



The Jesus Seminar Revealed

By

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Part One

The Jesus Seminar was a group of “scholars and specialists” interested in renewing “the quest of the historical Jesus.” The name Jesus Seminar would imply that this group had good credentials and would reveal something important about the real life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. That didn’t happen.

According to The Jesus Seminar –

“Among the findings is that, in the judgment of the Jesus Seminar Fellows, about 18 percent of the sayings and 16 percent of the deeds attributed to Jesus in the gospels are authentic.”

Another way of understanding that statement is that 82 percent of the sayings and 84 percent of the deeds attributed to Jesus in the Gospels are NOT authentic.

Let that sink in for a minute

The Jesus Seminar would have us believe that the vast majority of what's written about the sayings and deeds of Jesus Christ in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) are NOT authentic – not true – never said – never done.

Was The Jesus Seminar right?

If you've read other articles on the FaithandSelfDefense and GraceLife blogs, you know I think The Jesus Seminar was wrong – very wrong. To understand how so-called scholars and specialists reached their conclusions about Jesus and the four Gospels, we need to know a little about how The Jesus Seminar started.

It began in Berkeley, California in 1985 as the brain child of Robert W. Funk. Here's part of what Funk said in his opening remarks at the launch of The Jesus Seminar –

“We are about to embark on a momentous enterprise. We are going to inquire simply, rigorously after the voice of Jesus, after what he really said. In this process, we will be asking a question that borders the sacred, that even abuts blasphemy, for many in our society. As a consequence, the course we shall follow may prove hazardous. We may well provoke hostility. But we will set out, in spite of the dangers,

because we are professionals and because the issue of Jesus is there to be faced, much as Mt. Everest confronts the team of climbers.”

The Jesus Seminar started with 30 scholars at the initial meeting and grew to more than 200 specialists, called Fellows, who participated in various phases from 1985 – 1998. The fellows met twice a year to debate papers that had been circulated prior to their meeting. After debating the issues before them, the fellows used colored beads to vote on the “authenticity” of the sayings and deeds attributed to Jesus in the four Gospels.

It’s interesting to note that Funk was most excited about what he read in some of the ancient gnostic writings about Jesus, especially the Gospel of Thomas. That interest eventually led to his publishing *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say? The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (HarperOne, 1996), which added the Gospel of Thomas to the traditional Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. The Five Gospels also included a new Scholars Version (SV) that was supposed to be “free of ecclesiastical and religious control.” What did control the SV was the color-coding of The Jesus Seminar that demonstrated the belief that Jesus did not say most of the words attributed to Him in other versions of the New Testament.

“We have new and tantalizing primary sources with which to work, such as the Gospel of Thomas, the Apocryphon of James, the Dialogue of the Savior, and we stand on the verge of new study instruments, such as the New Gospel Parallels, the new Sayings Parallels, and perhaps even a new and more tolerable translation of other New Testament apocrypha.”

Opening Remarks, 1985

Jesus Seminar Presuppositions

While Funk gave the impression in 1985 that The Jesus Seminar would be a scholarly undertaking, he revealed his presuppositions that would drive the group from the beginning. Here’s how he began his “reveal” –

“Since we are Bible scholars, let us begin with the Bible as a whole. The Bible begins, we are wont to say, at the Beginning and concludes with a vision of the heavenly city, the ultimate End. Traditionally, the Bible is taken as a coherent structure: the Apocalypse is thought to bring things around again to their original state; the evil introduced into the garden in the first instance is eradicated in the last. And the beginning and end are viewed as wholly consonant with the real events that occur between them. Thus, the Christian savior figure is interpreted as belonging to the primeval innocence of the garden and yet predicting and precipitating the final outcome.

There are two things to be said about this scheme. First, we are having increasing difficulty these days in accepting the biblical account of the creation and of the apocalyptic conclusion in anything like a literal sense. The difficulty just mentioned is connected with a second feature: we now know that narrative accounts of ourselves, our nation, the Western tradition, and the history of the world, are fictions.

