be Catholics fighting against Lutherans...What I found so remarkable is the way that people on both sides of a conflict could read that same book against each other.”<sup>48</sup>

And, of course, other religions or sects within a religion don't have a Messiah to suffer on their behalf. What about Vedantists who worship the Impersonal formless God without qualities? This requirement of accepting a savior as the only way to put an end to sectarian bullying singles out Jews unfairly, setting a standard absent in parallel situations.

### **Did I Kill Christ?**

This question may seem like a bad joke in poor taste to a modern Vedanta audience, but it isn't. The Christian Deicide charge has no expiration. All the Jews and their offspring into forever, down to my granddaughter, are cursed with the crime. Some progress was made in that regard among rational Christians and also since Vatican II, where it was decided that of the mob responsible for Jesus's death, some, rather than all, Jews as well as others were responsible but that the guilt doesn't extend to future generations. However, this Catholic loosening of the screws, such as it is, doesn't necessarily sit well with all the Christian population at large, many of whom fault their religious institutions with bowing to political correctness; and, more important, the scripture are not altered to reflect this change in theology. It is ironic that what was originally so mutable is now set in stone.

When studying other religions, we Vedantists when reading actual source material, I think, experience a “click,” It all falls into place with the truths as we've learned them. This is because as Sri Ramakrishna says of realized souls “All jackals howl alike” (or as 14<sup>th</sup> Century Christian mystic and heretic Meister Eckhart put it “Theologians may quarrel, but the mystics of the world speak the same language.” Which demonstrates the point) but reliance on this truth only works when the jackal translator has heard the jackal correctly and transcribed it accurately. As inter-religious diplomats have found, others are sometimes annoyed by our re-interpretation of their beliefs. The Vedantic interpretation of the role of Jesus has similarities to but is not the same as the Christian position on his identity.

Often, common words are also terms of art within some religions, tightly defined, yet vague when used by others, e.g. “meditation”: a disciplined focus on the object of meditation to the Hindu, but a freewheeling reverie in common Western usage; “saint”: a holy person to whom a certain number of miracles can be attributed in Catholicism, but a person thought unusually close to God by others; so also avatar, enlightenment, and Messiah. Often, these terms have an overlap but are not synonymous. As a prebuttal to the possible argument that killing Jesus is only symbolic of killing Christ, i.e. that not accepting Jesus as the Messiah is the actual crime, I offer an examination of “Messiah.”

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.npr.org/2012/03/07/148125942/the-book-of-revelation-visions-prophecy-politics>

The Christian concept of Messiah is so different from the Jewish concept that Jews have simply started using another word: Mashiach. The concept of vicarious atonement by the Messiah is foreign to Judaism; it's a Christian construct established after Jesus' life. For Jews, the Messiah is anticipated, "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Mashiach, and though he may tarry, still I await him every day." (Principle 12 of Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith). In Jewish belief, there is always a potential Messiah present on earth waiting to become manifest when the conditions are right. What are the signs of the Messiah in Judaism?

He will include and attract people from all cultures and nations (Isaiah 11:10)  
There will be no more hunger or illness, and death will cease (Isaiah 25:8)  
Evil and tyranny will not be able to stand before his leadership (Isaiah 11:4)  
All of the dead will rise again (Isaiah 26:19)  
He will be a messenger of peace (Isaiah 52:7)  
Weapons of war will be destroyed (Ezekiel 39:9)  
He will give you all the worthy desires of your heart (Psalms 37:4)  
He will take the barren land and make it abundant and fruitful (Isaiah 51:3, Amos 9:13–15, Ezekiel 36:29–30, Isaiah 11:6–9)

And on a more esoteric level: "The people of Israel will have direct access to the Torah through their minds and Torah study will become the study of the wisdom of the heart." (Jeremiah 31:33) and "Knowledge of God will fill the world" (Isaiah 11:9).

