

Transcript of Metaphysics of Physics Episode Ten: An Interview with The Author of Creating Christ.

Narrated by James Valliant. Transcribed and edited by Dwayne Davies.

Ashna Sharan performed the question and commentary segments.

Any textual errors in this transcript are the fault of Dwayne Davies and not James Valliant.

The ideas presented here are those of the authors of "Creating Christ". We do however agree with them.

If you enjoy this brief summary of these ideas, or find them useful, please consider purchasing the book "Creating Christ: How Roman Emperors Invented Christianity".

It is available on Amazon, Audible and from Barnes & Noble.

Ashna: James, please introduce yourself and explain the thesis of the book:

James: My name is James Valliant. I am the co-author of the new book "Creating Christ: How Roman Emperors Invented Christianity".

Basically, it takes on what would certainly strike most people today, certainly most Christians today, as a rather outrageous thesis. That in fact, the New Testament is Roman propaganda. That when it was originally written, it was written with a certain political agenda. As well as a certain theological agenda.

Most Christians would think that is crazy. They regard Christianity as the very opposite of Roman philosophy. They believe that the Romans persecuted Christianity. Hollywood has certainly convinced them that in the last century. But there's a forgotten history here.

Two thousand years ago, there was cataclysmic war between the Roman Empire and Jewish Messianic rebels. And the rebellion was largely motivated by religious factors. It was that war, that cataclysmic war, that destroyed the temple, for example. Reduced it to the Wailing Wall that it is today.

It is difficult for me to imagine that Christianity emerging at that very same moment in history is just an accident. And when we started our research, we found nothing to contradict our theory. And then we found some remarkable physical evidence which basically demonstrated it.

In short, the thesis is that what we have in the New Testament is Roman propaganda written 2000 years ago to quell the Jewish revolt.

That is very much the 30,000-foot level of analysis. Or I should say 10,000-meter level, from New Zealand.

So, from way up in the sky, looking down on it, the way to really look at it is that the moral idealism that we read in the New Testament is really a form of political propaganda.

It is also regarded as moral idealism, both by Christians and even by secular people who have adopted it.

And having forgotten the original context of the New Testament's creation, it's very easy to detach ourselves from that. And to think of the doctrine of Jesus Christ as sort of an unworldly, non-earthly form of moral idealism.

But when you just change the angle slightly and you look at the entire New Testament from this new angle, suddenly everything is explained. We were simply blown away; I think when we started pulling that string because nothing contradicted it. And all the evidence seemed to confirm it.

Ashna: Does it matter how Christianity got started? Why does that matter to us now?

James: Well, that's a fair question. This is 2000-year-old history and Christianity has certainly changed considerably. At least its operative doctrines have. The New Testament itself obviously has not changed, but the way Christians understand and live those doctrines has dramatically changed over the last 2000 years.

So that's a very good question. Why should we even care?

Well, there are two very good answers to that. History matters. And particularly the history of ideas.

Human beings are really motivated by their ideas and their history can be understood in terms of the power of ideas. Although these ideas are 2000 years old, they literally reach across the millennia and control our psychologies, our view of what's morally right and wrong.

Even people who are secular, people who tend to be on political left and who don't have much of a religion, have basically adopted Christian social ethics as their own. Socialists and Communists have basically applied the ethics and the social doctrine of the New Testament in a very consistent way. While simply leaving out all the mystical and miraculous stuff.

So, the values and the ideas expressed in the New Testament are still a living vital, powerful force. On the American left, they have adopted elements of pacifism, social altruism and concern for the poor above other considerations.

The discovery, whether you're religious or not, that the moral idealism of Christianity is in fact simply a form of political propaganda, is crucially important.

I'm not saying that that every single thing in the New Testament is to be thrown out. I'm just saying that it needs to be re-evaluated. Every single moral doctrine in the New Testament needs to be re-evaluated in this light, rather than simply assumed as the moral ideal that it is held to be, and which is still controlling people today.

It seems to me that at one level it is important to understand that the New Testament isn't history. Scholars for the last 200 years have determined that the New Testament is not reliable history.

I think it's even far more powerful and far more important to identify what the New Testament actually is and to place it within its contemporary political and cultural context. Like we do any other literature or doctrine. Once you do that, understanding what it is, is I think far more persuasive than simply saying it is not reliable.

In other words, if Jesus tells you to turn the other cheek, is that really the best policy, in light of the fact that it was written in order to pacify rebels 2000 years ago?

We can see the agenda behind saying "Turn the other cheek" or "Blessed are the peacemakers", etc. But before we simply adopt that as a more as our moral code, we need to understand the real motives behind the people that wrote those things.

Ashna: Are there any modern parallels and can we apply what happened then to anything happening now?

James: Oh, very much so. In fact, the same basic conflict that we are discussing in the book, that cataclysmic war between the Roman Empire and Jewish Messianic zealots is still in a way, still playing out today.

The entire religion of Islam can I believe, be traced to the extreme monotheistic zealots of the first century. The war between Rome and the Jewish rebels stratified Judaism of the first century into three surviving religions.

The Rabbinic Judaism which survives today. And which greatly deemphasized the entire concept of Messiah. And which therefore reduced the political threat that Judaism might represent to foreign governments as Jews were living in diaspora as minorities and various Christian or Islamic cultures,

Christianity, which is a sort of pro-Roman peaceful response to Jewish Messianic activities in the first century.

And then of course, the Jewish rebels themselves, which never went away. They simply transformed over the centuries into Islam. The Islamic terrorism of today is in effect the same conflict of 2000 years ago. Western civilization in effect is still beating back a violent form of Eastern monotheism. In effect, we're fighting the same battle 2000 years later.

And the irony is that our response is very similar today. Western political leaders, for example, assure us that Islam means peace. That Islam commands peace and that Jihad is an internal conflict, not an actual rebellion. And in so doing, they're doing in effect precisely what the Romans did in creating Christianity.

The Romans said that Jewish Messianic religion is in effect a pacifistic religion. One that says, cooperate with political leaders, pay your taxes and a turn the other cheek.

Ashna: What about Roman persecution? Didn't they feed Christians to the lions? If not, why do you think this is widely believed?

James: The Roman Empire was a remarkably tolerant government when it came to foreign religions, comparatively speaking. They obviously did not have what we in the West today call freedom of religion or freedom of conscience.

There was religious persecution. Remember, politics and religion were joined at the hip in those days. There were political implications to any religious idea and there were religious implications to most political ideas.

Nonetheless, the Romans tried to be as tolerant as to as many foreign cults and religions as they possibly could. And so, persecution was not the norm

within the Roman Empire.

However, this Jewish War that I was referring to earlier was a major ideological challenge to the Romans. Jewish monotheism forbade them, for example, from participating in any kind of acknowledgement of Roman state deities. Which Romans thought just a perfunctory part of joining their empire and which other polytheistic cultures had no problem doing.

Many of the Jews, with their strict form monotheism, found it difficult to participate in Roman society generally. Therefore, at first, the Romans tried to create exemptions for the Hebrews, exempting them from Emperor worship or public worship of Roman state deities.

Nonetheless, any connection with foreigners, any contact with foreigners, began to be regarded as pollution by the more extreme elements among the Hebrews.

And simultaneously, the Romans began to see the Jews in various antisemitic ways. And the conflict became inevitable.

There were continuous disturbances. Outbreaks of rebellion and riots in Alexandria, in Egypt and in Rome itself. Until finally in 66, open rebellion broke out in Judea itself, climaxing in the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. Decades later in the early second-century, still a second Jewish war would break out.

Now, those Jews who were leaders of this movement, religious and political leaders, rebel leaders, were obviously heavily persecuted by the Romans. Romans crucified them in the thousands. They tortured them for information.

The Romans were not boy scouts, they were ruthless conquerors. So, there was persecution and indeed the persecution of Messianic Jews in the first two centuries.

Christianity is an offshoot of Messianic Judaism and has adopted that persecution as their own, although what we call Christianity is an entirely different doctrine.

In fact, in many ways, the very opposite doctrine of the Jewish rebels. The

rebels believed in the prophecies of the Old Testament that says the Messiah would come and liberate them in, at such times of foreign oppression.

Christianity has a strikingly different approach to the concept of Messiah and an altogether different approach to Jewish exceptionalism.

Jesus seems to be opening up Judaism, which is a somewhat exclusive religion. It is not easy to convert to Judaism. For adult males, for example, it involves circumcision and in the Ancient World, of course, that made conversion to Judaism very, very difficult and problematic.

Christianity seems to be opening up the Jewish faith to the entire world. Circumcision didn't matter to Paul or to Jesus. Kosher diet didn't matter. Strict Sabbath observance did not matter. In other words, everything essentially distinctive to Judaism was basically turned on its head in the New Testament.

In addition, they stressed a doctrine of peace with Rome. Paul himself declared the Roman Empire to be God's appointed agent on earth. And rebellion to be a sin. Therefore, this doctrine is found in the Gospels as well.

