

The Quest for the Hysterical Jesus

A Brief Critique of the Jesus Seminar

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Introduction: Christ Conformed to the Image of Man

It would seem that there is a different Jesus for every Jesus scholar.¹ Depending on the opinion in focus, Jesus could be a social revolutionary, a religious zealot (of dubious mental stability), a theological creation, a wise teacher, or a devil incarnate. Now the recent effort of a group of scholars calling themselves the “Jesus Seminar”² claims to have solved the “endless proliferation of views of Jesus”³ and found the true, authentic, historical Jesus.

According to the Jesus Seminar, Biblical scholarship has been enslaved too long by the “theological interdiction” (4) of churches, seminaries, and religious orthodoxy, but new liberties in the scholarly world have slowly wrestled control of Jesus away from the “perspectives of theology and traditional creedal formulations” into the “new lens of historical reason and research” (2). This Jesus is not held captive by “prior theological commitments” (5), nor is he bound by the Gospel “narratives in which the memory of Jesus is embellished by mythic elements... and by plausible fictions...” (4). This Jesus has not been created by “facts [marshaled] to support preconceived convictions,” for the “fatal pitfall” of the quest for the historical Jesus is “finding a Jesus entirely congenial to you” (5). Rather, the Jesus of the Jesus Seminar, who was found using tools at the “cutting edge of American New Testament scholarship,”⁴ is the actual historical Jesus, the authentic, distinctive, “enigmatic sage from Nazareth” (4).

Or is he?

The Jesus of the Jesus Seminar is not the real historical figure, but a man made in the image of his creators. Despite their claim to objectivity, the Jesus Seminar has fallen into their own “fatal pitfall” and has forgotten its own “final general rule of evidence” (5), for they found the Jesus that they

¹ Scot McKnight, “Who is Jesus? An Introduction to Jesus Studies,” *Jesus Under Fire* (M. Wilkins and J. Moreland, eds.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 55.

² The purpose of this essay is not to critique the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar community, but their “Jesus” and their methods for “finding” him. However, the many claims (page numbers are listed in parenthesis of a few examples) of the solid biblical scholarship of the Jesus Seminar in the introduction to *The Five Gospels: What Did Jesus Really Say?* by Robert Funk, Roy Hoover, and the Jesus Seminar ([New York: Macmillan, 1993] 1-38), do beg the question: What evidence exists to prove that these men and women are “Leading scholars” (1), “responsible scholars” (5), “gospel specialists” (5), “professionally trained specialists” (34), “critical scholars” (34), and “academics” (36)? Are they really to be set apart from their peers in the “skeptical left wing scholarship” (5) and the “elitist academic critics” (34) they discount? Is their scholarship really representative of “the kind that has come to prevail in all the great universities of the world” (35)? Is the fact that “most have had advanced training in biblical studies... [or] hold a Ph.D. or *equivalent*” (544, emphasis added) sufficient to qualify them? The answers to these questions, though, are better left to another essay. See Craig Blomberg’s “Where Do We Start Studying Jesus?” *Jesus Under Fire*, 18-50.

³ Funk, et al., *The Five Gospels*, 6. All future references to *The Five Gospels* in this essay will be parenthetical in the text.

⁴ Kim Riddlebarger, “Demythologizing the Five Gospels of the Jesus Seminar: An Exercise in Reductio Ad Absurdum,” Online article at www.alliancenet.org/pub/articles/riddlebarger.JesusSeminar.html (Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals, 1996). While Riddlebarger’s sarcasm should not be overlooked, he is reacting to actual claims of the Jesus Seminar.

wanted to find⁵—a tame, pithy, laconic sage who might be called “the first stand-up Jewish comic.”⁶ But how could this be? The Jesus Seminar was to be “a clarion call to enlightenment... for those who prefer facts to fancies, history to histrionics, science to superstition.”⁷ Its presuppositions were to be unencumbered by the “shifting sands” (5) of American fundamentalism; its methods promised to strip away every bias and presupposition to “liberate Jesus;”⁸ its influence was to spread beyond “a handful of gospel specialists” to the “poorly informed” masses of the public (34). Nevertheless, the presuppositions, methods, and influence of the Seminar community are not immune to the bias that would create a Jesus in its own image: their inclination was “to make Jesus himself affirm what they themselves had come to believe” (24).⁹

