

HONEST TO JESU

Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996),

CHAPTER TWO: FROM NAZARETH TO NICEA

ASSORTED FACTS AND FIGURES (P. 32-33)

Jesus lived in a period bounded by 6 or 7 B.C.E. on the one side and by 36 C.E. on the other. Those limits are set by the death of Herod the Great in 4 B.C.E. and the end of Pilate's tenure in 36 C.E. Jesus' life was played out on the stage we know as Palestine, consisting in his day of Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. Dividing the two provinces was the territory of Samaria, through which Jesus may have occasionally passed on his way to and from Jerusalem. He may also have traveled in the region across the Jordan, on the east bank, since, like other Judean pilgrims, he may have chosen to avoid contact with hostile Samaritans by crossing and recrossing the Jordan on pilgrimages to the holy city.¹

John the Baptist was almost certainly a historical figure. We know the names of a few followers of Jesus, such as Simon Peter, and James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus is linked with the reign of King Herod the Great (38-4 B.C.E.), during whose incumbency Jesus was allegedly born. We also have the name of Herod Antipas the Tetrarch, who ruled Galilee during Jesus' adult life, and the name of Pontius Pilate, the Roman procurator (26-36 C.E.) under whom Jesus was crucified. Then we know the names of a few women associates, such as Mary Magdalene, who belonged to his retinue and was later to play such a prominent role in legend. ..There is substantial evidence that a person by the name of Jesus once existed.²

Jesus' home was semipagan Galilee, whose inhabitants, because they were often of mixed blood and open to foreign influence, were despised by the ethnically pure Judeans living to the south. His hometown was Nazareth, and was probably born there as well, contrary to later legends that assign his birth to Bethlehem to satisfy an ancient prophecy. Since Jesus was a Jew, he belonged to the ethnic group we now more accurately call Judeans, the ancestors of present-day-Jews. Jesus' father, as well as Jesus himself, may have been a carpenter or a craftsman of some kind. His mother's name was Mary. Jesus had four brothers whose names were James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. According to the Gospel of Mark, Jesus' mother and his brothers were originally skeptical of Jesus' program but later became part of the Christian movement. Jesus may also have had sisters.³

Jesus' native tongue was Aramaic, a Galilean dialect that Judeans apparently could identify. We don't know whether Jesus could read and write. He may have been bilingual; Greek was probably his second language, learned from the pagan environment

¹ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 32.

² Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 33.

³ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 33.

that surrounded him in Galilee, especially in Sepphoris, a Hellenistic city located only four miles from his home village. The written gospels were all composed in Greek.⁴

FOUNDERS AND RIVALS: PETER AND PAUL (P. 35-36)

Peter knew Jesus.

Paul experienced risen Christ.

FROM NAZARETH TO NICEA: PAUL AND CONSTANTINE (P. 36-37)

Christianity took shape and became successful in the Mediterranean basin primarily as the result of the work of two very different persons: [Paul and the Emperor Constantine](#). Paul was an excellent promoter. He spearheaded the new movement as it marched from Antioch in Syria across Asia Minor and Greece to Rome. Paul worked the synagogues of Diaspora Judaism as the entry to numerous communities. He also laid the foundations for the early creeds. Paul underwent his conversion experience on the Damascus road not long after the death of Jesus. He arrived in Rome about 60 C.E. and died a couple of years later.⁵

[The Emperor Constantine](#) issued the edict of toleration in 313 C.E. which acknowledged [Christianity as a legitimate religion](#) for the first time. Later, in [381 C.E.](#), [the Emperor Theodosius adopted Christianity as the official religion](#) of the sagging Roman Empire. In [325 C.E.](#), [Constantine](#) summoned the leaders of the church to [Nicea](#), a suburb of Constantinople (modern Istanbul), to adjudicate controversies among warring factions in the ecclesiastical world. The first form of the [Nicene Creed](#) which contained the formulations of that council, was intended to unify the various parties. Constantine saw to it that the vote was unanimous by banishing the bishops who did not put their signatures to the creed. There was now an official statement of correct beliefs, an orthodoxy, to which everyone had to subscribe.⁶

THE GOSPEL OF JESUS (P. 40-41)

CHAPTER FOUR: THE RENEWED QUEST

[Jesus the Jew](#)

“Jesus the Jew” often means Jesus spoke and behaved like all other Jews in his time and place. There are two things wrong with this assumption. First, we don’t know as much as we would like about the religion of the Second Temple (the period beginning with the construction of the second temple around 520 b.c.e. and ending with its destruction in the 70 c.e. and especially about Jewish behavior in semipagan Galilee. In the second place, Jesus was not just another Jew. John the Baptist was not just another Jew. Caiaphas was not just another Jew. Jesus must have been enough of an individual to have said and done some things that were unusual or at least distinctive. According to the gospels, Jesus was a social deviant, a charismatic teacher who attracted a considerable

⁴ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 34.