Jesus praises, for example, the faith of a non-Jewish centurion above that "any of the sons of Israel". Imagine today an American GI being praised by an Islamic cleric as having more faith than any Muslim. It would be that astonishing in our context.

Jesus of course, famously said, "render unto Caesar". Jesus famously advocated peace with Rome, he went so far as to say submit to the evildoer.

The concept of Messiah itself, which at the time in the first century was inherently a politically charged one. The rallying cry of the Jewish, rebels was "Messiah", and the contemporary historians in the first and second centuries report perfectly plainly, that it was these Messianic prophecies that most motivated the cataclysmic Jewish wars of the first few centuries.

And so, it's striking that what we see in the New Testament is a paradox. The concept of Messiah being sort of turned on its head. Here we have a

peace-loving Messiah who praises centurions and advocates paying taxes. He hangs out with tax collectors, turning on its head, the first-century Messianic doctrine of the rebels.

And so this paradoxical combination of both the concept of Messiah, along with a concept of a peacemaker and an advocate of peace with Rome. That very combination is unusually paradoxical.

So, with Christianity, what we see is that simultaneously and suddenly, all the most culturally alienating aspects of Judaism in the Mosaic Law are being swept away. From circumcision to kosher diet, all the things that made it difficult for Jews to assimilate within the Roman world, are being swept away at the same time.

We see the concept of Messiah transforming into sort of a pro-Roman peace-loving Messiah, the very opposite of what Messiah had meant to Jews up to that point.

And we see it all happening simultaneously in the wake of the first Jewish War. On the face of it, that strikes us as Roman propaganda designed specifically to address Jewish rebels of the period.

So yes, there was Roman persecution, but Roman persecution of a very different kind of, let's say, Jewish Christian whose doctrine was basically the opposite of the doctrine we read in the New Testament.

Why would the Romans have persecuted a doctrine that advocated a peace with Rome? Blessed are the peacemakers. Submit to the evildoer, turn the other cheek, pay your taxes, render unto Caesar. The praise for the centurion. Why on earth would Romans persecute such a religion?

They wouldn't. Obviously, the Romans would have had every interest to promote such a doctrine. In fact, the evidence seems to suggest that they were actively promoting that very doctrine.

And that's how Christianity got started. Now, as time went on in the Roman Empire and Christianity became a very popular religion, it began to compete with other monotheistic cults. The cult of Sol Invictus and the cult of Mithras. Both of those tended also to be monotheistic and therefore mutually exclusive.

When that began to happen and when would-be Roman emperors were taking sides in such matters, yes, there was some limited persecution of what we would call Pauline Christians, the New Testament Christians. But that was at a much later date and for very limited periods of time.

But, so pro-Roman and so Roman friendly was the New Testament, that it eventually took over the Roman Empire in a very easy and friendly way as Roman Emperors became Christians.

The doctrine is enormously pro-Roman. On no less than four occasions the New Testament commands slaves to obey their masters, even harsh ones, even when the masters aren't looking. The emperors were to be honored. We are repeatedly told to obey authority. The outsized praise repeatedly heaped on Roman officials and Roman centurions in the New Testament is noteworthy.

Part of the reason why Christians have this false notion of persecution is Hollywood. After 2000 years of antisemitism, let's face it, Hollywood cannot present the Greatest Story Ever Told, the story of Jesus, as it is told in the Gospels.

Mel Gibson tried to do that 15 or so years ago, with his movie, the Passion of Christ. There he followed the Gospels very, very carefully. And of course, he was met from all quarters with accusations of antisemitism.

Mel Gibson, of course responded with: "Well, I was just following the Gospel story!". And of course, he was. That doesn't excuse him of the charge of antisemitism, but it does underline the fact that Christians are in deep denial.

For the last 2000 years Passion Play performances would stimulate Christian mob, violence against Jews. The story of the narrative behind the death of Jesus as told in the Gospels can only be seen one way. In a rather racist way, the Jews, as such, are being blamed for the death of Jesus.

So, modern retellings of the story clean that up and they've taken that out. And they have made the Romans, in effect, the heavies in the story of the death of Jesus. Which is not the obvious original intention of the New Testament.

So, modern Christianity is in denial about those aspects of the New Testament. And so, every retelling that movies give us these days is cleaned up, with all the original politics removed as much as possible.

And in fact, reversing the bad guys altogether from the rather racist way the Jews are blamed in the New Testament, to blaming the Romans.

Maybe I can take you through the Passion narrative and explain how that's obvious.

The famous story of Jesus, of course, is that his rhetorical foils in the Bible, the people he's arguing with all the time, are not Romans. They're Jewish authorities, of various stripes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes.

They catch him with his disciples working on the Sabbath. They ask him: "Why do you let your disciples violate Mosaic Law like that, Jesus?" and that's when he says, the famous line: "Well, the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath".

These kinds of rhetorical jousts with Jewish authorities go on and on. Until finally Jesus enters Jerusalem and morally and physically attacks the temple. He says, you've turned it into a den of thieves. Interestingly, he adds, it should be a house of prayer for all nations. Again, stomping on Jewish exceptionalism.

This attack, of course upsets the priesthood. They get Judas, one of Jesus' own disciples to betray him. Judas famously betrays him with a kiss. Jesus is tried before Jewish council, the Sanhedrin and charged with offenses against the Jewish Mosaic Law. He is convicted of them in a sort of kangaroo court proceeding.

They take him to Pilate, the Roman governor at the time. Pilate hearing these religious charges, cannot understand them. In all four of our Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Pilate, the Roman governor, flatly declares Jesus to be innocent. He will not crucify Jesus.

We are told that there is a Jewish crowd that is gathered. The Jewish crowd three times demands Jesus' death, and chant three times to crucify him. And only after three times this specifically named Jewish crowd

demands Jesus' crucifixion does Pilate finally relent. In what was almost a political cartoon at the time, he melodramatically washes his hands and a base of any guilt.

We do not need Matthew's version to add the Jewish crowd, apparently in unison saying his blood is on us and on our children. We do not need that line to know what all four Gospels are saying.

That the Romans would not have killed this tax paying, peace advocate. It was only the demands of this crazy Jewish crowd, in a very obviously fictional and artificial story that led to that. It is pointedly blaming the Jews for the death of Jesus.

And that has stimulated 2000 years of Christian antisemitism. Christian antisemitism is no accident, no accident, whatever. There is no doubt that in the 20th and 21st centuries, Christian guilt over that antisemitism, which climaxed in the Holocaust, the slaughter of millions of Jews, just for being Jewish, has caused a Christianity to rewrite the text.

It began much earlier than the Holocaust. Getting back in touch, allegedly with its Jewish roots was part of the Reformation. So, goes all the way back to the 16th century. This attempted to sort of reform Christianity and get back to basics. But even the early Protestants in the 16th century, men like Martin Luther were vicious anti-Semites who clearly believed that the Jews were the ones responsible for killing Jesus.

You must ask yourself, who would want to exonerate the Roman government, but the Roman government? Who in the wake of the Jewish War would want to so pointedly blame the Jewish people as a people for the death of their own Messiah, but the Roman government? Who would need such an elaborate justification for what they did?

The Romans and Christians, the very first Christians to discuss this, the early church fathers saw it just this way. That the Jews lost their war with the Romans and their temple was destroyed precisely because they killed Jesus.

That is how Origen, the Christian writer in the third century saw it. That is how Eusebias the first Christian historian in the fourth century saw it. The Jews got what they deserved because they killed Jesus.

That was the common understanding by Christians until recent times in fact. But Hollywood has had to clean all of that up. It has allowed Christians in effect to maintain their deep, what I can only regard as deep denial about the inherent antisemitism in the New Testament.

Combined with what appears to be obvious Roman propaganda in the doctrines of Jesus, it becomes at least a viable hypothesis that Romans created the New Testament. They did so in order to pacify and quell these Messianic rebellious Jews in the first and second centuries.

And it is that persecution the Christians are sort of adopting as their own.

Ashna: What historical evidence suggests they were not persecuted?

James: Well, I would refer readers to an outstanding book of recent scholarship. Professor Candida Moss, a British professor of theology has done excellent work in her book, the Myth of Persecution. It discusses the alleged persecution of Christians at the hands of Romans during the imperial period.

She shows rather conclusively, that while there was some limited persecution here and there, basically it has been dramatically overstated by Christians. There is very little evidence to substantiate the notion that the New Testament Christians were persecuted.

In fact, early Christian writers, like Tertullian, even tell us that Roman governors worked hard to get Christians off when people would try and inform on them the Romans through the imperial period.

I would note and add to Professor Moss' analysis and that there was a confusion by the Romans as to what Christians were. Were they the rebellious Jewish type of Christians? Or were they these peace advocate Pauline, New Testament Christians?

That confusion did lead Roman government authority to sometimes be confused as to whether to simply persecute someone because they claimed to be a Messianic Jew or whether they should do further analysis. But. In either case, there is no hard evidence of any sustained persecution.

