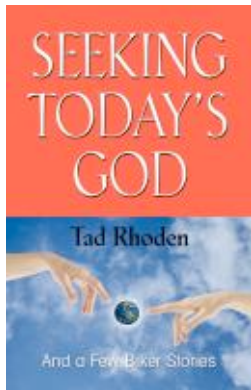


SEEKING TODAY'S GOD

Tad Rhoden



And a Few Biker Stories



Our scriptures have been so altered, edited and censored by special interests as to be almost irrelevant. Today's Christianity bears little semblance to the church planted by Jesus and the Apostles. History records Constantine as having converted to Christianity; it would be more proper to say that he converted Christianity to Constantine. He remained a sun worshiper and incorporated most of the pagan Roman practices into Christianity. This book is not for everyone. The hidebound fundamentalist may cry blasphemy but the freethinker may embrace it.

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And a Few Biker Stories

A Christianity Critique

By **Tad Rhoden**

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CHAPTER 1—THE JOY OF IGNORANCE

A few times a year I attend a rural Community Church. One of the meetings was being conducted by a hopeful seeking to fill their vacant pastor position. Brandishing his bible energetically aloft he proclaimed, “This is the word of God and I know every word, yeah even every syllable of it to be absolutely true.” Being a guest, I stifled an impulse to challenge this head in the sand generality; I must admit, it was dramatic.

I couldn’t see which edition of the bible he was so fervently flailing about, but I felt reasonably certain his statement indicated he had not compared it to other editions. I have heard good and seemingly educated people proclaim that if that bible was good enough for the apostles, it’s good enough for us. It’s amazes me that they never investigate where or how their bible originated; apparently believing it just fell from heaven one afternoon, divinely edited, pure, inerrant and undefiled. Oh well, it’s a comfortable belief; I wish I had it.

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Unfortunately, the more I learn about the bible the less I know whom or what to believe.

It is truly discouraging to learn how many contradictions, errors, alterations and omissions there are to all the bibles. It is also disturbing to learn that most pastors are aware of this and discretely choose to not mention it; it's bad for business. Conspiracy theorists, this could open up a whole new field of conjecture for you.

So what's wrong with our bible, or rather bibles? I hardly know where to start or how far to go. As a primarily Christian society relying on the teachings of Christ, perhaps the New Testament would be an appropriate starting place.

In the beginning of the Christian era, nobody took notes or kept records. The apostles didn't realize that Jesus wouldn't be with them permanently; and most of them were likely illiterate. Literacy was rare and a loosely applied term. If a person could write their name but

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nothing else, they were termed literate.¹ An education was an expense beyond the reach of an average person, and anyone truly literate would likely have a position befitting his skills. Many of the apostles were blue collar working men.

Peter, John, James and Andrew were fishermen; the lower rung of the economic ladder and exceedingly unlikely to be literate. Mathew was a tax collector, so probably able to keep records. Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, James, Thaddeus and Simon we just don't know about. Judas Iscariot served as their treasurer, implying perhaps a bit more ability than his fellows.

So Jesus teachings were passed on orally for several generations. Have you ever been to a party and played the telephone game? One person whispers a message to the next who does the same to the next until the message has been repeated around the circle and then the result is compared to the original and found to be totally different? And if that weren't damage enough, people can't leave

¹ *Misquoting Jesus*; Bart D Ehrman Pg. 39

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scripture alone; they have to improve on it. When you were a child did you have a friend or sibling who would get their way by claiming that “mom said”, even though mom had never been consulted? It was common in biblical times to ascribe your writings to some authoritative person to give credibility, and scripture was no exception.

Starting at the beginning; Matthew, early church writers ascribed this book to Matthew the tax collector. Various considerations cast considerable doubt on those ancient views. The Gospel of Matthew contains, but is not, a collection of sayings. A Hebrew version exists but it is medieval, scholars say it was written in Greek and so is not a translation. The author is almost certainly aware of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 CE (21.41; 22.7; 24.15-16). Jesus main opponents are the Pharisees, whose authority developed mainly in the late first century. It is widely held scholarly opinion that the main sources for the author were the Greek Gospel of Mark, and a sayings source in Greek that has been lost (designated “Q”) and some special traditions (“M”). This

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all suggests a date of composition between 80-90 CE. Also this seems to have been written by a multi lingual man.²

Upshot of it all? Gospel of Matthew appears to have been written by some other Mathew, or possibly someone not even named Matthew. How disappointing.

Moving right along; Mark, the earliest reference to Mark is a statement of Papias written early in the second century, but surviving only in a quotation by Eusebius. Papias says Mark was the interpreter of Peter and that he wrote down what Peter said accurately, but not in order. Some scholars accept this, but many identify the “Mark” of Papias as “John Mark” of Acts 12.12, 25; 15.37-39 and with the “Mark” of Col 4.10; Philem 24.2 Tim 4.11; Pet 5.13. Others contend that this Gospel was written anonymously and only attributed to Mark in the second century. The name Mark was common in the first century, making it uncertain who was who. Others contend that those who first copied this Gospel knew who the author

² *Harper Collins Study Bible*, Mathew Introduction Pg. 1666

was and that the assumption of the traditional Mark is reliable.³ So who yah going to believe?