Narrative fictions, aside from recent experiments in “structureless” novels, must have a beginning and an end and be located in space. They must involve a finite number of participants and obviously depict a limited number of events. Moreover, it is required of narratives that there be some fundamental continuity in participants and some connection between and among events that form the narrative chain. It is in this formal sense that the Bible is said to form a narrative and to embrace in its several parts a coherent and continuous structure. And it is also in this same sense that the Bible, along with all our histories, is a fiction.

A fiction is thus a selection—arbitrary in nature—of participants and events arranged in a connected chain and on a chronological line with an arbitrary beginning and ending. In sum, we make up all our “stories”—out of real enough material, of course—in relation to imaginary constructs, within temporal limits.

Our fictions, although deliberately fictive, are nevertheless not subject to proof or falsification. We do not abandon them because they are demonstrably false, but because they lose their “operational effectiveness,” because they fail to account for enough of what we take to be real in the everyday course of events. Fictions of the sciences or of law are discarded when they no longer match our living experience of things. But religious fictions, like those found in the Bible, are more tenacious because they “are harder to free from mythical ‘deposit,’ as Frank Kermode puts it. ‘If we forget that fictions are fictive we regress to myth.’ The Bible has become mostly myth in Kermode’s sense of the term, since the majority in our society do not hold that the fictions of the Bible are indeed fictive.

Our dilemma is becoming acute: just as the beginning of the created world is receding in geological time before our very eyes, so the future no longer presents itself as naive imminence. Many of us believe that the world may be turned into cinder one day soon without an accompanying conviction that Armageddon is upon us. But our crisis goes beyond these terminal points: it affects the middle as well. Those of us who work with that hypothetical middle—Jesus of Nazareth—are hard pressed to concoct any form of coherence that will unite beginning, middle, and end in some grand new fiction that will meet all the requirements of narrative. To put the matter bluntly, we are having as much trouble with the middle—the messiah—as we are with the terminal

points. What we need is a new fiction that takes as its starting point the central event in the Judeo-Christian drama and reconciles that middle with a new story that reaches beyond old beginnings and endings. In sum, we need a new narrative of Jesus, a new gospel, if you will, that places Jesus differently in the grand scheme, the epic story.” Jesus Seminar Opening Remarks, 1985

So there you have it. From the very beginning, Robert Funk and the Jesus Seminar revealed itself as nothing more than another attempt to “rewrite” the life of Jesus – something straight out of the ancient “gnostics” playbook. These so-called “scholars and specialists” were not then and are not now part of any real attempt to determine what is true about the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus Christ. They are simply part of a scheme to write “another” gospel.

Why We Should Care

The Jesus Seminar ended its work in 1998, so why should we care about it 20 years later? At least two answers come to mind:

First, many of the “scholars” and “specialists” who participated in The Jesus Seminar have written books and articles, have been widely interviewed by the national media, and are still talking publicly about the issues raised in the Seminar. They also appear in video interviews and

debates and are heralded and quoted by many atheists online and in social media discussions, posts, etc. The atheists use the supposed scholarship of The Jesus Seminar to bolster their own views as they attempt to destroy the faith of Christians through such devices as “street epistemology.” Some of the better-known members of The Jesus Seminar include John Dominic Crossan, Marcus Borg, Robert Price, Harold Attridge, Karen Leigh King, James M. Robinson, Burton L. Mack, Barbara Thiering, Lloyd Geering and Stephen Harris.

Second, the impact of the Jesus Seminar did not end with its final report. It gave birth to other “seminars,” some that are still active.

- Paul Seminar, Completed (1993 – 2010)
- Christian Origins, Completed (2006 – 2009)
- Acts of the Apostles, Completed (2001 – 2011)
- Seminar on God and the Human Future, Active (2013 – current)
- Christianity Seminar, Active (2013 – current)

Here’s how the Seminar on God and the Human Future explains the impact of The Jesus Seminar on its work –

“The academic Seminar on God and the Human Future began its work in 2013. Inspired by the pioneering research and public notice of the Jesus Seminar, it has sought to attract a new generation of scholars to

the mission and ongoing work of the Westar Institute. In a short time it has attracted over thirty participating Research Fellows who together are exploring new ways and new images for thinking about God in a post-theistic context.