Presuppositions: Anti-theological Theology

Of all the presuppositions behind the work of the Jesus Seminar, the most dangerous is their belief that the Jesus of history is *completely* different from the Jesus of theology and faith. The Jesus Seminar goes to great lengths to demonstrate that their analysis of Jesus is designed to “disengage the Jesus of history from the Christ of the church’s faith” (7) and be free from “the dark ages of theological tyranny” (8). Yet, in seeking to be objective and unbound by traditional assumptions, the Jesus Seminar binds itself to a prior conclusion dictated by their *modern* assumptions.

From the outset, the Seminar committed “to a strict philosophical naturalism.”¹⁰ This naturalism denies the possibility of the supernatural, and therefore, it denies the possibility of the virgin birth, healings, miracles, exorcisms, prophecy, and the Resurrection. According to the Seminar, a commitment to the theological assumptions of supernatural phenomena results in “windowless

⁵ Here the line between personal attacks against Jesus Seminar Fellows and genuine scholarly criticism against their views is blurred, for if the Jesus of the Seminar is the Jesus they wanted to find, one would need to show how the beliefs of a fellow coincides with the type of Jesus “found.” For example, the Jesus Seminar Cofounder John Dominic Crossan claims that “the historical Jesus was a peasant Jewish cynic” (*Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994] 198), but Crossan himself is a Catholic cynic who denies the virgin birth and the resurrection. However, the present essay will focus primarily on how the Jesus of the Jesus Seminar conforms to the presuppositions and naturalistic biases of the Seminar, not the beliefs of individual members.

⁶ Robert Funk quoted in “Facts About the Jesus Seminar and Founder Robert W. Funk,” Online article at answers.org/apologetics/jesuseminar.html (Costa Mesa, CA: Answers in Action, nd) 3.

⁷ Robert Funk, *The Gospel of Mark, Red Letter Edition* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge Press, 1991) xvi-xvii.

⁸ Robert Funk in an interview by Mary Rourke, “Cross Examination,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 February 1994, E1, E5. Quoted in M. Wilkins and J. Moreland, “Introduction: The Furor Surrounding Jesus,” *Jesus Under Fire*, 2.

⁹ However, the irony is that in the above quote on page 24 of *The Five Gospels*, the Jesus Seminar accuses the Christians and gospel writers of perverting the historical Jesus to serve their own preconceived notions: “Christian conviction eventually overwhelms Jesus: he is made to confess what Christians had come to believe.” Yet, the Jesus Seminar does the same thing.

¹⁰ M. Wilkins and J. Moreland, “The Furor Surrounding Jesus,” 4.

studies” (1) and the tendency to twist the evidence to fit “dogmatic considerations” (34).¹¹ To be true to their naturalistic assumptions, “the Fellows of the Seminar are... to make empirical, factual evidence... the controlling factor in historical judgments” (34). But is this rejection of the supernatural legitimate for Biblical scholars?

Ultimately, the problem with the Jesus Seminar’s methodology comes down to an issue of authority, an issue that Biblical scholarship has struggled with since the Enlightenment: by what standard is truth determined? The Seminar would have the world believe that its “rules of evidence” (16) are a sufficient standard to evaluate the veracity of the New Testament claims about Jesus—claims that are, of course, characterized as only “hearsay evidence” (16) requiring cautious acceptance. But such efforts to demythologize the New Testament according to human reasoning are hardly new or creative, despite the Seminar’s claims to lead a “reemergence of the interest in the Jesus of History” unfettered by any prior presuppositions (4) that shackled past efforts. Even in 1906, Albert Schweitzer (hardly a conservative Bible scholar!) recognized the futility of interpreting Jesus through modern presuppositions, lest Jesus be conformed to the scholar’s image:

There was a danger of our thrusting ourselves between men and the Gospels, and refusing to leave the individual man alone with the sayings of Jesus. There was a danger that we should offer them a Jesus who was too small, because *we had forced Him into conformity with our human standards and human psychology*. To see that, one need only read the Lives of Jesus written since the [1860’s], and notice what they have made of the great imperious sayings of the Lord, how they have weakened down His imperative world-condemning demands upon individuals, that He might not come into conflict with our ethical ideals, and might tune His denial of the world to our acceptance of it.¹²