It wasn't until the middle of the third century that the Roman government passed any laws on the subject of Christianity. And those laws were only briefly enforced. So, the whole idea of Christian persecution and being fed to the lions is a completely distorted one.

Perhaps the most famous case of Roman persecution of Christians comes from the first century where we're told that the notorious Roman emperor Nero blamed Christians for the great fire of Rome in the year 64 of the Common Era.

There was a terrible fire which destroyed most of the city of ancient Rome in the year 64. And Tacitus, the second-century Roman historian, gives us a detailed account of it, and we are told by him that Nero fastened the blame. While Tacitus implies that Nero is the incendiary arsonist.

Many modern historians have question Tacitus' assumption here. Romans themselves, did not like the Roman emperor Nero and blamed him for many, many things that may not have been his fault.

Not that he was a good emperor, he was a vicious and monstrous tyrant. But he was probably not responsible for burning his own capital to the ground. It cost him a great expense and political headaches that he could have avoided had he not burned his own capital to the ground.

So many, many historians question whether Nero would have done that at all. But at least that the historic second-century Roman historian Tacitus reports that Nero blamed the Chrestiani.

Let us think about that for a second. In the year 64, would the peace-loving Christians, the peace advocating Christians of the New Testament have made a plausible scapegoat?

Or isn't it much more likely that the Chrestiani that Tacitus is referring to are the Messianic Jewish rebels? After all, the fire happened in sixty-four and the Jewish War will break out in just two years later in 66.

We have other instances where we know Jewish rebels were arsonists and set fires. In other cities like Antioch there were violent rebels who engaged in such terrorist activity.

Let me ask a further question. Would there be enough Pauline Christians in the city of Rome thirty years or so after the Crucifixion, to make a plausible scapegoat for Nero? I doubt it.

However, the Jewish rebels, who had already started causing disturbances, even in the city of Rome as early as the year 50, would have made a very, very convenient scapegoat for Nero. In fact, let me go so far as to say they make a more plausible perpetrator for the fire.

We have some evidence that the fire was arson. Tacitus reports that the fire would restart in various parts of the city, despite efforts to put it out. And that the fires would start around the home of a notorious agent of Nero. Again, I doubt Nero would have started the fires around one of his agents' own homes. But terrorists who are anti-Roman might well have done that.

Let me again suggest that what is happening is that the Christians have adopted persecution of Jewish Messianics, who Romans confused with Christians all the time and adopted that persecution by Nero has their own.

It hardly seems likely to me that however few Pauline Christians there were in Rome at the time could have made a plausible scapegoat. Besides, they were peace lovers, pro-Roman pro tax paying peace lovers. Why would Nero have done it at all?

Ashna: To what extent do you think the New Testament is responsible for antisemitism today?

James: I think there is very little question that the New Testament is the source of Christian antisemitism for the last 2000 years. There are related secondary causal issues that come from that.

But, you know, it is like discussing the various causes of the American Civil War. A historian will ask what the causes of the American Civil War. He will discuss various things like, westward expansion, the railroad, the tariff, but really at all redounds to slavery, doesn't it?

And the same is true for Christianity. For example, Christianity, forbids Christians from charging interest on loans. It was only until recent centuries that the Christians could do that. And on the other hand, Jews could charge interest on loans.

This of course, created a great deal of resentment in Christian culture about the alleged greedy Jews. It creates this sort of Shylock image from the Merchant of Venice. He demanded his pound of flesh.

But really all those are secondary issues.

There are other forms of antisemitism. Islam, for example, has a deep and profound antisemitism, which has little to do with Christianity.

But, in my mind, Western European and American antisemitism is grounded and rooted completely in the New Testament. The Passion narrative, as I just described. The complete turning on its head of the Mosaic Law as Christian literature itself develops. It all grows increasingly more and more antisemitic.

As I say, Christian writers began to blame the Jews more and more and more for the crucifixion of Jesus. Until finally you see the Passion Play Reconstructions during the Middle Ages.

Which simply caused mob violence. The Christians would watch the Passion Play narratives around Easter time and they would get so emotional, they would literally become a mob with pitchforks and torches, and they go beat up and kill the local Jews.

It really reduces to the fact, and it has its origins in the fact that the New Testament itself is perfectly antisemitic. People have a hard time with that thought because they say: "Wasn't Jesus himself Jewish? Wasn't Jesus himself the fulfilment of Hebrew prophecies?"

It's very interesting to note the New Testament takes great pains to condemn that specific generation of Hebrews. Takes great pains to open up Judaism to all the world and to stress the fact that the Hebrews themselves have somehow gone astray.

And given that emphasis in the New Testament, the Jews in general have been sort of segmented off in the Christian mind as particularly worthy of contempt and that has its roots all the way back in that Passion narrative.

There didn't seem to be a Jewish group that Jesus didn't criticize in the

New Testament. In the New Testament, Saint Paul's enemies in the book of Acts, for example, are clearly not the Romans. The Romans clearly seemed to be protecting Paul at every moment.

His enemies according to the story, at least as told in the New Testament, are Jews of various stripes. Who are constantly pursuing him and attempting to have him killed or arrested. In the New Testament itself, the Jews are the heavies, not just in the story of Jesus, but in the story of Paul, the martyrdom of Stephen and over and over again.

The disciples themselves are portrayed over and over as dolts who don't understand the message. Peter denies him three times. Judas betrays him unto death. Thomas doubts the resurrection and needs to touch the resurrected body. So, they are doubters, deniers, betrayers. They don't get it. The portrait of the disciples particularly unflattering in the New Testament.

The portrait of Jewish authorities is even less flattering. It's really hard to escape the fact, if you're a fair reader of the New Testament, that it is systematically critical of first-century Jews. Their purity laws, their culture, their commitment to the Mosaic Law, their politics, their political zealotry, their violence are all being specifically addressed in the New Testament. And turned on its head from the Roman perspective.

So, what we're seeing here is the grounds, if you will, for 2000 years of antisemitism. It was certainly Martin Luther's grounds for antisemitism, it was Eusebius', Saint Augustine's. As well as Christians of various stripes, Eastern orthodox, Western Catholic, Protestant, you name it.

Ashna: Alright, so if Paul was pro-Roman, perhaps even working for the Romans, why would they execute him?

James: Well, the first thing to note is that the execution of Paul, as reported in Christian tradition, is strictly speaking not to be found in first-century Christian literature at all.

When you read the Acts of the Apostles, which tells us the story of Paul, it cuts off before Paul arrives in Rome, where he's allegedly executed. Now, I have no grounds to doubt that tradition, but it stems from a later oral tradition.

There is one of the Pauline epistles which was not actually written by Paul, in which Paul says: "I am on my way to my death". Which itself suggests that it was not written by Paul, but sort of anticipates the martyrdom of Paul.

But, to back up and give you the real answer. Many, many, many double agents in the history of espionage have faced that very fate. Someone who works as a mole, which is precisely what Paul was trying to do, often suffers such a fate. He was doing very dangerous, psyops sorts of espionage operations for the Romans.

He had to assume the identity of one of these Christian rebels and infiltrate their movement. Either sincerely at one time be, or at least pretend to be a for a time, a member of that group. And then start undermining it from within. Which is precisely what he did and when he started to undermine what we might call the Jewish Christian movement.

This is what Paul's great change to the Jewish Christian movement was, he turned it into a pro-Roman peace movement. For example, in one of the oldest sections of the New Testament., he names the Roman government as God's appointed agents on earth and says rebellion is a sin.

And that is why we must obey the Roman state and even honor the emperor. It is going well beyond any effort to simply appease the Romans or not rock the boat. He's saying the Roman government are God's agents on Earth.

The other thing that he's doing is altering the Mosaic Law, turning it completely on its head.

We know that the rebels, of course, as would be consistent with their ideology, were Torah Orthodox. It was those various elements, the Mosaic Law that they were fighting for. It was the practice of these very aspects of their religion that they thought required their political independence.

And so, he changes the requirement for say circumcision. Paul says it's no longer necessary. And that's of course why it's totally optional for Christians. Paul also says that a kosher diet is no longer necessary. You can eat lobster and pork and so on. You eat with gentiles and that's no

problem.

The very people that he was trying to influence in these ways reacted very violently. The Jewish Christian movement, which he had infiltrated, believed very, very differently on those subjects. Hence, we get the portrait in the book of Acts, where various Jewish groups began to react violently to Paul.

Rather than pacifying the Jewish Christian rebel movement, Paul was having the opposite effect. He was aggravating them. In his own letters, which are first person letters that he himself writes, he says that he had open confrontations with previous Christians over things like kosher diet and circumcision.

In Galatians, he outright damns the previous Apostles like James and Peter. People don't realize that in the book of Galatians, the saints are arguing ferociously with one another. Saint Paul is having a heated argument with all the previous Christians over these very issues. He says he had to confront Peter to his face over the issue.

So, we have a good indication that the "Christians" prior to Paul, were Torah Orthodox and violent rebels. And that makes perfect sense, doesn't it?