Unlike past Westar seminars, the God Seminar consists primarily of philosophers of religion, critical theorists, and radical theologians rather than biblical scholars and historians. At the same time, as was confirmed in one of the seminar's earliest votes, the work of the God Seminar acknowledges its debt, is engaged in conversation with, and is deeply informed by the historical critical work in biblical scholarship for which Westar has been known." WestarInstitute.org

Do any of the two active seminars have an interest in real scholarship? See for yourself –

“Begun in 2013, the Christianity Seminar aims to rewrite the history of early Christianity. The scholars of the seminar have broken through to new understandings of many disparate movements in the first four centuries of the Common Era. As the Seminar enters the second half of its first decade, these historians of religion are poised to write their first major book for the public on the first two centuries.

The Seminar has already undone the pretentious “master narrative” of how Christianity emerged. In place of the myth of an orderly apostolic Church fighting heretics, this fresh scholarship has shown how under the thumb of the violent Roman empire a diversity of struggling groups were re-imagining how to belong. The first two centuries did not produce the Church victorious, but rather a plethora of ways for different ethnic groups to re-invent themselves in overlapping units that resisted Roman domination.” WestarInstitute.org

Don't hold your breath waiting for any “real” scholarship to come from the presuppositions of Westar Institute. They have a history of “rewriting” Christian history. That's their stated purpose and goal, so we have their “reveal.”

Part Two

In part one of our report, we looked at The Jesus Seminar and its impact on other “seminars” conducted as part of the Westar Institute.

I admit to being slightly amused at this statement on the Westar Institute website –

“Westar is not affiliated with any religious institution and does not advocate a particular theological point of view.”

That’s an interesting statement in light of their stated point of view about Christian theology, as you read in our previous report.

In part two, we will look at the founder of The Jesus Seminar and Westar Institute and his stated purposes for “rewriting” the history of Christianity.

Robert W. Funk (1926 – 2005) had a long history as an academic. He earned a B.D. from Christian Theological Seminary, an M.A. from Butler University, and Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University. Funk’s teaching career included Texas Christian University, Harvard Divinity School, Emory University, Vanderbilt University, and the University of Montana where he was Professor of Religious Studies from 1969-1986. Funk became Co-

Chair of The Jesus Seminar in 1985 and founded Westar Institute a year later.

This is how Funk was memorialized after his death –

“A distinguished teacher, writer, translator and publisher in the field of religious studies, Robert Funk retired from the University of Montana in 1986 to found the Westar Institute, a non-profit research and educational institute dedicated to the advancement of religious literacy. Westar’s first project, the Jesus Seminar, renewed the quest for the historical Jesus begun by David Friedrich Strauss in the nineteenth century and later taken up by Albert Schweitzer at the beginning of the twentieth. At the opening session of the Jesus Seminar in 1985, Funk defined its mission as follows: “We are going to inquire simply, rigorously after the voice of Jesus, after what he really said.” The Jesus of Nazareth discovered by the Jesus Seminar was a wisdom teacher whose parables proclaimed the arrival of God’s kingdom. He was not, in the judgment of the Seminar, the messiah of the end-times. These and other findings of the Seminar drew widespread attention throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Funk further influenced the course of biblical scholarship by insisting that Fellows of the Jesus Seminar communicate the results of biblical scholarship directly to the literate public.” Robert Walter Funk, In Memoriam – Westar Institute

The Quest Renewed

The “quest” for the historical Jesus began long before The Jesus Seminar convened in 1985. David Friedrich Strauss (1808 – 1874) was a German philosopher and theologian who published *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (*Das Leben Jesu kritisch bearbeitet*) in 1835. He denied the historical value of the Gospels and rejected their supernatural claims as “historical myth.” He believed that came from 2nd century writers who wrote the “legend” of Christianity because of the “hopes” of believers. Strauss published *The Old Faith and the New* (*Der alte und der neue Glaube*) shortly before his death. It was his attempt to replace Christianity with a Darwinian type scientific materialism.