Long before the Jesus Seminar emerged, critical scholars believed that their investigation “should (and could!) detach itself from every a priori of faith”¹³ and reconstruct the historical truths undergirding the New Testament. Supernaturalism, it is reasoned, belongs to the realm of faith, not history. Only that which could be put to the tests of experimental science, “distinguishing the factual from the fictional,” would be helpful in determining the relationship between the Jesus of faith and the Jesus of

¹¹ Of course, the Jesus Seminar has a point here. After all, Christians accuse the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses of twisting the Scriptures to suit their own agendas. However, the issue is not whether or not to have theological considerations, the issue is will the theological and philosophical considerations that one *already has* influence the interpretation of facts in a *good way* or a *bad way*? See Richard Pratt’s *Every Thought Captive* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1979).

¹² Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus* (tr. by W. Montgomery; London: A&C Black, 1910) 401, emphasis added. While the Jesus Seminar (among others) reject Schweitzer’s eschatological Jesus, the members of the Seminar have not adequately addressed how they managed to escape the effects of **any a priori** assumptions that Schweitzer finds in every attempt to determine the “Jesus of history.”

¹³ H. Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the New Testament Scriptures* (tr. by De Jongste; 2nd ed.; Phillipsburg: P&R, 1988) 2.

history (2). In fact, to know the authoritative truth about Jesus, one must “find the Jesus of history,” (2) not faith. But this dichotomy between faith and history, rather than establishing truth (and the authority of human reason), has simply robbed such study of its “theological character.”¹⁴ The Jesus Seminar suffers from the same “subjective and existentialist” view of Jesus that all naturalistic scholarship finds: “Human judgment about what is essential and central for Christian faith is the final court of appeal.”¹⁵ But how can human reason establish itself as ultimately authoritative, especially over matters regarding supernatural phenomena? Simply put, it can’t: “certainty cannot result from uncertainty.”¹⁶

In fact, the denial of the supernatural in establishing reason as an ultimate authority is essentially a **theological** decision. Because science and experience cannot prove or disprove the existence of God and His role in the universe, a denial of the *possibility* of such supernatural activity is based on religious beliefs and theological considerations, not science.¹⁷ In their efforts to be “a-theological,” the Seminar Fellows have become the very “slaves to theology” and faith that they treated with such derision.¹⁸ The Jesus Seminar *assumes* that Jesus could have no prior knowledge of the Roman invasion of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.; they *assume* that Jesus would make “no claim to be the... Messiah” (32); they *assume* any “Christian’ language” (24) was due to the influence of Paul’s theological construct of Jesus; they *assume* that Jesus could not perform miracles and is “embellished by mythic elements” (5) in the Gospels; they *assume* that the Resurrection is impossible; they *assume* that the true historical Jesus is hidden by the Gospel accounts and Christian theology. These assumptions are not founded on the “empirical, factual evidence” (34) so highly prized by the Jesus Seminar, but are the very philosophical (theological!) **foundations** of the Seminar’s analysis of the historical Jesus: “the Jesus Seminar doesn’t start with historical evidence; it starts with presuppositions, assumptions it makes no attempt to prove.”¹⁹

¹⁴ Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, 3.

¹⁵ Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, 7.

¹⁶ Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, vii.

¹⁷ The veracity of specific accounts of such supernatural activity *might* be denied based on sufficient evidence (i.e., the common debunking of many self-proclaimed psychics and sorcerers), but the possibility of such activity cannot be proved or disproved by finite human science. A theological assumption is not necessarily bad—only bad theological assumptions are bad.

¹⁸ “Not even the fundamentalists on the far right can produce a credible Jesus out of allegedly inerrant canonical gospels. Their reading of who Jesus was rests on the shifting sands of their own theological constructions” (5). Yet the Jesus Seminar has its own set of theological constructions—what makes them more sturdy?

¹⁹ Gregory Koukl, “The Jesus Seminar Under Fire,” *Stand to Reason* (Radio show, 1995). Transcript available as an online article at www.str.org/free/commentaries/apologetics/bible/jsuf.htm.