⁵ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 37.

⁶ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 37.

following. He was apparently a nonconformist, like many of the ancient prophets of Israel. He seems to have criticized the temple cult and subverted some purity codes. He was a troublemaker. So we should be able to identify him among the throngs who came frequently to Jerusalem for the holy days.⁷

CHAPTER NINE: PARABLES

The Good Samaritan

The parable was understood different way. On the one side are the common folk who side with the victims; they agree that the Jericho road is no place to travel alone, and they are modestly bemused by the behavior of the clerics, whom they know to have a callous indifference to such ordinary occurrences. On the other side the chagrined priest and their lay assistants, the Levites, who immediately stiffen when the story makes them out to be unseeing and uncaring. Into the tension between these two segments of Jesus' society rides the Samaritan astride his ass.⁸

The moral Judean did not think highly of Samaritans. The Judean listeners probably doubted that there was a Samaritan in the world who would help a Judean victim. The religious authorities certainly thought highly of themselves, but it would immediately have occurred to them that contact with blood or with a dead body would defile them and render them ineligible for temple service. There were thus good and sufficient reasons not to stop. Undoubtedly, some in the audience would have nodded their heads in silent approval at the depiction of the priest and Levite as completely engrossed in their own importance and safety, to the exclusion of other concerns. The story herds listeners into separate social corrals of their own devising.⁹

The Samaritan works as a parable because it is loaded with heavily freighted literal, social, political, and religious terms. The Jericho road was a lonely and dangerous road. The priests were powerful upper-class authorities governing the temple cult, and the Levites were the priest's associates, providing music, incense, sacred bread, temple curtains and adornments, and administration for a national business that included "kosher metapacking" and banking. The importance of the cult for the economic well-being of Jerusalem cannot be overestimated. Herds and flocks were in constant demand for sacrificial offerings, and the influx of pilgrims at festival times required money changing and banking. Priests and Levites were known to have quarters in the Jordan valley near Jericho where they retreated from the beehive of activity surrounding the temple on ordinary days, to say nothing of feasts. The opulence of the priestly class was an irritant for the ordinary Judean, in spite of his or her devotion to the law and the sacrificial system.¹⁰

The initial face of the story invites the reader to take it in its everyday and literal sense. In other words, the narrative gains the assent of the listener by affirming everyday reality,

⁷ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 59.

⁸ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 171.

⁹ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 173.

¹⁰ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 174.

the world as everyone knows it. The story thus rests on a stock of images that are current, concrete, and cogent.¹¹

The Samaritans were a bastard race by Judean standards. They were presumably descended from Israelites who had remained behind when the Assyrians deported the leading families of the region following their conquest in 722 b.c.e. The Israelites remaining behind intermarried with foreign settlers brought in by the Assyrians in the years that followed, although the Samaritans – the new ethnic group-continued to regard the Torah as their law. They erected their own temple on Mount Gerizim, just outside Shechem (modern Nablus), at a time when there was no temple in Jerusalem. John Hyrcanus, a Maccabean ruler, destroyed that temple during his reign (134-104 b.c.e.) and so raised enmity between the Judeans and Samaritans to a new level of intensity. In Luke, Jesus is made to refer to the grateful Samaritan leper as an alien, a foreigner. To call someone a Samaritan was a term of insult; in John, Jesus is called a Samaritan and a madman (John 15:7). The two epithets were taken as synonymous. Samaritans were regarded by Judeans as gentiles, as outside the scope of God's chosen people, in spite of the fact that Samaritans claimed Moses as their teacher and ancestor. In fact, the Samaritans claimed they were descended from the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.¹²

Galilean pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem for festivals often went through Samaria, which separated Galilee on the north from Judea to the south. The only way to avoid transit through this hostile territory was to cross the Jordan south of the Sea of Galilee, journey south through Trans-Jordan or Perea, and then recross the Jordan at Jericho, to ascend to Jerusalem along the Jericho road.¹³

Josephus records one incident that illustrates the enmity between the two groups. In 52c.e., a group of Galilean pilgrims was attacked and some of them were killed after they crossed the border into Samaria at the village of Jenin. In retaliation, Judean guerrilla forces from Jerusalem raided some Samaritan villages, slaughtered the inhabitants, and burned the towns. The Romans intervened; they crucified or beheaded numerous notables on both sides of the conflict and delivered one of their own tribunes, who had bungled his job, over to the people of Jerusalem. They then dragged him through the streets behind a horse and had him beheaded. It is thus understandable that the labels "*Samaritan* and *Judean* stood in considerable tension with each other."¹⁴

Those who listened to Jesus tell the parable of the Samaritan, as good Judeans, would have expected the third person along that road to be Judean. The hero of the story would naturally have been one of them. How shocked they must have been when that figure turned out to be a hated Samaritan. at the mention of the Samaritan, Judean listeners

¹¹ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 174.