Albert Schweitzer (1875 – 1965) was a French-German theologian, philosopher and mission doctor who received the Nobel Prize for Peace in 1952. He was also the author of *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (1906) and *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (1931).

Schweitzer summed up his findings in *The Quest* this way –

The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward publicly as the Messiah, who preached the ethic of the kingdom of God, who founded the kingdom of heaven upon earth and died to give his work its final consecration never

existed. He is a figure designed by rationalism, endowed with life by liberalism, and clothed by modern theology in a historical garb ...

Whatever the definite solution may be, the historical Jesus whom research will depict, on the basis of the problems which have been recognized and admitted, can never render modern theology the services which it claimed from its own semi-historical, semi-modern Jesus. He will no longer be a Jesus Christ to whom the religion of the present can ascribe, according to its long-cherished custom, its own thoughts and ideas, as it did with the Jesus of its own making. Nor will he be a figure who by a popular historical treatment can be made as sympathetic and universally intelligible to the multitude. With the specific characteristics of his notions and his actions, the historical Jesus will be to our times a stranger and an enigma.” *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Albert Schweitzer, First Fortress Press, 2001, p 478

Robert Funk wrote about historical milestones in the “quest” for the historical Jesus and included this –

“The quest for the historical Jesus has been underway for more than two centuries. It was launched about 1775, the same time the United States was being founded. Its progress is marked by milestones, landmark developments that represent the transition from one stage to another. The axioms that govern the current consensus emerged over that span

of time.” *Milestones in the Quest for the Historical Jesus*, Westar Institute, 2001

Funk included the following scholars as part of the “milestones” in the quest for the historical Jesus –

- Hermann Samuel Reimarus – *The Aims of Jesus and His Disciples* – 1778
- David Friedrich Strauss – *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* – 1835
- Christian Hermann Weisse – *The Gospel History Critically and Philosophically Investigated* – 1838
- Heinrich Julius Holtzmann – *The Synoptic Gospels* – 1863
- Johannes Weiss – *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* – 1892
- Wilhelm Wrede – *The Messianic Secret in the Gospels* – 1901
- Albert Schweitzer – *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* – 1906
- Karl Ludwig Schmidt – *The Framework of the Gospels* – 1919
- Rudolf Bultmann – *History of the Synoptic Tradition* – 1921
- Ernst Käsemann – “The Problem of the Historical Jesus” article – 1953
- Günther Bornkamm – *Jesus of Nazareth* – 1956
- James M. Robinson – *The New Quest of the Historical Jesus* – 1959

- Rudolf Bultmann – “New Testament and Mythology,” essay in *Kerygma and Myth* – 1961
- Amos Wilder – *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric* – 1964
- Robert W. Funk – *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* – 1966
- Dan O. Via – *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* – 1967
- Geza Vermes – *Jesus the Jew: A Historian’s Reading of the Gospel* – 1973
- John Dominic Crossan – *The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* – 1973
- John Dominic Crossan – *In Fragments: The Aphorisms of Jesus* – 1983
- Marc Borg – *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* – 1984
- Thomas Sheehan – *The First Coming: How the Kingdom of God Became Christianity* – 1986
- Marc Borg – *Jesus: A New Vision* – 1987
- E. P. Sanders – *Jesus and Judaism* – 1985
- Burton Mack – *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* – 1988
- John P. Meier – *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus. Vol. 1, The Roots of the Problem and the Person* – 1991

- John Dominic Crossan – *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* – 1991
- Ben Witherington – *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* – 1992
- E. P. Sanders – *The Historical Figure of Jesus* – 1993
- Burton Mack – *The Lost Gospel: The Book of Q and Christian Origins* – 1993
- Stephen J. Patterson – *The Gospel of Thomas and Jesus* – 1993
- Marc Borg – *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time: The Historical Jesus and the Heart of Contemporary Faith* – 1994
- John Dominic Crossan – *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* – 1994
- Leif E. Vaage – *Galilean Upstarts: Jesus' First Followers According to Q* – 1994
- John Dominic Crossan – *Who Killed Jesus? Exposing the Roots of Anti-Semitism in the Gospel Story of the Death of Jesus* – 1995
- Burton Mack – *Who Wrote the New Testament? The Making of the Christian Myth* – 1995
- N. T. Wright – *Jesus and the Victory of God* – 1996
- Robert Funk – *Honest to Jesus* – 1996
- N. T. Wright – *The Original Jesus* – 1997
- Dale Allison – *Jesus of Nazareth. Millenarian Prophet* – 1998
- Stephen J. Patterson – *The God of Jesus. The Historical Jesus and the Search for Meaning* – 1998

