

## PREFACE

In high school I assumed that I would be a lawyer, so I went to a very fine liberal arts college in southern California, where I majored in history and minored in philosophy, in preparation for law school. But in my senior year in college I had become a committed Christian, which led me to seminary, instead of law school (“from law to grace,” as one minister remarked).

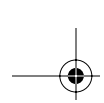
I went to seminary for the purpose of training in Christian ministry. I was fascinated with Jesus of Nazareth and wanted to learn more about him and his teaching. I looked forward to a lifetime in pastoral ministry. But in seminary I discovered the academic side to theology and biblical studies. I loved it. Greek and Hebrew came easily; exegesis was fun; historical and background studies were stimulating. While other students were attempting to avoid these subjects, I engaged them enthusiastically.

In my second year I took an advanced course in Greek in which we read the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke—in one semester! That did it; I was hooked on the life, teaching and world of Jesus. I was fascinated with the Gospels themselves and the questions scholars grappled with: What are the sources of the Gospels? How do they relate to one another? How much of the Gospels is history, and how much is interpretation? I enjoyed it so much I decided to pursue a Ph.D.

I had the good fortune of entering Claremont Graduate University at a time when its biblical studies faculty was at its greatest. CGU, along with the nearby Claremont School of Theology, boasted a powerhouse faculty in New Testament and related fields of study. In this faculty were Hans Dieter Betz, William Brownlee, Burton Mack, James Robinson, James Sanders and John Trever.

Professor Betz chaired the Hellenism and the New Testament Seminar, which was favored with visits from Ronald Hock and Edward O’Neill, both





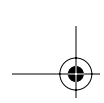
on the faculty of the University of Southern California. During this time the seminar was finishing its work on Plutarch and just launching its work on the Greek magical papyri. Betz impressed me greatly with his high standards and attention to detail. His commentaries on Galatians and the Sermon on the Mount in the Hermeneia commentary series are impressive and well respected.

Professor Robinson chaired the Nag Hammadi Seminar, dedicated to the publication and study of the Coptic Gnostic codices found in Nag Hammadi, Egypt. I found his enthusiasm for fresh research, discovery and publishing infectious. Entering Claremont was like walking into a publishing factory. I was overwhelmed by the activity. During my time with the Nag Hammadi Seminar, I became acquainted with Charles Hedrick (who taught me Coptic) and Marvin Meyer, who now is the research director for the Coptic Magical Texts Project at Claremont Graduate University and an expert on Gnostic texts.

Professor Mack was in those days engrossed in Philo and Jewish wisdom traditions. He was at that time a warm-hearted Christian scholar. I distinctly recall him in 1977 telling me how happy he was that I was serving on the staff of a nearby church. "That is really good," he said. "What we need are more doctors of the church." Times change and so do some people.

Professor Brownlee was wonderful to work with. He was quiet, gentle and unassuming. Yet he was one of the very first scholars to lay eyes on the Dead Sea Scrolls. He was in Jerusalem, doing a year of postdoctoral studies in 1947-1948, when the first cave containing scrolls was discovered. His studies in the book of Ezekiel and the ancient Ugaritic language were set aside. Brownlee brought one of the scrolls back with him to Duke University in the fall of 1948 so he could use it in teaching Hebrew. (That of course is no longer allowed!) He published an early study of the Rule Scroll (1QS) and spent much of his career analyzing Qumran's commentary (or pesher) on the book of Habakkuk. I found him delightful to work with and eventually finished my doctoral dissertation under his supervision. It was from Brownlee that I learned much about the Dead Sea Scrolls, and it was with him that I studied Aramaic and Syriac. His sudden death in 1983 left me an academic orphan and ended plans that we had made for collaborative studies in Isaiah and Daniel.



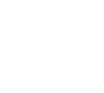
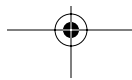


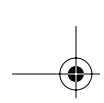
I also had the privilege of making the acquaintance of John Trever, Bill Brownlee's longtime friend. Trever was with Brownlee in Jerusalem in 1947-1948, and it was he who took the very first—and quite excellent—photographs of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Trever was also happy to give me a guided tour of his collection of photographs and artifacts, explaining where they were found and their significance.

Although I was very close to Brownlee, the person who influenced me the most at Claremont was Professor Sanders, who joined the faculty in 1977, the year my doctoral studies commenced. It would be almost impossible to exaggerate the significance of his contribution to my understanding of biblical literature and its full context. Sanders introduced me to the versions of Scripture, such as the Old Greek (or Septuagint) and the Aramaic (or Targum). He led me through the rabbinic literature, taught me to appreciate rabbinic midrash and transformed textual criticism—the study of ancient manuscripts and their diverse readings and variants—into a joy. Under his instruction my appreciation of Scripture grew. Over the years we have collaborated on a number of publishing projects and jointly chaired from 1989-1996 a program unit in the Society of Biblical Literature.

Although I started out at Claremont as a New Testament student, I was so deeply influenced by Brownlee and Sanders that I wrote my dissertation on the book of Isaiah. There are New Testament components in the dissertation, to be sure, but at the conclusion of my doctoral studies I was as much interested in a career in Old Testament as I was in New Testament. One of the ironies of my life is that twenty-five years ago I interviewed for a position in Old Testament at Acadia Divinity College. I was passed over on account of my youth and ended up at Trinity Western University instead—as an assistant professor of New Testament! This appointment guided me back to the New Testament, and after twenty-one years at Trinity I was appointed to Acadia Divinity College as the Payzant Distinguished Professor of New Testament. It seems I was destined for Acadia after all—but in New Testament not Old.