¹² Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 175.

¹³ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 175.

¹⁴ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 175.

would have bristled, rejected the plot, and quit the story, in spite of their initial inclination to give it a sympathetic hearing.¹⁵

Metaphorical Proclivities of the Good Samaritan Story (P. 176).

The first suggestion derives from the semantic organization of the plot. The first response on the part of the Judean audience would have been to affirm the everyday features of the tale: the Jericho road was known for its robberies, so it would have been natural to identify with the victim in the ditch. The appearance of the priest and then the Levite would have caused the audience to divide over the issue of the clergy: some would have protested, others would have smiled, depending on whether they were pro-or anticlergy. Jesus introduced this preliminary tension into the story in order to heighten the real tension still to come. With Jesus' audience divided on what will eventually prove to be a secondary issue, the Samaritan, an enemy of both parties, intrudes. This narrative strategy sows additional confusion in an audience already divided.¹⁶

The confusion of roles in the story was designed to teach the listeners a lesson: be wary of easy identification with characters in the parable. The parable instructs the listener to be circumspect in taking sides.¹⁷

The second suggestion is less subtle. The behavior of the Samaritan contravenes normal, everyday expectations. As a consequence, the parable takes on the character of a fairy tale. The Samaritan acts in an altogether unexpected way. The peasant listener in the audience would no longer be an innocent victim in the ditch but the object of Samaritan mercy. That is a role no self-respecting Judean wanted to play. To be sure, no self-respecting Samaritan wanted to play the role of the helping hand either. The priest and Levite, on the other hand, must have believed they had been shortchanged, thinking, in retrospect, that they should have been given the role of the hero. And some lay listeners would have objected that the hero should have been an ordinary Judean. The story thus promoted the transposition or the migration of social roles. The biggest movement of all was called for by the appearance of the Samaritan.¹⁸

Listeners would have found it more congenial to adopt the role of the helper as their own than to accept the status of victim. The role helper gives one the initiative, put one in change of the outcome. The role of victim is passive, helpless, subject to initiatives taken by others. It is not the perspective of the helper that dominates the story – no, it is the perspective of the victim that provides the narrative focus.¹⁹

Among Jesus' listeners, those who would have responded positively to this story were those who had nothing to lose by doing so. Note that the victim in the ditch has nothing to do or say. The victims' inability to resist the Samaritan's ministrations is a weak form of consent, but it plays an essential role in the story. God's domain is open to outcasts, to

¹⁵ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 175.

¹⁶ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 176.

¹⁷ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 176.

¹⁸ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 176.

¹⁹ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 177.

the undeserving, to those who do not merit inclusion. In other words, all who are truly victims, truly disinherited, have no reason and are unable to resist mercy when it is offered. The despised half-breed becomes the instrument of compassion and grace – Judeans would have choked on that irony. It has occasionally been suggested that there is an autobiographical element in the parable of the Samaritan. After all, Jesus was a lowly Galilean peasant, only slightly higher on the social scale than the Samaritan. Was he thinking of himself as an instrument of his Father's grace? This suggestion is farfetched, although it does square with Jesus' view that salvation will come from unexpected quarters.²⁰

The Samaritan is made to behave in a way that runs counter to expectations. The parable greatly exaggerates his willingness to help. Listeners could no longer believe their ears; their normal sense of reality was being called into question. In the world of the parable, things run the other way around. ... The parable is understood as an invitation to cross over. The ability to cross over will depend on both the tenacity with which one holds to the inherited order of reality, the received world, and on one's willingness to cut the ties to comfortable tradition. The parable is pitted against the power of the proven. Making the transition under such circumstances does not come easily.²¹

Another way of understanding the parable is:

By the time Luke edits this parable for his gospel, much has changed. Judeans and Samaritans no longer hate each other. For Luke, the Samaritan is just another gentile, who fits nicely into his geographical plan for the march of the gospel from Jerusalem to Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. The temple and its priests and Levites are gone when the temple was destroyed in 70 c.e. The Jericho road has become any Roman roadway. And Luke's audience is made up not of Judeans but of gentiles; in fact, Luke makes no mention of Judeans in the story at all.²²

This parable also passes the coherence test. Jesus steadily privileged those marginalized in his society – the diseased, the infirm, women, children, toll collectors, gentile suppliants, perhaps even Samaritans – precisely because they were regarded as the *enemy*, outsider, the victim. The Samaritan as helper was an implausible role in the everyday world of Jesus; that is what makes the Samaritan plausible as a helper in a story told by Jesus.²³

The parable, however, is not about Samaritan helpers. It is about victims. No one elects to be beaten, robbed, and left for dead. Yet in this story the way to get help is to be discovered helpless. The parable as a metaphor is permission for the listener to understand himself or herself in just that way. There were many in Jesus' society who could identify with that possibility without strain. Others could not imagine themselves

²⁰ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 177.