Method: Anti-historical History

Having eliminated the necessity to deal with the supernatural, faith-impacting claims of Jesus as irrelevant, the Seminar embarked on a quest to “know the truth about Jesus, the real Jesus,” and find the “Jesus of history” (2) unencumbered by theological constraints. But in separating faith and history (as if faith exists in a vacuum),²⁰ this analysis actually disconnects Jesus from his actual historical context.

Disconnected from His Roots

Presumably, the methods of the Jesus Seminar liberate the historical Jesus from Christian and Jewish theological baggage without losing its “concern for the Jewish and Christian traditions” (4). But the Jesus of the Jesus Seminar is *completely* divorced from his Jewish religious heritage because his words and actions are assumed to be *completely* distinctive and “distinguished from common lore” (30). Jesus’ sayings are assumed to have no link with the religious, political, or social climate of his day; rather, they only “cut against the social and religious grain” (31) in an apparently arbitrary manner. For example, according to the Seminar, Jesus could not have even quoted a well-known proverb—“No doubt you will quote me that proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself’” (Luke 4:23)—because the proverb “found in a number of forms in non-biblical literature of the period” (279) must have been put on the lips of Jesus by the Gospel author! The Jesus Seminar is so determined to find the “authentic” Jesus that they only allow Jesus to make completely new sayings.²¹

In addition, Jesus is very rarely said to quote the OT in his discourses,²² and he dealt with “more secular” (31) matters than those tied to religious law. Jesus could not quote the Psalms despite the well-known use of those hymns in the Jewish synagogue life.²³ However, he cannot be understood apart from his culture’s history: Jesus was Jewish! And Jesus’ interaction with the Jewish Scriptures cannot be assumed false without some level of evidence.²⁴ Furthermore, Jesus was executed for what he said and did in that society and culture! If Jesus is only a laconic sage whose main

²⁰ See Ridderbos, *Redemptive History*, 1-47. Ridderbos cogently outlines the intricate connections between the history of revelation and its claims about the person and work of Jesus: “It is necessary to examine more closely the connection between the history of redemption and the canon” (12).

²¹ This is like understanding T. S. Elliot’s “Ulysses” without Homer, or the OT prophets without the Mosaic law.

²² “Scholars believe that most, perhaps all, quotations from scripture attributed to Jesus are secondary accretions” (201).

²³ Clearly, then, no one in the Jesus Seminar could quote the Beatles either.

²⁴ The only real “evidence” the Jesus Seminar gives is their belief that searching the Scriptures for proofs of Jesus’ Messianic role was “undertaken with great vigor and imagination by the early Jesus movement” (201). In other words, the supernatural OT predictions of Jesus are *a priori* impossible in the naturalistic worldview of the Seminar.

interaction with his surroundings amounted to pithy sayings that “surprise and shock” (31), why was he killed?²⁵ The effort of the Jesus Seminar to find an authentic Jesus is so disconnected from the reality of Jesus’ life and culture, it has produced only a sterile, unassuming teacher of fortune-cookie proverbs anchored more in the modern assumptions of the Seminar.

Disconnected from His Legacy

Not only has the Seminar divorced Jesus from his own culture, it has separated him from his own legacy. By assuming such a late date for the Gospels (after the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.), the Jesus Seminar is attempting to lend credence to their suggestion that most of what the Evangelists wrote was corrupted by the framework of early Christian theology. Paul, though they do not debate the early dating of his letters, is assumed to have created a Jesus out of “the type he knew from the Hellenistic mystery religions” (7). Jesus, then, “was not the first Christian” (24); instead, his followers presented him as such. The Seminar notes the supposedly stark contrast between the “Christian language or viewpoint” and the “real voice of Jesus” (24). But how could the laconic sage be transformed into a god less *than a single generation* after his death?²⁶

The Seminar’s reliance on oral tradition to explain some of the adaptation of Jesus’ words by his followers by “improvising and inventing as the occasion demanded” (27) is less than satisfactory. Citing modern scientific experiments in human memorization ability, the Fellows force the first century Jewish culture into the Seminar’s naturalistic, modern framework. The Seminar *assumes* that the people of Jesus day could remember no more than people in the twentieth century; they *assume* that reports of average Jewish citizens memorizing passages and passages of Scripture are unfounded; they *assume* that Jesus was so unremarkable that only his “cute” sayings were remembered (and even those were not remembered well).