In any event, Paul's infiltration of this movement and his attempt to pacify it, his attempt to soften its commitment to the Mosaic Law, had precisely the opposite effect that it was intended to have. As we can read in Paul's letter to the Galatians and in the Book of Acts.

The violent conflict that it caused created disturbances so heated that Paul's trial was transferred to Rome. Paul, as a Roman citizen, interestingly, demanded that his trial be transferred from Jerusalem.

It is on his way to trial in Rome, that the Biblical story cuts off. Biblical tradition says that at some point later he was martyred.

But that aside, he arrives, very interestingly on the eve of the great fire of Rome in 64. And if the Great Fire of Rome really was blamed on Messianic Jews, then we can see, Paul may have had a very counterproductive impact.

He might have brought the violence that he had stimulated in Judea to Rome itself. In the wake of the Great Fire, Nero might've seen that he had become counterproductive to his purposes. Therefore, the execution of Paul might have been seen as a way of appeasing the violent Jewish crowd.

So, Paul could have faced what the fate that many, many agents in the history of espionage face. Being killed by one side or the other. He would have certainly become very inconvenient to the Romans by that point. His mission had backfired.

Ashna: Do you agree with those who think Christianity has roots in pagan Mystery Cults and other eastern cults?

James: Well, what Creating Christ attempts to do is to integrate various and very disparate fields of biblical scholarship. We try to integrate the work of critical Biblical scholars, but we also try and integrate the work of various other fields such as those scholars who do see the pagan parallels in Christianity.

And in this respect, it's very helpful to contrast it with its mother faith, Judaism. Which is a strict form of monotheism. As we recall from the Ten Commandments itself, Lord Thy God is a jealous god and will have no other gods before him. The Ten Commandments also forbids the worship of idols, no graven images, no physical representations of God at all.

And therefore, within Judaism, while they have a tradition of a Messiah, a prophetic savior who would come to rescue the Jewish people in times of crisis, sent by God, he would be a mortal Messiah. Never in Jewish prophecy is it implied that the Messiah would be a god himself, the son of God, or any such thing.

There had been Messiah's in the ancient history of the Hebrew people on multiple occasions. Moses and Joshua, who led the children of Israel into the Promised Land, can be seen as the first. Surely King David, who defeated the Philistines and became the second king of Israel was a Messiah.

And then of course, Hanukkah celebrates the second-century BC successful Jewish Messianic revolt of the Maccabees. This revolt lead by

Maccabeus, lead the Hebrews to independence over their Syrian overlords.

So there had been repeated Messiah's who had come to the rescue of Jews. Maybe even with miraculous help from God. But the Messiahs themselves were all men, perfectly mortal beings. What we have in the New Testament for the first time, is a divine Jewish Messiah, a god man.

Of course, the reaction by mainline Jews is precisely what you would expect it to be. The very first references to Jesus in the Talmud ridicule his virgin birth and ridicule his claims to divinity.

And so, what is very striking is what Christianity does to the concept of Messiah. It turns him into a man-god, which is totally alien to and in fact, counter to Jewish monotheism.

The creation of this Jesus man-god will create a problem within Christianity. Because it will still claim to be monotheistic. And so, it will have to work that out with the concept of the Trinity.

It is really violating a basic tenant of monotheism in having a divine Messiah. And when we look at this divine man-god Messiah, he has many features of pagan demigods and man-gods. The examples are just so numerous.

Hercules, from Greek and Roman myth is a good one. Or the healing god Aesculapius or the Persian god, Mithra, who became Mithras. The Egyptian god, Osiris, who became Serapis in a syncretized form.

In the ancient world, after the conquest of Alexander the Great in fourth century BC, pagan polytheism began to cross identify polytheistic gods with one another. And so, Egyptian gods were beginning to be cross identified with Greek gods and so forth. They were in the process of unifying gods.

For instance, seeing all the solar deities the same, seeing all the sky deities as the same. This increased cross referencing of deities was going on in the pre-Christian pagan world.

Moreover, there is in the pre-Christian pagan world, something else that's happening to religion. Instead of being focused on, say, political concerns, personal salvation in the afterlife becomes more and more of a concern

within these pagan mystery cults.

Soon you began to see what are known perhaps misleadingly as Orphic Mystery cults. Where the health of your loved ones or their happy afterlife is what is being sought with this secret knowledge of the demigod that's being worshiped.

And there's a pattern to these pagan mystery cults as well. There is usually a god who is at first born of a god and a mortal female. Such as the healer god Aesculapius of the Greeks. He was born of Apollo and a mortal woman. He was a healer, and he became so good at healing the ill that he could resurrect the dead. Numerous heroes from Greek mythology are resurrected, we are told by the healer god Aesculapius.

But of course, this vexed the gods, the gods of the Underworld didn't like that. This healer was stealing the souls of Hades from the Underworld. And so, zap, Zeus kills Aesculapius, who suffers a martyrdom as a result of his resurrecting activities.

Well, Apollo, his divine father is vexed by this. He asks Zeus if something can be done about this. And Zeus offers to turn Aesculapius into a god, so that everyone is happy.

So, Aesculapius the semi-divine healer who was resurrecting people and was martyred, enjoys his own apotheosis to become a god himself. And so, the devotees of the cult of Aesculapius would worship Aesculapius for both for his powers to heal the sick and to assure them of a happy afterlife.

We can see this on numerous inscriptions that should strike any Christian as obviously quite familiar. That's the outline of Jesus' own life, right as told in the New Testament. And that is not the only one.

There are numerous, many, many, many, many parallels to various pagan mystery cult gods. Many scholars have gone over this in great detail.

The mere fact that we celebrate the birth of Jesus around the Winter Solstice is not accidental. Jesus is portrayed in many ways as a solar deity. Which many of these mystery gods were, such as Apollo, the father of Aesculapius. He was the sun god and when Aesculapius becomes combined with the solar and afterlife deities of Egypt, he takes on a new

form

He takes on the form of Serapis, which is sort of an afterlife, healing god. He combines the features of Aesculapius with Osiris, the Egyptian god of the underworld. In the process this creates a god that is represented with a benevolent, bearded Jesus like aspect, but also as the beardless solar daddy with a halo and rays coming out of his head.

This god of course had his birth at the Winter Solstice like most solar deities did. The sun is metaphorically born, if you will. The old sun of the year dies. And the new sun is born on the longest night and the shortest day of the year.

And so solar deities of the Ancient World traditionally celebrated their births at the end of the year, around the Winter Solstice. Interestingly, the Roman emperor Titus celebrated it at around the same time as well.

The mere fact that Christians in their tradition celebrate Christmas at around this time is a very pagan element. December 25th is in fact, exactly when the Romans celebrated the birth of Sol Invictus, the solar god.

There are many, many other examples in the Gospels themselves. For example, in Matthew's nativity story, there are Magi. That is to say Zoroastrian, not Jewish, but Zoroastrian priests who have read the stars and determined that this is the world ruler whose just been born.

Or, take the resurrection of Jesus. He is resurrected at dawn in all four Gospels. You see life, the sun rises, the sun has resurrected. And in fact, the Gospel of John gives Jesus the title of the Sun God, the Light of the World.

And in many, many other ways, Jesus resembles a pagan mystery god. The fact that he's divine is itself in an affront to traditional Judaism. Just to turn the Jewish Messiah into a demigod, a healer god, is on its own a very pagan notion.

Yes, I very much believe that Christianity sort of completes the syncretizing, unifying movement that was happening among these pagan deities. We begin to see gods being turned into a sort of a pantheistic single being. these syncretized beings, Aesculapius and Zeus are being

combined with Osiris to become Serapis.

What we see in Jesus is the Hebrew Messiah being added into the mix. Jesus is, I hate to use such an unfriendly metaphor, but Jesus is sort of a Frankenstein's monster of elements. Sewing together distinctly and even anti-Jewish elements, like being a man-god, or being born of a virgin or performing healing miracles.

All of which are very common for pagan deities. But are direct affronts to Jewish monotheism and their conception of the Messiah.

We see all kinds of other pagan Roman elements being fused. Many, many, many scholars of Christianity, for example, have clearly observed the Platonic dualism that characterized Jesus' message. Jesus says, don't store up your treasures here on Earth where moths and rust can get at them. Store your treasures in the kingdom of Heaven where they last eternally.

Well, what is that? But a Platonic dissing of the material world, a Platonic elevation of this transcendent other world. What does Jesus say? My kingdom is not of this Earth.

In that very process, they're taking the very political ambitions of the Hebrew people and their concept of Messiah and simply taking it away from this world and putting the Messiah in some supernatural dimension. The Platonic World of Forms, this Perfect Order that has nothing to do with the world here. This is separating out the Messiah into some sort of unearthly thing, not a political thing, not an earthly thing at all.

And in various other ways, we see Platonism and Stoicism being layered into the philosophy of Judaism. The very ideas that the Jewish rebels, the Jewish Messianic rebels of the first few centuries were fighting. So many echoes of Classical philosophy are there in the New Testament.