Robert Funk wrote this about the “renewed” quest in 2001 –

“The Renewed Quest, on the other hand, is by and large dedicated to the separation of Jesus from the views of his early followers, and thus to the goal set by Reimarus and endorsed by D. F. Strauss. The Five Gospels and The Acts of Jesus have attempted to carry that task to its logical conclusion. And it has attempted to do so by rigorous adherence to the milestones sketched above. Of course, like our predecessors, the Fellows of the Seminar are acutely aware that some of their work is tentative and will require modification. At some future generation, it will be decided whether we succeeded sufficiently to be awarded a place in a new history of the milestones of the quest.”

Westar Institute Today

What about the Westar Institute today, 13 years after the death of its founder Robert Funk?

“Westar Institute — home of the Jesus Seminar — is dedicated to fostering and communicating the results of cutting-edge scholarship on the history and evolution of the Christian tradition, thereby raising the level of public discourse about questions that matter in society and culture.

Westar is a non-profit, public-benefit research and educational organization that bridges the gap between scholarship about religion and the perception of religion in popular culture. In pursuit of its mission:

- Westar conducts collaborative, cumulative research in the academic study of religion, addressing issues, questions, and controversies that are important both to the academic community and to the general public.
- Westar communicates the results of its research in non-technical terms, equipping the general public with tools to critically evaluate competing claims in the public discussion of religion.” Westar Institute Mission Statement

Part Three

Westar Institute's "mission" statement claims that the organization "is dedicated to fostering and communicating the results of cutting-edge scholarship on the history and evolution of the Christian tradition, thereby raising the level of public discourse about questions that matter in society and culture."

Question: how "cutting-edge" is Westar's scholarship?

"The reason for the popularity of the Jesus Seminar, at least for a short time, was not because it was brilliant, cutting-edge, top-notch scholarship. Rather, its popularity lay in that it was saying something many Americans wanted to hear. The Jesus Seminar sounded scientific, while appealing to the popular imagination. These scholars were saying there is a different way of construing Christianity, which is neither the right-wing Protestantism nor the right-wing Catholicism with which we grew up – and it is certainly quite unlike televangelism." N.T. Wright, *Seven Problems with the Jesus Seminar*, 2001

I begin with N.T. Wright because Robert Funk included Wright in his “milestones” of the quest for the historical Jesus (detailed in our last report). I addressed the “presuppositions” of Funk and The Jesus Seminar in an earlier report. Here’s more on that from Christian philosopher and professor William Lane Craig –

“Now look carefully at what the Jesus Seminar says about Strauss:

‘Strauss distinguished what he called the ‘mythical’ (defined by him as anything legendary or supernatural) in the Gospels from the historical The choice Strauss posed in his assessment of the Gospels was between the supernatural Jesus, the Christ of faith, and the historical Jesus.

Anything that is supernatural is by definition not historical. There’s no argument given; it’s just defined that way. Thus we have a radical divorce between the Christ of faith, or the supernatural Jesus, and the real, historical Jesus. Now the Jesus Seminar gives a ringing endorsement of Strauss’s distinction: they say that the distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith is “the first pillar of scholarly wisdom.’

But now the whole quest of the historical Jesus becomes a charade. If you begin by presupposing naturalism, then of course what you wind up

with is a purely natural Jesus! This reconstructed, naturalistic Jesus is not based on evidence, but on definition. What is amazing is that the Jesus Seminar makes no attempt to defend this naturalism; it is just presupposed. But this presupposition is wholly unjustified. As long as the existence of God is even possible, then we have to be open to the possibility that He has acted miraculously in the universe. Only if you have a proof for atheism can you be justified in thinking miracles are impossible.