Disconnecting Jesus from his legacy provides an easy means of discounting the power of Jesus presented in the Gospels. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, he does not require humanity’s devotion and allegiance. If he will not come again to judge the living and the dead, the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar need not fear him. But discounting his legacy does not negate its reality: historicity

²⁵ Even the Jesus Seminar can only admit that Jesus was a “mild political threat” (2) to Herod and the local Roman authorities. If his interaction with society was so unimportant to the “real” person, why was he executed?

²⁶ And why, given the Seminar’s “devotion” to the hard evidence demanded by historical science, didn’t anybody during that first century publish something about it?

“should not be determined by what we think possible or likely, but by the antiquity and reliability of the evidence... . As far back as we can trace, Jesus was known and remembered as one who had extraordinary powers.”²⁷

Influence: Anti-scholarly Scholarship

But their supposed evidence has not played as strong a role in the Seminar’s efforts to find the “real” Jesus as anti-supernatural bias. While the members of the Jesus Seminar should not be personally attacked out of malice (Mar 7:22,²⁸ Eph 4:31; 1 Pet 2:1), their methods and presuppositions have demonstrated that they are not the scholars they claim to be.

An Exercise in Absurdity²⁹

Who then, is the Jesus Seminar? Co-founded and co-chaired by Robert W. Funk, the Seminar is a collaboration of several hundred individuals (calling themselves scholars)³⁰ who, from its inception in 1985, met twice a year to debate the degree of authenticity of Jesus’ words (34). *The Five Gospels* itself, while edited by Funk, has many authors from the Seminar (ix). But given the diversity of the Seminar Fellows and their “own perspectives” (35), one might wonder if any one Fellow has had an inordinate influence on the work of the Seminar. For instance, as a co-founder and editor of many Seminar works, has Funk guided the course of the seminar or followed it? In other words, is the text of *The Five Gospels* that of the Seminar as a whole or is it primarily Funk’s? Can we separate *The Five Gospels* of the Seminar and that of Funk? What are the authentic words of Funk?³¹ The following excerpt from pages 34-35 the text of the Five Gospels is color-coded according the Seminar’s practice,³² after applying the methods of the Jesus Seminar to itself.³³ Great care was taken in this analysis, for one must beware of finding a Funk entirely congenial to oneself (5).

²⁷ Raymond Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994) 25 n.24. Quoted in M. Wilkins and J. Moreland, “The Furor Surrounding Jesus,” 5.

²⁸ Which, of course, the Jesus Seminar denies as authentic words of Jesus, claiming they were inserted by the early church to “spiritualize and thus soften the previous reference to bodily defecation [in 7:14-15].” Obviously (?!), Jesus could not interpret or spiritualize his own statements since he had no real spiritual dimension to his personality. Again, the presuppositions of the Seminar undermine their quest for Jesus.

²⁹ This section must be taken for the exercise in absurdity that it claims to be. The methods of the Seminar are so questionable, it is only fair to see what those same methods make of themselves.

³⁰ Of course, this comment runs the risk of communicating malice, but this is not the case. The claim of scholarship made by the seminar has not been established in the academic community and is open to legitimate questioning. See above, note 2.

³¹ Like the Seminar’s question (“Who is the real Jesus?”) assumes that there is a problem with the Gospel accounts, this question assumes that there is a problem with *The Five Gospels* text. Is this not, in reality, creating a problem that doesn’t exist?

³² **Red** = authentic Funkian words; **Pink** = probably something like a Funkian statement; **Grey** = Funk did not say this, though it may include his own ideas; **Black** = Funk definitely did not say this, it is from the Seminar.