The early Christians forged a correspondence between Paul and the Stoic Roman philosopher Seneca, the Younger. The ideas of the first-century Roman philosopher and Saint Paul are so similar and have so many echoes that the Christians simply couldn't believe that the two men, who would have been contemporaries, could not have been in correspondence with one another. And so, by the fourth century, Christians had forged a

fictional correspondence between the Roman philosopher, Seneca and the earliest Christian writer, Saint Paul.

Both Hellenistic and Roman philosophy, as well as Hellenistic and pagan religion are grafted onto the Jewish Messiah to create this man-god, Jesus Christ. In the New Testament, Jesus was a grand synthesis of just about every aspect of ancient religion that the Romans were aware of. And that's part of its power.

Let's face it. Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophy was always far more consistent with Jewish monotheism than it was with polytheism. By the time you get to the Neoplatonists like Plotinus, we're talking about the Form of the good being the One

It is just begging for a unified god, for a monotheistic god rather than a polytheistic hodgepodge. And in this way, the developing Neoplatonic tendency toward monotheism perfectly dovetailed with Judaism. And that made Christianity, arising from the attempt to both combine Neoplatonic philosophy and pagan religious elements, along with this Jewish Messiah.

And then it had Roman political propaganda put into it. It made it the perfect vehicle for Roman state religion. Irresistibly. It took over the Roman Empire and took over Western history since. It was an effective formula at pacifying everyone in effect, getting them all in line on the same religious page. It succeeded in getting them all obedient to this day.

Romans:13, which declares the government to be god's appointed agents on earth, was used by Christian governments well into the 17th century and 18th centuries. Louis the 14th's divine right, "I am god's appointed agent on earth".

Or, the arguments of the British Tories against the American Revolution. The supporters of King George cited Romans:13.: "Look you, American revolutionaries, you're rebelling". And George the Third was a pussycat compared to Cicero and Nero.

Not only that, but the American Founding Fathers were also rebelling for taxes. They didn't even want to render unto Caesar! I would have to say that the British Tories in the American revolution had much the better Biblical arguments.

Whatever American conservatives think, the American Revolution is the opposite of the New Testament.

You really can see it all over the place from Neoplatonism to Seneca. There's no question that Neoplatonism, by way of Stoicism is precisely the philosophical backdrop for Christianity. I think that's pretty obvious.

In fact, Christianity was a sort of an intermediary. Neoplatonism was the ascending philosophy in the Ancient World. Throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods there is an increasing appeal of Neoplatonism.

And so, what Christianity did, is it became the perfect vehicle by which to transmit Neoplatonism, for the reasons I indicated earlier. I think Jewish monotheism was always more consistent with it.

So, all they had to do was throw in the various elements of the pagan man-God, fuse that with the Neoplatonism and Stoicism that was so popular in Rome the time. And it became the perfect vehicle for Neoplatonism.

And it carried that Neoplatonism right in, through Saint Augustine, right into the Dark Ages. Which were darkened by that very fact. Christianity was itself just the religious trappings for Neoplatonism to ascend.

By the 13th century, it was also starting to widen its scope through the good graces of Thomas Aquinas, to include Aristotelian elements.

The great genius of Christianity has been its flexibility. And the reason why it's survived 2000 years is that it was able enough to detach itself enough from its Neoplatonic origins to eventually become a livable doctrine.

But yes, there's absolutely no question that the reason why we should study the history of Christianity is that it was the great vehicle by which Neoplatonic ideas were transmitted into Western civilization.

Ashna: And it destroyed them, it destroyed the Roman Empire.

James: Precisely. The advent of Neoplatonic dualism and mysticism is the direct cause of the fall of the Roman Empire at the commencement of the Dark Ages. And they were dark on purpose.

If you look at it this way, the barbarians didn't conquer them at all, the barbarians were conquered by them. Look at the Franks and the Visigoths. The people who live in France and Spain are still good Roman Christians and they still speak a recognizable form of Latin, French or Spanish. Culturally speaking, the barbarians were conquered by the Romans who had a superior culture.

In fact, Christianity survived as did Roman culture, straight through.

It was Christianity that caused the Western Roman Empire to literally fall apart. The aristocrats were joining monasteries rather than their army. Rome, which once had a glorious military culture, was finding itself more and more and more in the, in the grip of a Platonic dualism and pacifism. Making it so that they would have to hire out their military.

The Western Roman Empire would collapse from within. The Eastern Roman Empire would continue in some form for centuries as what we call the Byzantine Empire. But it immediately engaged in what I can only describe as a self-inflicted lobotomy.

This was an age before the printing press. And so, any books that were preserved from the Ancient World had to be copied by hand. And so, most of the ancient literature of the classical world was lost because they didn't copy it.

In fact, they bleached over vellum and created Christian prayer books or Christian hymn books. Out of the old copies of, say, Archimedes Method or Aristotle's dialogues.

And that's why they exist only in palimpsest form today. We can only discover, say, an outline of some lost ancient world behind some Byzantine Christian prayer book or hymn book. Because the Christians no longer copied the works of Aristotle or Archimedes and rather just made an umpteenth next copy of some Christian hymn book.

We really lost the knowledge of the classical world much more through that process, the failure to copy and preserve the books, than we did through say book burnings.

Although there were book burnings. There was for instance Savonarola, who, who would in the middle of Florence just burn all the art and books they could. And there were of course times when books were censored.

But by and large, the knowledge of the pagan, classical world was lost because Christians in the Byzantine world simply refused to copy the works of classical authors. There is no question. Christianity made the Dark Ages dark. They destroyed and lost so much of classical knowledge.

We'll never really know how much we don't know about the classical world. Thanks to that black hole which separates us from the classical world. One created by Christian culture.

Isn't it a tragedy? Cicero describes the dialogues of Aristotle is liquid gold. As even better than Plato's dialogues. And none of them, not a single one of Aristotle's dialogues still exists.

Or Archimedes Method. We had to rediscover the work of one of the greatest scientists of the Ancient World in palimpsest form.

We really are still just recovering his science. I guess people like Archimedes and Aristotle, weren't important enough to preserve. The scientists from the Ancient World were not important enough for medieval Christians to preserve. All so that they could have a zillionth copy of another Christian prayer book.

Ashna: Somewhat of a controversial subject?

James: We are always told that in polite conversation, there are two subjects to avoid: religion and politics. My book is where religion and politics collide. It is inherently a controversial subject. Before I even start talking about it, I usually must make sure that I will not get punched in the face.

Ashna: Not exactly something to discuss this or indeed any other Christmas...

James: No, not recommended family holiday discussion material.

I have a great deal of sympathy for certain Christians. This may be hard for

someone in our audience to understand, but I do. Philosophy is a necessary thing for human beings. It is not an optional element. And most of us just don't have the wherewithal to develop a whole philosophy.

It is obviously an accumulated effort. Newton said, we stand upon the shoulders of giants when we discover something new, any of us. Without a secular, rational philosophy as an alternative, religion is a tempting necessity.

It gives us a moral framework. It gives us a basic way of putting things together. Even if most of our readers might not think adequately answers those metaphysical or ethical questions that need a clear answer, at least it provides an answer.

And again, let me go as far as I can in being as sympathetic to Christianity as I can. There are things to be said about Christianity.

It did unlike, say, Islam carry elements of the classical world into Western civilization. In a direct and pure form, in a way that Islam did not. This made the Christian civilization easier to adapt and easier to modernize than say, Islamic culture was.

Although, the Golden Age of Islam a thousand years ago, itself had an Aristotelian period of, of scientific advancement. But I think there were forces within Islam that brought that to a halt that did not exist within the Christian world. Precisely because Christianity carried certain elements of classical learning into its own tradition.

I will go even further. There are beautiful elements of Christianity.

You and I and many of our readers are advocates of the philosophy of Ayn Rand, of Objectivism. Obviously, from our perspective, Christianity is just about the opposite in every way you can imagine. Its metaphysics is mystical and dualistic. Its epistemology is mystical revelation. Its ethics is altruism. Its politics is total submission to the state.

And so, in every fundamental way, the doctrine found in the New Testament is diametrically opposed to Objectivism in just about every way you might think. But even Ayn Rand could find things in Christianity that she liked.

For example, she loved the wonderful quote “For what should it profit a man if he should gain the whole world but loses his own soul?”.

She liked the focus on individual soul, individual salvation. Even if it is a mystical thing, it created within Christian culture, a sort of an emphasis on reality to the individual and that individuals were equal before God and in Christian culture, that dovetails into an equality before the law.

Again, I'm doing my best to define things within Christianity that I can praise and there definitely are things that made Christianity amenable to that kind of benevolent change, no question about it. They were based on ideas that were carried from the classical world into Christianity, straight through into Western civilization. So, I have to tip my hat, at least to that extent.

Ashna: Given that it was aimed at a Jewish audience, to what extent does it preserve Jewish ideas and customs?

James: Well, that is the other side of this, isn't it? It very much does. The Romans did not, despite their antisemitism, despise everything about the Jews or even the Jewish rebels. There were things about Judaism that Roman society did admire. You can hear it in our own history as well.