As I taught New Testament at Trinity, I of course began to shift my research and publishing away from Isaiah and the Old Testament to the New Testament. I focused on Jesus and the Gospels, which had been the focus of

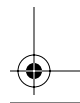
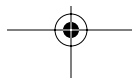
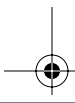


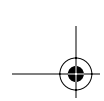


my interest back in seminary. An interesting thing happened. I realized that my work in Isaiah, the Greek and Aramaic versions of the Old Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls and early rabbinic literature was an enormous asset in the study of Jesus and the Gospels. As I became acquainted with more and more New Testament scholars (at regional and national Society of Biblical Literature meetings), I became aware that many of them lacked training in the Semitic background of the New Testament. I was bumping into New Testament scholars who had studied Greek and knew something of the Greco-Roman world, but had only the feeblest ability with Hebrew and Aramaic (if at all). Most knew little of early rabbinic literature and the Aramaic paraphrases of Scripture.

This deficiency on the part of so many New Testament scholars helps explain the oddness of much of the work of the Jesus Seminar, founded by Robert Funk in 1985. Whereas many of the Seminar's members have been exposed to Greek literature and Greco-Roman culture and conventions, not many of them appear to have competence in the Semitic (Jewish) world of Jesus. Few seem acquainted with the land of Israel itself. Few have done any archaeological work. Few know rabbinic literature and the Aramaic paraphrases of Scripture. As a consequence of these deficiencies, it is not surprising that the Jesus Seminar has come to so many odd and implausible conclusions. For example, the Seminar does not understand what Jesus meant by his reference to "kingdom of God." The Seminar has completely misunderstood the meaning of eschatology and holds to a skewed idea of the meaning of Jesus' favorite self-designation "Son of Man." Moreover, the Seminar finds no meaningful place for Israel's Scripture in Jesus' self-understanding and teaching. The Seminar's errors are egregious and legion. Unfortunately, the Seminar has gained a great deal of media attention and has cultivated a series of books that advance misguided and mistaken views of Jesus and the Gospels—both those in the New Testament and those outside the New Testament. *Fabricating Jesus* will address just these sorts of issues.

I am a Christian. I was a Christian before going to seminary and graduate school, and I still am after completing school and teaching and publishing for more than a quarter century. When some of my friends at seminary learned that I would be entering Claremont to pursue a doctorate, I was





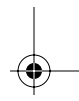
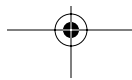
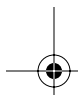
warned that critical study would not be good for my faith. Of course, I had heard of some who after becoming involved in critical research had given up faith. I will speak to that topic in the first chapter.

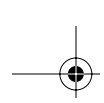
My academic life has not resulted in the loss of faith. Aspects of my faith have changed, to be sure. Not everything is as cut and dried, black and white, as it once was. There are aspects of theology that remain uncertain, historical details that remain unclear. But then again, I have found that that was the way it was for Jesus and his earliest followers. Maybe not having pat answers for everything is what faith is all about.

At first, I must admit, I found aspects of biblical criticism unsettling. But in time I realized that what biblical criticism challenged was not the essence of the Christian message, but the baggage that many think is part of the message. Typically this baggage includes views of authorship and dates of given biblical books (for example, the idea that biblical books must be early and written by apostles even when they make no such claim), as well as assumptions regarding the nature of biblical literature (for example, the belief that the Gospels are history and nothing else) and the nature of Jesus' teaching (for example, the view that everything Jesus said was wholly unique and never before heard). In time I was able to distinguish the baggage from the message. In fact, I can say that biblical criticism rescued the message and helped me see it and appreciate it more fully.

I have found careful, searching study of the historical Jesus rewarding. I love to lecture. I love to preach. I love to tell the stories of the Gospels. I love to see the look in the faces of people in the congregation when they first understand what Jesus meant—what he really meant—when he said or did something. I am always touched when I see how the story of Jesus affects people and brings positive change to their lives. The story of the sinful woman (Luke 7), or the good Samaritan (Luke 10), or the prodigal son (Luke 15), if proclaimed in proper context, results in forgiveness, reconciliation and even self-reproach. It seems that none of the power Jesus exuded has diminished in the passage of time.

I have found that the better we come to understand who Jesus was, what he said and how he was understood by his contemporaries, the more we appreciate him and the movement that he inaugurated. When Jesus' actions





or words are misunderstood, problems begin. I have found that lying behind assertions to the effect “Jesus could not have said this” are mistakes in interpretation, usually due to a failure to view the saying in its proper context and setting.

*Fabricating Jesus* is a book that takes a hard look at some of the sloppy scholarship and misguided theories that have been advanced in recent years. I am appalled at much of this work. Some of it, frankly, is embarrassing.

*Fabricating Jesus* is written at a popular level and is primarily intended for nonexperts who find much that has been said about Jesus in recent years terribly confusing. Notes are kept to a minimum and are gathered at the back of the book. I have tried to define terms common in biblical studies but unfamiliar to general readers as I introduce them; in addition, I have appended a glossary at the back for quick reference. A list of recommended books is provided for any readers who want to look in more depth at the documents and scholarly literature that stand behind my arguments and conclusions.

I want to thank Jim Hoover of InterVarsity Press, who invited me to write this book and provided me with many great ideas and insights. I also thank my wife, Ginny, who graciously read through the whole manuscript, one chapter at a time, and asked me those important questions, such as, “What does this mean?” Because of her care and attention, the book is much easier to read. And finally, a word of thanks is due Danny Zacharias, who assisted with the preparation of the indexes.

*Craig A. Evans*