This raises the very real question of whether the fellows of the Jesus Seminar even believe that God really exists.” William Lane Craig, *Presuppositions and Pretensions of the Jesus Seminar*, Reasonable Faith

Westar presents itself as a scholarly institute, but is it? Can a scholarly institute that operates as an agenda-driven organization to undermine orthodox Christianity be called “scholarly?” Funk, who spoke about the Bible as “fiction,” wrote this about Jesus –

“Those of us who work with that hypothetical middle—Jesus of Nazareth—are hard pressed to concoct any form of coherence that will unite beginning, middle, and end in some grand new fiction that will meet all the requirements of narrative. To put the matter bluntly, we are having as much trouble with the middle—the messiah—as we are with the terminal

points. What we need is a new fiction that takes as its starting point the central event in the Judeo-Christian drama and reconciles that middle with a new story that reaches beyond old beginnings and endings. In sum, we need a new narrative of Jesus, a new gospel, if you will, that places Jesus differently in the grand scheme, the epic story ... The fiction of Revelation keeps many common folk in bondage to ignorance and fear. We require a new, liberating fiction, one that squares with the best knowledge we can now accumulate and one that transcends self-serving ideologies. And we need a fiction that we recognize to be fictive.”

Robert Funk, Jesus Seminar Opening Remarks, 1985

That was part of Funk’s speech at the launch of The Jesus Seminar more than 30 years ago. Not sure how his need for “a new fiction” concerning Jesus Christ advances scholarship – but there you have it, part of Funk and Westar’s “fostering and communicating the results of cutting-edge scholarship on the history and evolution of the Christian tradition.”

Funk-y Theology

The “scholarship” of Robert Funk and Westar Institute reached the bottom rung (humble opinion) in 1998 when he wrote these words about theology. Be sure to fasten your seatbelt!

“The God of the metaphysical age is dead. There is not a personal god out there external to human beings and the material world.

The deliteralization of the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis brought an end to the dogma of original sin as something inherited from the first human being.

Miracles are an affront to the justice and integrity of God, however understood.

Prayer is meaningless when understood as requests addressed to an external God for favor or forgiveness and meaningless if God does not interfere with the laws of nature.

We should give Jesus a demotion. It is no longer credible to think of Jesus as divine. Jesus’ divinity goes together with the old theistic way of thinking about God.

The plot early Christians invented for a divine redeemer figure is as archaic as the mythology in which it is framed. A Jesus who drops down out of heaven, performs some magical act that frees human beings from the power of sin, rises from the dead, and returns to heaven is simply no longer credible. The notion that he will return at the end of time and sit in

cosmic judgment is equally incredible. We must find a new plot for a more credible Jesus.

The virgin birth of Jesus is an insult to modern intelligence and should be abandoned. In addition, it is a pernicious doctrine that denigrates women.

The doctrine of the atonement—the claim that God killed his own son in order to satisfy his thirst for satisfaction—is subrational and subethical. This monstrous doctrine is the stepchild of a primitive sacrificial system in which the gods had to be appeased by offering them some special gift, such as a child or an animal.

The resurrection of Jesus did not involve the resuscitation of a corpse. Jesus did not rise from the dead, except perhaps in some metaphorical sense.

The New Testament is a highly uneven and biased record of orthodox attempts to invent Christianity.

The Bible does not contain fixed, objective standards of behavior that should govern human behavior for all time. This includes the ten commandments as well as the admonitions of Jesus.” Robert Funk, *The Coming Radical Reformation*, 1998

Keep in mind that The Jesus Seminar completed its work in 1998, so Funk was writing from the vast array of great “scholarship” that he and scores of other “scholars” were able to determine after 13 years of collaboration.

I learned many years ago as a radio and television journalist to let people speak for themselves whenever possible. There’s nothing like hearing what people believe from their own mouths. Remember that Funk called himself a scholar. How does this “scholar” recommend we deal with his “revelations” about God, the Bible and Jesus?