So, where we see Roman social ethics overlapping with Hebrew social ethics, Hebrew social ethics is featured, promoted and very much advertised in Christianity.

For example, take the Golden Rule, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. We see forms of that already influencing Stoic philosophers like Seneca. Seneca himself, articulates forms of the Golden Rule, which probably has its roots in Jewish ethical wisdom of the first-century BC. So of course, it's hardly surprising to see the Golden Rule actively featured in the New Testament as an ethical doctrine.

And that is not all. Romans were very, very impressed by the commitment of the Jewish religion to its ethics. We can see that favorably featured in the New Testament.

The entire notion of the Messiah itself, is predicated on the Hebrew

prophecies. Jesus is an echo of everything that's expected of a Hebrew Messiah in the first century. He is a descendant of King David. He is born in Bethlehem. A star heralds his birth. He is appropriately circumcised. He goes through the Baptism ritual that certain first-century Jewish extremist groups required and so forth.

It even goes beyond that. The descriptions of Jesus, his life in the New Testament are very frequently based upon material in the Hebrew scriptures.

That is an astonishing fact in itself. If they're telling us the biography of a recent fellow named Jesus who lived in the first century, why would they be citing material from the Hebrew scriptures?

Take for example, the nativity of Jesus. We're told that king Herod slaughters all the babies of Bethlehem. Well, that is an echo of the same story told about the baby Moses when he was born. A Jewish savior has been prophesied. What does Pharaoh do? He kills all the Hebrew babies and that's why Moses is put on the river to be picked up by Pharaoh's daughter.

So, what we're seeing again and again and again in the New Testament, is entire passages from Hebrew scripture simply written into the life of Jesus.

When, for example, the archangel Gabriel announces to the virgin Mary, that she's about to give birth to the Messiah, she goes into this speech. Which is almost a perfect echo of a similar speech that a woman in Hebrew scripture gives the mother of the prophet Samuel when she too has a miraculous birth. This time, not a virgin birth, but her miraculous pregnancy in old age.

That speech is basically reproduced for Mary and the New Testament, so we can be certain that one of the major sources for the Gospel writers was the Old Testament. Hebrew scriptures and not in fact any recent biographical tradition about a man named Jesus.

Many, many elements of Jewish ideas and culture come through and some not Roman. When Christianity became popular in the Roman Empire, there are certain Jewish features that were sort of anti-Roman that it brought in as well.

The Roman culture was a notoriously sexually libertine from a Christian perspective. They had a much more open and less uptight view about sex, let's put it that way. Christianity, when it took over the empire brought a much stricter sexual ethic.

Of course, that's consistent with Neoplatonism in general. The disparagement of the physical is the tendency of Neoplatonism.

We see in Christianity, for example, when it says poverty is wonderful and a sexist to be avoided, both those doctrines are in the New Testament. Paul recommends celibacy. Paul says money is the root of all evil. Jesus recommends becoming a eunuch for Kingdom of Heaven's sake. And he says that you can't serve both God and money.

So, this is a doctrine that wealth and sex are bad. It is part of Platonic dualism. This disparagement of the material world itself then becomes inevitable with any mystical dualism.

We find Jewish morality is far more consistent with that and a much stricter sexual morality. And so, what Christianity does is it combines the stricter Jewish sexual morality with this Neoplatonic dualism. And that combination creates in Christianity a very anti-sex attitude.

We see that it isn't until well into the Middle Ages that all priests are required to be celibate. But we see celibate monks early in the Christian tradition. A monastic tradition that probably has its roots in a Jewish monastic tradition of separating from the world and being sexually abstentious and so forth.

In denying the flesh in every form that you can imagine; the early Christian writer Origin took Jesus quite literally. When Jesus said: "Become a eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake", he castrated himself. That's in sharp contrast to traditional Greco Roman sexual ethics.

So, we see an extreme form of Neoplatonism dovetailing with Jewish sexual ethics to make this perfect storm of anti-worldly approach to things like money and sex. That became very extreme in the Middle Ages.

Today, we've come so far away from that original doctrine. Since the Enlightenment, the only place where you see Christians consistently

practice it is in monasteries or Amish communities.

Ashna: Do you think there was a historical Jesus? Do you think we could ever know the answer to this question? I believe your book takes the position that we will never know.

James: Yes, we do not. That question might never be satisfactorily answered. That may be one of the great unknowns that we just have to live with for the rest of the time. Because there is no physical evidence and no contemporary documentary evidence for Jesus.

The earliest documents that mentioned him are in a theological context, that is to say the writings of the New Testament. They are talking about a man-God and they are not talking about a historical being. By the time Jesus was really talked about in secular history, he has left living memory.

And so, the very existence of the historical Jesus becomes problematic. There are excellent arguments that scholars make on both sides.

The so-called mythicists, who say there was no Jesus, they point to the fact that there's no element of Jesus that really does not have some other cause or reason. Whether in Hebrew prophecies or being modelled by some pagan deity.

It either comes from some aspect of a pagan deity or some aspect of Jewish prophecy being fulfilled. But in either sense, the Jesus that we have in the New Testament could be a purely synthetic creation.

There are those who are very dissatisfied with that. They say: "Well, wait a minute. You know, doesn't it make better sense that there was at least someone named Jesus that got it all rolling and it snowballed into the Jesus movement."

The best arguments I think for that, are the fact of the Crucifixion. The Crucifixion is a sort of paradoxical thing. If there was a historical Jesus, we cannot rely on the New Testament as history.

Even critical Christian scholars recognize that some 80 or 90 percent of the material quoted from Jesus in the New Testament, could not have been spoken by any historical Jesus.

Let me give you an example. Jesus allegedly said: "Deny yourself, pick up your cross and follow me". No living Jesus could have said that. He is magically predicting the method of his own execution. It would also have been nonsensical to his listeners. They didn't know about the cross yet or his crucifixion.

And in fact, the statement "Pick up your own cross and follow me" speaks to a more metaphorical or abstract understanding of the Crucifixion. So that quotation was clearly inserted into the mouth of Jesus at a later date by people who already saw the Crucifixion in an abstract and symbolic way.

Most of the stuff quoted by Jesus in the New Testament simply could not have been uttered by any historical Jesus. That has led scholars to say: "Look, since we can't rely on the New Testament, what can we really know about Jesus? What would be the bare facts that we could possibly know?"

The one bare fact we have, since the Gospels are so unreliable, is the fact of his crucifixion. If there's anything that would have been true about him, it was the fact that he would as he was crucified.

If there was a historical Jesus, and if he was crucified, it's far more likely he was crucified for being a rebel. The Romans would not have crucified an advocate of peace. The Romans would not have had crucified an advocate of paying your taxes and rendering unto Caesar. Had the Roman's known about Jesus, they would have probably hired him as a spokesman rather than crucify him.

And so, if there was a historical Jesus, let me suggest that he was the exact opposite of the person described in the Gospels. We know the earliest Christians were Torah Orthodox.

From Paul's own arguments, we know that all the previous Christians were sticklers about the Mosaic Law and that Paul was the innovator in this regard. And so, Jesus would have been Torah Orthodox and like we know the earliest Christians all were.

If there was a historical Jesus at, he would also have likely been a political rebel. Again, that's why Paul is arguing so strenuously for peace and paying your taxes and why he has to stand on his head to say that the

Roman government are God's agents on earth and so forth. That again, is a Pauline innovation.

If there was a historical Jesus, he probably advocated rebellion, which is consistent with Torah Orthodoxy. And so, if there was a historical Jesus, and that is still an if in my mind, he was precisely the opposite of the fellow described in the Gospels. He was a Torah Orthodox, violence advocating rebel who was crucified for that reason.

The real Jesus, if there was such a thing, would have been very, very different from the Prince of Peace in the Greatest Story Ever Told, that's for sure. He would not have gone around praising centurions as has having more faith than any son of Israel.

What we have in the Gospels, and the Passion narrative, is the story of Jesus' execution. It is an elaborate explanation for why a crucifixion might have happened and why this peace advocate would have ever been crucified by Pilate.

It requires explanation if there was such an event. In fact, it would require the sort of explanation that the Gospels give it.

If Jesus had been convicted of violating the Mosaic Law by the Sanhedrin, they had all the power in the world to execute in themselves. They routinely executed people without any permission from the Roman government.

Josephus, the first-century historian, quotes the Roman edicts, which give Jews before the Jewish War, the right to enforce their own laws, including the death penalty.

In fact, the Gospels themselves depict scenes in which the Jewish authorities do just that. In the Book of Acts, the Sanhedrin convict Saint Stephan of the very same crime Jesus' is convicted of, and they don't need the permission of Pilate. They just stoned him.

And so, you must ask yourself why, if the Sanhedrin convicted Jesus of those crimes, why didn't they just kill him themselves? There's this bizarre explanation being given in the narrative. If there was a historical Jesus, they needed to go to that extent to exonerate the Roman government of the Crucifixion.