The coming of the Messiah does not preclude the possible interpretation that it happens not on a macrocosmic scale but rather within the individual, who then sees God everywhere and is made peaceful, happy, just and God-centric. As Meister Eckhart said, "What good is it that Christ was born [2,000] years ago if he is not born now in your heart?" But this is not the common belief being debated by Christians and Jews. The things foretold of the Messiah didn't happen with the coming (not death) of Christ; instead, the Roman occupation continued and intensified. Christianity redefined the Messiah and planted prophecy in the Old Testament to make Christ the sacrificial lamb.

In Vedanta culture, we have absorbed Jesus as an Incarnation of God. But accepting Jesus as "AN incarnation of God" is different than "THE Messiah," the determining factor being that THE Messiah is singular while an Incarnation is one of many. Part of the Vedantic take on the necessary mercy of the Incarnations is that they bridge the gulf between man and the ultimate God, Brahman, the Impersonal formless without qualities, which is too abstract for the human mind to fathom. For Vedantists, the reward for accepting this assistance is God-realization, which is open to us 24/7; the punishment for ignoring it is continued ignorance. However, failure to accept the Christian Messiah results in eternal torture in hell, while the reward for acceptance is eternal heaven. While heaven can be interpreted to mean God-realization, it is not specifically stated as such, nor is that the definition commonly held by most Christians. Incidentally, Judaism also has its human bridge to realization in the form of the Tzadik, not necessarily a rabbi or priest, rather a holy man who helps humanity realize God. Similar to the potential Messiah, Tzadikim are always present, in every generation.<sup>49</sup>

## Conclusion

One very popular possible source for Gospel criticism is conspicuously absent from this piece—Bart D. Ehrman's *Misquoting Jesus*. Although he has many concise, easily absorbed go-to quotes concerning scriptural tampering, I resisted the bait because his religious faith was damaged by his discoveries. For those not familiar with his story, he was a gung-ho biblical inerrant so enthusiastic that learned the ancient languages and studied the old manuscripts to deepen his understanding. But his beliefs were rigid: the Bible was inerrant; anything less zealous was weakness. The deeper he went, the more difficult it was to justify inerrancy. After continued struggle with the inconsistency of text through time within the same documents, he knew he was in big trouble when he was defeated by a mustard seed. He tried to intellectually defend as correct the statement that the mustard seed is the

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<sup>49</sup> Personal Note: You may wonder if I, in writing this, advocate for or against Jesus as an Incarnation of God. Truthfully, I have no idea; discerning who is an Incarnation or a partial incarnation or a simply a saint is above my pay grade. My faith in things above my head is just that – faith. I like to keep that list of the things I accept on faith only as long as absolutely necessary.

smallest seed...when he knew for a fact that it isn't.<sup>50</sup> At the time of his book tour, he confessed that he no longer believed in God. The scholars, mostly Christian, I have quoted are faithful Christians who love their religion and are unafraid of science. They read Gospel as theology, not history.

Some dismiss this critical study as being simply "higher criticism," as if the truth of the story is not good enough, as though a non-embellished story isn't worth telling, and everything looks better dimly lit.

In praise of Biblical criticism, Harold W. Attridge, The Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament Yale Divinity School states: "...by a historical, critical understanding of scripture we can both enrich our own appropriation of the teachings of scripture and also sort through some problematic elements in scripture. And I think unless we adopt a historical critical attitude toward our Biblical tradition we may miss appropriate scripture. For instance, if we apply too readily or accept without some sort of critical perspective some of the controversial statements within the gospel tradition about the Jews, I think we're being unfaithful to our Biblical tradition. But in order to understand those we have to put them into some sort of historical context. So we're invited to engage in historical critical study by the problems of scripture itself, encouraged to do so by the payoff of such study for understanding and enriching our appropriation of scriptural material, and I think absolutely forced to do so by the problematic elements of scripture which can only be understood within the historical context."<sup>51</sup>

### **So what is my prayer, already?**

May our faith be supple. May our reverence for past teachers not calcify into a de facto doctrine of infallibility on their behalf. May those who help shape the Vedanta culture from the pulpit and/or the literature either leave Judaism out of the discussion or check their information with care and objectivity. May my faith be supple.

This is my piece.

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<sup>50</sup> Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 9

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/jesus/tensions.html>