“In rearticulating the vision of Jesus, we should take care to express ourselves in the same register as he employed in his parables and aphorisms—paradox, hyperbole, exaggeration, and metaphor. Further, our reconstructions of his vision should be provisional, always subject to modification and correction.” *The Coming Radical Reformation*

Playing the Public

One of Funk’s primary goals for The Jesus Seminar was that everything they did would be “public.” That was public relations genius on his part.

“Our basic plan is simple. We intend to examine every fragment of the traditions attached to the name of Jesus in order to determine what he

really said—not his literal words, perhaps, but the substance and style of his utterances. We are in quest of his voice, insofar as it can be distinguished from many other voices also preserved in the tradition. We are prepared to bring to bear everything we know and can learn about the form and content, about the formation and transmission, of aphorisms and parables, dialogues and debates, attributed or attributable to Jesus, in order to carry out our task.” Robert Funk, Jesus Seminar Opening Remarks, 1985

The media ate up the opportunity to interview Bible “scholars” who believed the theological points listed earlier from Funk. There is a strong ‘anti-God, anti-Bible, anti-Christ’ view among members of the news media and it’s been that way for a long time. I used to be one of them in my early days in radio and television in the 1960s. The Jesus Seminar was a ready-made ‘revisionist agenda’ machine for people trying to erode belief in historic Christianity. Funk and other members of the Jesus Seminar were interviewed many times for many years and were presented by the media as biblical “experts.” For many members of the public who didn’t know better, they bought what the Seminar members were selling.

Here’s a media coverage example from a Los Angeles Times story from March 22, 1995. I found the writer’s question to be insightful.

“The Jesus Seminar has asserted most of the words attributed to Jesus in the Gospels are fabrications. They also advised us of their opinion that the physical Resurrection of Jesus is also a fabrication. It’s only a matter of time before they decide there was no crucifixion and, from there, it’s just a short hop to the declaration there was no Jesus at all. Why are they fudging? Instead of chipping away at the Christian faith, why not just declare the whole thing a hoax and be done with it?” Los Angeles Times Articles Archives

In Summary

The Jesus Seminar concluded its work 20 years ago, but the work of Westar Institute continues. Other seminar topics have been completed and two more are still active. Robert Funk died 13 years ago, but the work of Westar Institute continues. It would be a mistake to think that the influence of The Jesus Seminar has disappeared or even waned. The impact of its conclusion in 1998 and the many books that seminar members have written since that time is still being felt in our world – from the classroom to the boardroom. The impetus of the seminar that has led to even more seminars and books continues to bring fresh debate into the public arena through the media every Christmas and Easter season as the media places Westar’s so-called “scholarship” about Jesus Christ on public display. Thousands of today’s college and seminary professors once sat in classrooms as students and learned about the Seminar’s conclusions.

They are now teaching those same beliefs to their students who will one day be teachers and business, community and church leaders. Many are now teaching 'theology' in Christian colleges and seminaries and leading another generation down a bad path of poor scholarship and erroneous theology.

I hope this brief series of reports about *The Jesus Seminar Revealed* will stir within you the desire for good biblical scholarship .. and to that end please click on the links below to learn more.

Reference Sites for Further Reading and Viewing

<https://www.reasonablefaith.org/writings/popular-writings/jesus-of-nazareth/presuppositions-and-pretensions-of-the-jesus-seminar/>

[How Seriously Do Scholars Take The Jesus Seminar?](#)

http://www.garyhabermas.com/books/EvidenceBook/GaryHabermas_Evidence-for-the-historical-Jesus-Release_1point1.pdf

[Refuting the Jesus Seminar | Part 1 | Gary Habermas, PhD](#)

<http://ntwrightpage.com/1999/01/01/five-gospels-but-no-gospel-jesus-and-the-the-seminary/>

What is your opinion Dr. Wright, of the conclusions reached by the Jesus Seminar?

<https://www.str.org/articles/the-jesus-seminar-under-fire#.WqnGEGaZP-Y>

<https://www.apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=589>

<http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/jesussem.html>

<https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/221-jesus-seminar-part-1-the>

<https://albertmohler.com/2004/07/15/the-scandal-of-the-empty-tomb-the-glory-of-the-resurrection/>