³³ The assumptions involved in this exercise are modeled after those used by the Jesus Seminar and include: (1) Funk couldn’t be a scholar if he makes overt claims to that fact, (2) the distinctive words of Funk alone are helpful in determining who he is—his

The Fellows of the Seminar are critical scholars.³⁴

To be a critical scholar means to make empirical, factual evidence—evidence open to confirmation by independent, neutral observers—the controlling factor in historical judgments.³⁵

Non-critical scholars are those who put dogmatic considerations first and insist that the factual evidence confirm theological premises.³⁶

Critical scholars adopt the principle of methodological skepticism: accept only what passes the rigorous tests of the rules of evidence.³⁷

Critical scholars work from ancient texts in their original languages, in the case of the gospels, in Greek, Coptic, Aramaic, Hebrew, Latin, and other tongues.³⁸

Critical scholars practice their craft by submitting their work to the judgment of peers. Untested work is not highly regarded. The scholarship represented by the Fellows of the Jesus Seminar is the kind that has come to prevail in all the great universities of the world.³⁹

Critical scholarship is regularly under attack by conservative Christian groups.⁴⁰

At least one Fellow of the Jesus Seminar lost his academic post as a result of his membership in the group. Others have been forced to withdraw as a consequence of institutional pressure... .⁴¹

use of other sources is illegitimate, (3) Funk would never add nuances to his statements—they must remain simple, single-point comments.

³⁴ This is clearly a Funkian statement. The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar would never resort to such self-praise. Funk is so worried that others will not see him as a legitimate scholar that he feels he must state it explicitly and identify himself with a group of scholars. Funk is dangerously close to creating a Seminar according to his own interests.

³⁵ While this may be consistent with Funk's thought, it is almost certainly a quote from some academic dictionary defining the term "critical scholar." Since we must form our opinions of Funk solely from his distinctive words, this cannot be of use. Funk himself makes the point that we must understand the view of a person solely in his own unique vision: "Christianity originated with Jesus of Nazareth. In that case, Christianity needs to be re-anchored in his imagination, in his vision" (*Honest to Jesus*, 300-303). Use of other sources (i.e., Jesus' use of a proverb or the OT) cannot provide us any helpful information.

³⁶ Funk could not have said this, as he is greatly concerned with the religious implications of Jesus: "The aim of the quest is to set Jesus free [note the a priori goal of Funk]... . The renewed quest points to a secular sage who may have more relevance to the spiritual dimensions of society at large than to institutionalized religion. As a subversive sage, Jesus is also a secular sage. His parables and aphorisms all but obliterate the boundaries separating the sacred from the secular. He can teach us something that has nothing directly to do with what we know as Christianity or, indeed, with organized religion as such. Stated as a question: Is Jesus relevant to our society, to our time, to the world we know, apart from the role he has played in the Christian religion?" (in *Honest to Jesus* [San Francisco: Harper, 1996] 300-303). Clearly, Funk has theological considerations of Jesus that have no place in the Seminar's academic study.

³⁷ Funk is clearly a skeptic and would adopt such methods, but these words are obviously softened from the blatant skepticism that Funk exhibits. Therefore, these cannot be the truest form of Funk's words.

³⁸ Funk does not limit himself to the original sources, but would interpret things, like the historical Jesus, through a cultural grid: "Jesus is one of the great sages of history, and his insights should be taken seriously but tested by reference to other seers, ancient and modern, who have had glimpses of the eternal, and by reference to everything we can learn from the sciences, the poets, and the artists" (*Honest to Jesus*, 300-303). Besides, there is no evidence that indicates that Funk even knows these languages. True, Funk's biographical sketch indicates that he has several higher-level degrees that would require this skill, but one cannot trust another's interpretation of who Funk is, we must allow the historical Funk speak his insights to us in his own, true words, unhindered from the shackles of modern biographical sketch writers (who are known to exaggerate).

³⁹ The Jesus Seminar would not have said this, since many of its members have been kicked out of various academic institutions. Clearly, Funk is attempting to justify his own desires to be recognized as a scholar despite working at a relatively unknown institution (the Westar Institute?!). He wants his work to be highly regarded.

⁴⁰ Funk obviously has no love for the traditional Christian Church: "He can teach us something that has nothing directly to do with what we know as Christianity or, indeed, with organized religion as such" (*Honest to Jesus*, 300-303). He goes on to comment on the hostility felt by those entrenched in the traditional understanding of Jesus and their need to reevaluate their views. But the Jesus Seminar obviously glossed the original statement (which, clearly, would have read: Robert Funk is constantly under attack by conservative Christian groups).