Now, if there wasn't a historical Jesus that is equally explainable. Jesus would have made the perfect vehicle for what? Describing how the Jewish people had created their own problem.

Messianic prophecies indicated a Messianic precursor who might have to be martyred. A human sacrifice that would allow the Messianic advent to occur. Within Hebrew prophecy that's known as the Suffering Servant. In those Jewish prophecies, they say the Suffering Servant must be pierced for the transgressions of the people. That perfectly dovetails in with the Crucifixion.

So, in fulfillment of Jewish prophecy, he was crucified in order to be pierced for the transgressions of the Jewish people. Or he was actually a man who was crucified.

It is hard for me to tell which. I think there's good arguments on both sides, but in either case, if there was a historical Jesus, he was exactly the opposite of the person described in the New Testament.

Ashna: How do you account for the diverse variety of Christian literature, and sects, in the first three centuries?

James: That is an outstanding question. In fact, one of the arguments that I would submit for my thesis is the fact that we have four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

Each of these was addressed to a different segment of the population. A more Hellenized Jewish population was being addressed in Luke and Acts. Whereas a more orthodox Jewish population was being addressed in the book of Matthew and still a more Messianic audience is addressed in the book of John.

So, the various groups within Judaism are clearly each having a form of the Jesus story told to that specific audience. And it strikes me as very odd that all at once, several different Jewish communities are being appealed to with the same essential argument, just given a slight twist for their own community.

And more than that, once that happens, once Christianity has detached itself from the mother faith Judaism, it can then become all kinds of things.

It could adopt various pagan elements, which it quickly added.

For instance, the Gnostic movement, which is a sort of a philosophic Platonic movement which affected many religions, could directly affect Christianity.

Soon, various forms of Christianity cut their ties with the Jewish faith altogether. Marcion of Sinope, a Christian Bishop in the second century said: "We don't need the Hebrew scriptures at all".

So, Gnostic forms of Christianity and far more pagan and Hellenised forms of Christianity developed in the second century, a wide variety of them did.

And what's very interesting is that when Christianity did become the official religion of the Roman Empire in the fourth century, it had to declare many of these variant Christians to be heretical.

Because they were going off on their own, deeply Hellenised thing and coming up with all kinds of creative, heretical versions of Christianity. What would later be seen as radical versions, because at the time there was no canonical version of Christianity.

And Christianity in the first three centuries was in a period of creative flux. And so, we see a wide variety of Christian literature, very creative Christian literature of various kinds. Some of which said Jesus was only a spiritual being, never a physical man of all. Others said he was just a man who later became God. Some of which, as I say, completely cut off the Jewish tradition all together.

It was only when it became the official doctrine of the Roman Empire that they needed Christianity to be unified. Only then was there a need for there to be a single canon of literature and a single a doctrine of faith. And thus, we see the Council of Nicaea, in the early fourth century.

Just after Christianity is becoming the official faith of the Roman Empire. All the Christian bishops in the empire get together and try to iron out these differences. They try to resolve all of the various variations on this theme that they have made and make it a single doctrine.

So, what we call a Trinitarian Christianity, really all Christianity since then,

came to its final form only at the council of Nicaea. Which developed the doctrine of the Trinity and so forth and ironed out the differences that had emerged in a Christianity in the first three centuries.

They didn't realize that they were creating such a powerful beast that would gobble up their own empire. They thought they were only pacifying the Jewish rebels, but so successful formula was it for pacifying their conquered people that it became the ideal means of doing so and unifying the entire empire.

Ashna: Which books or historical sources would you suggest to anyone wanted to know more about some of the information presented in your book?

James: Well, fortunately, I'm not alone, I am just a member of a growing new school of thought in this area of Roman providence.

Fortunately, in this, and the pioneering work was done back in the 19 nineties by Professor Robert Eisenman and his work "James, the Brother of Jesus" and his other works on the various ideologies of the first century.

He is an important translator of the Dead Sea Scrolls. He is the scholar that got the Huntington Library to release a photostatic copy of their entire set of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The officials who in charge of translating and releasing them have been dragging their feet for literally decades. So, he got the Dead Sea Scrolls made available to all scholars.

In his own analysis of the Dead Sea Scrolls, he began to see how Messianic Jewish ideology had in effect been turned on its head in the New Testament.

He identified it in both an ideological and even a linguistic way, at such a level that I can only recommend his work to readers who have a real deep interest in this. Because he will get into some very technical issues. But he makes some very, very powerful arguments.

I don't necessarily agree with everything Professor Eisenman says. He does say some very controversial things, which we do not rely upon in our own theory.

But in any case, Robert Eisenman's "James, the Brother of Jesus" is a highly recommended work.

I also highly recommend the work of Joseph Atwill: "Caesar's Messiah", written in 2005. It for the first time, began to explore the relationship between the imperial Flavian dynasty of Roman emperors. Who ruled Rome at the end of the first century? During the very period when the Gospels and most of the New Testament was composed. Which is a subject we explore deeply in the book.

I also recommend the work of Thijs Voskuilen and Rose Mary Sheldon, "Operation Messiah", which argues nothing less than that Paul was a Roman intelligence operative. That book came out in 2008.

I also recommend the work of Francesco Carotta, the Italian scholar whose work more than 10 years ago, was finally translated from German and Italian into English. And is available now to English speaking audiences.

He has another brilliant analysis where he shows the relationship between the Imperial cult of the divine Julius Caesar, and early Christianity.

And all those parallels when taken together, have something important to add to this. And many of their arguments overlap with arguments that we independently discovered.

My co-author and I back in the 1980s, before any of these other authors had published any of their works, before we'd heard of any of these other authors, had stumbled across this theory. And we were absolutely convinced both of Roman providence and the Flavian provenance to the New Testament. And we've been working on it for thirty years.

It is just one of those strange things in the development of knowledge. I would reluctantly compare it to a grand thing like Newton Leibniz independently discovering calculus. Or like Wallace and Darwin, independently discovering natural selection.

I really feel like this is the moment in history when scholars have finally stumbled across the obvious reality of Roman provenance to the New Testament.

Why I compare it to those grant or scientific outlooks is that once you see the world from, say the standpoint of Darwinian evolution, it's impossible not to see it that way.

In other words, once you get evolution you say: "Oh my gosh, yeah, fish and lizards and birds all have two eyes. And those underneath four appendages sticking out. We're all related."

So that the differences and similarities between the various species now has a causal explanation. And when you look at the natural world thereafter, it is impossible to not see Darwin playing out in the natural world. Once you've got that angle, all your observations are now changed.

I would, perhaps, immodestly compare my own understanding of Christianity to that. Once you look at the New Testament from this angle, suddenly everything becomes obvious. You can't not see it. Let me give you a few examples.

Jesus and his famous parable of the Good Samaritan. We all know the parable of the Good Samaritan. At least, all Christians know the story of the man who was beaten up and robbed and left on the side of the road.

A Jewish priest walks by and he walks on to the other side of the road, ignoring the guy. A Jewish holy man walks by, and he ignores the man. But a Samaritan, a foreigner, a non-Jew, he takes picks up the man, takes him home, feeds him, dresses as wounds and cares for him.

What's the message of the story? Well, let's just name it what it really is. It is the parable of the good foreigner. It is the parable of the bad Jew.

Once you understand the theory of Roman providence and reread the New Testament, then suddenly literally every single narrative story, every single idea expressed suddenly takes on a new and different meaning. Suddenly it is quite obvious what the original agenda was.

And so, now I can't look at Christian art, I can't read Christian literature without my theory screaming at me. It is very much a fundamental reorientation. Once you've seen Christianity in this light, you cannot unsee it. It explains everything.

As I say to my Christian friends, just drop your finger down at random in the New Testament, and I will explain to you how that's obviously Roman propaganda. It is just a fun test to do.

Take Christian literature for the last 2000 years. A great example is Dante's Divine Comedy. Dante was a medieval Italian poet, and he wrote a very famous epic where he takes one through the Christian metaphysical world. Right through Purgatory and Hell, and then up to Paradise.

As we're going to the depths of Hell, we're taking down through the various levels of Hell. The inferno, where each type of sinner gets an appropriate punishment. Adulterers are strapped up by their genitals for all time. Blasphemers are strung up by their tongues and so forth. Until you get to worst punishments and worst punishments for worst sinners.

The deeper and deeper down into the inferno we go until we've reached the bottom. Lucifer himself is frozen in a lake at the very bottom, and he has got three faces. And in each of his three mouths, he is chewing the three worst sinners of all time.

As Christians might expect, there's Judas, the disciple who betrayed Jesus. That is easy to understand. But, in the other two mouths are the assassins of Julius Caesar, Brutus and Cassius!

Suddenly all Christian arts takes on a whole new look and suddenly it is explicable in a way that it never really was before.

I have this tendency towards integration. Towards trying to bring everything together in a consistent way. And I think one of the things that's impaired contemporaries from seeing this with great clarity is that modern scientific method is almost the opposite. It tries to break everything down into the smallest particulates.