Continuing our bible sniping; Luke. The author does not identify himself. The prologue to the Gospel (1.1-4) admits that the author is dependent on others. The title “Gospel according to Luke” is from the oldest still existing manuscript of the Gospel (P75, ca.175-225). This attribution may have been suggested by Luke’s name in Paul’s letter to Philemon (v.24) and in some letters attributed to Paul (Col 4.14; 2 Tim 4.11) and the “we” passages in Acts (16.10-17; 20.5-15; 21.8-18; 27.1-28.16), which gives the impression that the author of Acts sometimes traveled with Paul. These references may have been inserted for literary effect. The overall portrait of Paul in Acts conflicts at numerous points with Paul’s writings. The traditional identification of Luke as the author seems to have emerged during the latter half of the second century when it seemed important to trace the

³ Ibid. Mark Introduction. Pg. 1722

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authoritative writings of the early church directly to the apostles or their associates.⁴

The Gospel according to John? A tradition going back to the second century identifies the author as John the son of Zebedee. The Gospel itself does not make this identification. It may be that the author developed the book from traditions about Jesus that had been handed down by one of his disciples. It has been suggested that an earlier document focusing on Jesus' miraculous signs (2.11) was incorporated into the Gospel. John was evidently expanded: chs. 15-17 and 21 seem to have been added later. John is a book with a complex history whose origins are not entirely clear to us.⁵

Okay, this is getting boring and repetitive, there's lots more but let's wind it up. We're really doubtful about who wrote the four Gospels. Paul's letters? We really only trust Romans, 1st Corinthians, 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, and questionably Philemon. All the rest are in doubt. Could

⁴ Ibid. Luke Introduction. Pg. 1759.

⁵ Ibid. John Introduction. Pg. 1815

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one person really have written that volume of letters; and we don't even have them all? It's a good thing he wasn't paying postage by weight as we do today.

The point being, we can't trust the bible to give us the difference between what Jesus taught and what has been added or altered by those wishing to promote their own agendas or prejudices. If someone could prove it conclusively one way or the other, I would be exceedingly grateful.

CHAPTER 2 – BIKER STORIES

Unless you're a spiritual saturationist, most of us can only digest theological self improvement for a so long before we need a change. The only thing I can think to digress to are my own way back when stories, many of which are biker stories. While biker stories may seem incompatible with seeking God, motorcycles and motorcycling people of the 1960's exerted a major influence in my development. I'm too old to ride, but I still love motorcycles. A well balanced motorcycle dances through curves like you're swinging from a rope and the bike is just an extension of your hips; their freedom is better than actual flight. I can only fly to another airport, but a motorcycle can take me anywhere.

I'm not phobic about flight. I completed an enlistment in the Air Force and was employed in the aviation industry for close to forty years. One of my jobs was to participate as a flight crew member on test flights and perform in flight repairs. Most people enjoy flight, I don't, it's just

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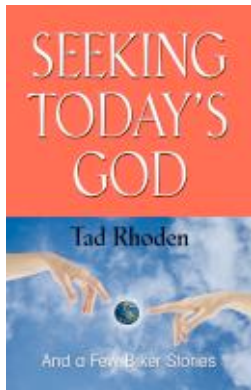
work. I've been flown ten miles up, where you can verify with your own eyes that those photos aren't faked, the world is truly round. It is admittedly an impressive and majestic sight. I've experienced loss of cabin pressure at high altitude, when you have about fifteen seconds to get to emergency oxygen before you lose consciousness. I've probably spent more time weightless (and airsick) in an airplane that we were trying to break (for test purposes), than is expended on training the average astronaut. We've flown home with three dead engines and the door open with my parachute on, waiting for that last engine to quit and the pilots order to bail out. I lost a friend who was a frighteningly enthusiastic canyon racing competitor, and whom I always predicted would die on a motorcycle, when he incongruously fell out of a parked airplane; I just don't trust airplanes.

I never rode with any of the so called one percent outlaw motorcycle gangs. I did run with wannabe racers whose greatest joy was racing one another on twisting public mountain roads. My companions were not ignorant rednecks; many of them were well educated and intelligent. The same type of riding in England at the time

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was called café racing; but in culture deprived California we were just canyon crazies. It was dangerous and irresponsible play, and people, sometimes innocents, were injured. Young men have a time when testosterone overrides good sense. It's a wonder society survives.

In any event, I've witnessed more airplane crashes than motorcycle wrecks. I'll stick to bikes, thank you.



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