Public attack on members of the Seminar is commonplace, coming especially from those who lack academic credentials.⁴²

Clearly, then, from Funk's own words, we see that he is a self-professing academic zealot, lashing out at all who oppose his own preconceived notions of scholarship. He is concerned only with exalting himself to the pinnacle of the academic community through his supposed scholarship concerning the historical Jesus.⁴³ This is the true, historical Funk—not at all the stately intellectual the Jesus Seminar would have the world look to. In reality, he is a self-absorbed Funk.

Or has the author of this paper, through arbitrary "scholarly" proclamations created a Funk that resembles some preconceived notion of the co-founder of the Jesus Seminar? Surely, those who claim to be witnesses to Funk's person and work, his character and goals, will rise up in opposition to this view, but they are clearly imposing their own pro-Funkian bias on a man who, in his own words (as shown above) demonstrates his desperate desire to be perceived as a scholar. They cannot prove scientifically their opinions of Funk and must resort to critical attacks on the efforts to find the historical Funk.

Does this exercise smack of absurdity? So do the methods of the Jesus Seminar in their quest for the historical Jesus.

An Exercise in Subversion

Despite such absurd methods, their *claim* of scholarship⁴⁴ (like the claim of a-theological research created a Jesus to challenge the traditional view) has helped to create a Jesus Seminar that challenges the credibility of traditional academia. The Seminar has not proven its scholarship, it has *assumed* it and used it to influence the masses directly without the intervention of the scholarly community or the Church. By swaying popular opinion, they will gain the attention of all—theologians, laypersons, and scholars alike.⁴⁵ Essentially, the Jesus Seminar is practicing

⁴¹ The Seminar shies away from anecdotal elements of Jesus' words, so they would not resort to such methods regarding their own history. This is obviously a Funkian attempt to legitimize his role in the Seminar because of the common disregard many have of his position in the Westar Institute.

⁴² While Funk may share some of this thought process, this statement is an obvious softening of the earlier comment about the excellence of the scholarship represented by the Seminar.

⁴³ "This forecast, I am acutely aware, stands in strong contrast to what many scholars of the gospels take the quest to be all about" (Funk, *Honest to Jesus*, 300-303).

⁴⁴ See above, note 2.

⁴⁵ The media has been especially quick to support the Jesus Seminar as "representing the mainstream of biblical scholarship" (Koukl, "The Jesus Seminar Under Fire") even though the Seminar community is anything but an accurate cross-section of the academic community. Ironically, the Jesus Seminar has used a Jesus recreated in their own image to recreate their image in the scholarly and popular circles.

“evangelism in reverse.”⁴⁶ They seek (whether intentionally or not is unknown) to become the sole power brokers in the Christian world: they rob Jesus (and, therefore the Christian church) of His power and they rob traditional Biblical scholarship (both liberal and conservative) of its power. They want, like the Jesus they created, to become the ones that people look to for guidance. But by robbing Jesus of His power, they have nothing of value left in their teachings. Their lack of real power will become evident, and in time, the Jesus Seminar will be another forgotten fad.

Conclusion: Man Conformed to the Image of Christ

The Jesus of the Jesus Seminar has little hope to offer the world. In fact, he is little more than a man created in the image of his “scholarly” discoverers. He has no real connection to God; he has no power over death. Why then, is he so popular? The scope of this paper is insufficient to address that issue thoroughly, but one thing is clear: If the hope and power of the real, historical, God-man Jesus is to be known in the lives of people in any era, He must be proclaimed as He has revealed Himself. Could the Evangelical Church’s love affair with methodologies and popularity distracted it from the power of the Person and Work of the real Jesus Christ? Could the Jesus Seminar’s popularity be a result of the lack of power in the preaching of the Church? Could modern society’s fascination with the Jesus of the Seminar be a result of their rejection of the dead orthodoxy offered by so many in the church? If the true, historical Jesus is to be rediscovered—if the Jesus Seminar is indeed to pass away as a brief fad—the Church must repent of its lackadaisical approach to life and doctrine and preach once again, the power of the One Lord Jesus Christ. And “thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 15:57).

⁴⁶ Koukl, “The Jesus Seminar Under Fire.”