But, what it takes to understand this is an ability to put a lot of various things together. And then once you've done it, what it does, like any good scientific understanding does, it majestically simplifies the entire subject. And then you know, you're on the right track, right?

Ashna: Does it matter whether there is a real Jesus?

James: You know, it really doesn't matter whether there was a historical Jesus. The historical Jesus is really one of the least important, least relevant questions in the topic. What matters is Jesus Christ as described in the New Testament. That character has had a monumental influence on history. That being we can talk about.

In other words, it's not whether we can deduce the Jesus that must have really been. Because that's the direction that Biblical scholarship initially took. In the 19th century, the German historians who really invented critical biblical scholarship, tried to discover the real historical Jesus,

Through various deductive processes, they tried to strip away what they were discovering was unreliable material. Strip that away to get it what Jesus must've really been.

About 100 years ago, there was one famous Albert Schweitzer. He was missionary and doctor in Africa. He was also a biblical critic, a biblical scholar of the first order.

He wrote a book called "The Quest for the Historical Jesus.". Another book I highly recommend, even though he's a Christian.

Because, what he said is this: "Look, the New Testament presents us with a theological construct. It is impossible to penetrate to the historical Jesus because all we have is this theological construct."

He noted that everybody seems to find their own Jesus. Marxists find a Marxist Jesus. Existentialists find an Existentialist Jesus. Isn't it funny how the Jesus, the real Jesus always turns out to be why the author himself? And so, he said: "Look, there is no real Jesus in that sense. Even if there was a real Jesus, we can't pierce that veil as it were. What we have is the Jesus of the New Testament and he can be explained."

And it is on that basis that we have proceeded to try and understand not that the New Testament is unreliable, but what is the New Testament? What is it doing? What is its agenda? And that can be determined with clarity.

The New Testament is both theological and political propaganda. The theological agenda and the political agenda of the New Testament is clear

and that is what shaped Christianity and that is what shaped Western civilization for the last 2000 years. That is the important topic.

We need to understand not the real Jesus because that assumes that what? When we get to the real Jesus, then we'll get the real deal. You see, by claiming that there is no historical Jesus, they've lost themselves in that quest. Whether or not there is a historical Jesus is entirely beside the point.

Let's talk about what Christianity is in its earliest documents. That we can know.

I do say so myself, what creating Christ does for the very first time is to identify what it is, not what it isn't. What the New Testament was in its original first-century context. Namely Roman propaganda.

Objectivists really don't know the topic and really do not care. And bully for them. There really is no need to waste their time understandings of ancient philosophy, which is the very opposite of their own.

But it is fun to understand the origins of Christianity and more than that, it's important if we really want to have an effective response to Christianity as Objectivists. It is certainly a completely an untilled field. It really is. Objectivists really do need to understand Christianity as their antipode a lot more clearly, and I hope I've done that.

As you know, I'm a student of Doctor Leonard Peikoff. And a great admirer of his DIM Hypothesis. Along with Leonard Peikoff, I believe that it is philosophical constructs like Christianity which are much more dangerous than outright nihilism. Which I don't think has a long-term appeal.

Christianity has such a well-developed cultural and philosophical base that I regard Christianity and what it might become in the future as far more dangerous than your average left-wing nihilist. And I think it's very important for us as Objectivists to understand Christianity so that we can have an effective response to it. I think we've covered that.

Ashna: I think we have outlined pretty much the entire book by now...

James: Yeah, I think we did a really good job of covering the bases. I mean, I could get more into the Flavian stuff.

The earliest parts of the New Testament are Paul's letters. The Gospels had not yet been composed. The Gospels were only composed during the Flavian dynasty in the immediate wake of the Jewish War and the destruction of the Jewish temple.

We were discussing earlier how Paul's mission for the Romans had an effect, backfired and failed miserably following the destruction of the temple and following the Jewish War.

The Romans could give it another shot and this time they had a much better crack at it. And the means they chose was specifically to create a method by which Jewish Messianics could still be loyal Romans and worship the emperor as the Romans did.

In order to pull this off, they had to create a man-god, very much like the Roman emperors themselves. And in the process of doing this, the very Roman generals who conquered the Jews for Nero and who would go on to become the second dynasty Roman emperors because of their success in Judea, used Jewish prophecies themselves for their own political ends.

As part of the imperial Cult of the Emperor Vespasian and his son, the Emperor Titus, they included in their cult the belief that they, in fact were the Jewish Messiah of prophecy. It was a critical element of the propaganda of these Roman emperors to say that the Jewish people in rebelling, misunderstood their own prophecy.

Had they known the correct interpretation, they would have realized that it had pointed to these Roman rulers who did go on to rule the world after conquering Judea. And so, these Roman generals and emperors adopted the mantle of Jewish Messiah for their own.

Now, that may seem like an odd paradox because it was this notion of Messiah, which had been the rallying cry of the rebels. So here we see the Romans sort of co-opting that very notion for themselves in an effort to pacify the Jewish rebels.

So, we know that the Romans were using Messianic Jewish prophecies against the Jewish rebels. They were using it in their imperial cult. What's interesting is that the New Testament when looked at again from this new angle, appears to be a prophetic justification for the exact claim of the

Flavians.

One of the things in the New Testament that has astonished and mystified Christian scholars, is a claim, for example, the Jesus makes in the Synoptic Gospels, the first three Gospels. He claims that glorious Second Coming will happen within the lifetimes of people listening to him. In other words, Jesus unequivocally stated that the glorious Second Coming would occur within the first century.

Now this is an astonishing mistake on Jesus as part. It's almost as if he was the first of these crazy people predicting the end of the world. Saying that the apocalypse is nigh, and they'll actually predict the date for the end of the world and so forth. Jesus must be counted as the first Christian to get the day of the Second Coming wrong.

Or, was he? Or was there some other purpose to that when looked at from another angle? The Second Coming might well have been these emperors, Vespasian and Titus. Looked at from that standpoint, Jesus's prophecy appears to be a justification for those claims made by those Roman emperors, doesn't it?

And so, when looked at from many other angles, for example, there are several parallels between the life of Jesus and the lives of these Roman emperors. They have a humble origin. Their births and deaths are heralded by stars. Activities on the Sea of Galilee, and the healing miracles of Vespasian. He cured the blind and the lame, and he cured them in precisely the same fashion that Jesus is described as healing the blind and the lame in the Gospels.

The numerous parallels between the Flavian emperors and the Jesus of the Gospels are far, far too numerous to be mirror accidents. In fact, they combine the same paradoxical elements in their Imperial cult, that Jesus of the Gospels combines in the New Testament. Notice that they are man-gods. Very un-Jewish, very not monotheistic, yet both the Jesus of the Gospels and the Flavian emperors were Messiahs and gods.

Moreover, they are advocates of peace. Vespasian built a temple to peace. He minted coins with peace on earth, "Pax orbis terrum" printed on them. The very ideas in the New Testament that herald, the birth of Jesus. Peace on Earth, good will toward men, that we read in the book of Luke,

associated with Jesus.

Nothing could be a more naked, example of Roman propaganda than Roman coinage. They have the face of the Roman emperor on it and have these Roman civic ideal: harmonia, concordia, hope and so forth. Peace on earth, good will toward men is on the Roman coins jingling in the pockets of people at the very moment when the Gospels are being written, in the Flavian dynasty.

Furthermore, the very earliest Christian archaeology, the oldest known Christian site of any kind and the oldest Christian catacombs are the burial site of Vespasian's niece Domitia. She was venerated as a saint in the Christian tradition.

Her husband, a cousin of the Flavian, her own third cousin, Titus Flavius Clemens was Saint Clement of Rome. A first-century Pope, according to early Church tradition.

The final zinger, of course, is that the symbol uniquely used by the emperor Titus was the very symbol the Christians used to first symbolize Jesus and the catacombs. The anchor entwined with a fish on one side.

On the coins minted by the emperor Titus we see his image on one side. On the other, we see the anchor and fish image, the very same anchor and fish image, which was the single most common symbolic representation of Jesus in the catacombs during the Roman period.

So, Jesus' symbol is the very same as the unique symbol of this Roman emperor who also claimed to be a Jewish Messiah. The very man who fulfilled Jesus is prophecy in destroying Jerusalem and the temple.

All of these connections are far too numerous, far too intimate and far too important to ignore. It seems quite obvious to me that the Flavians had organized a form of Christianity, in the late first-century. One that was responsible for the composition of the Gospels and the organization have an official cult.

This official cult lasted well beyond the Flavian dynasty. But then again, Roman emperors, once they were officially deified, became permanent Roman gods, permanent members of the Roman pantheon. We should

expect their cults to have long outlet live them.

And indeed, we have evidence that there was a priesthood of Titus and a priesthood of Vespasian throughout the second century. It seems quite plain to me that there is a deep connection between the imperial cult of the Flavians and Christianity one that's undeniable.

It is really fascinating because the parallels are so, so many. At some point you begin to think, my god, it's as though Jesus is being modelled on these Roman emperors.