²¹ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 177.

²² Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 178.

²³ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 179.

being helped by a Samaritan. That is where the differences lay: how his listeners understood themselves. In the parable only victims need apply for help.²⁴

CHAPTER TEN: PROFLIGATE AND PROPER SONS

The parable of the prodigal son is traditionally understood as an allegory. The father in the story is presumably a model of behavior for God the Father, whose love embraces the younger son upon his return. the prodigal stands for the gentiles, who are foreigners and sinners. The older son represents the Judeans, specifically the Pharisees, who object to the treatment God the Father extends to the godless gentiles.²⁵

A German scholar, Joachim Jeremias held that the father is the central figure in the story and functions as a paradigm for God's love for sinners. Further, he believes that the parable is a vindication of the good news Jesus proclaims for sinners in the face of critics, who in Jesus' day, he thinks, were the Pharisees. The older son of course stands for these critics, who object to the warm welcome Jesus gives to sinners, represented by the prodigal son.²⁶

Another way of understanding the parable: The parable is now aimed only at *outsiders*; insiders are safe within the community of God's love by virtue of the haven of fixed, favorable, protective interpretation: The Christian community was quite willing to understand the father in the story as God and the older son as the Pharisee, but it did not want to understand itself literally as the younger son. The younger son was not to be commended as a role model for Christian "sinners." (Marcus Borg reports that Krister Stendahl, once dean of the Harvard Divinity School, remarked that Christians are indeed sinners but think of themselves only as "honorary sinners.") This is an unbalanced or, in kinder language, an asymmetrical way of interpreting the central players in the story.²⁷

Another way of interpreting: the central figure in the story is not the father but the younger son, in relation to whom the father and the older son give contrasting responses. Viewed this way, the reader (or listener) is left to be drawn into the story on one side or the other: he or she may wish to empathize with the prodigal father (who is prodigal in his love the younger son), or with the loyal son, or with both at different times.²⁸

The role of the father in the prodigal corresponds to the role of the Samaritan in the parable of the Samaritan. Just as the Samaritan would not have been expected to come to the aid of the Judean in the ditch, so the father would not be expected to respond to the younger son as he does. From the perspective of older son, the old man has been beset by senility or something worse. But crystallized familiarity – the standard, sentimental

²⁴ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 179.

²⁵ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 181.

²⁶ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 185.

²⁷ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 186.

²⁸ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 187.

interpretation - has fixed prodigal love as the property of the father, who stands for God the Father, so that the actual details of the story are not allowed to interfere with that sense.²⁹

Leave taking and coming home:

John the Baptist has forsaken his community and gone out into the desert to prepare the way of the Lord. A leave-taking was to be followed by a promised homecoming. Abram, who was to become Abraham, is instructed to quit his country, leave his relatives and his family, and go to a land as yet unspecified. Upon arrival, he would father a great nation. The Israelites, who were in servitude in Egypt, were commended to depart, to wander in the wilderness for forty years, so that eventually they would possess a homeland. There can be no homecoming without leave-taking. To come home, one must leave home. Life is not a good place for homebodies. This is a way to read the second episode of the parable of the prodigal: the older son is a homebody – he cannot come home because he has not left home. He is unable to party even in his own home. Homebodies are the norm, the accepted, the safe, the role to be recommended. Leavetaking is painful, traumatic, risky. But the road to maturity leads through trials in a strange land, in the forest of our nightmares, in contests with alien forces. True arrivals are preceded by true departures.³⁰

The prodigal mirrors the journey of Jesus; Jesus had to become an itinerant – a homeless person. He seems to have quit his ethnic traditions, Those who identified with him as an Israelite in a largely pagan environment. Eventually, he seems to have been prepared to leave life behind, almost as readily as he abandoned family and mentors.³¹

INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS P. 192

Reversals are a standard feature of the genuine parables of Jesus. In the tragic plot, reversal results in exclusion for those who think they should be included, who do the right thing, who are justified by their own standards. Those who have been marginalized, who are outcasts, who could not have been expected to be invited, to be paid the full wage, to be welcomed home, are surprised by their unexpected good fortune.³²

Another way of saying is that Christians no longer wanted to think of themselves as “sinners,” that is, as *outsiders*. Those with whom Jesus ate and drank originally, however, were all real sinners or *outsiders* - that is how they were perceived socially from the standpoint of those who adhered to purity codes and ate kosher. Sinners, outsiders in Jesus’ society, included persons with a skin disease (“lepers”), the maimed, the halt, the blind, gentiles, Samaritans, as well as petty tax officials, who were Roman collaborators, and women who did not observe the social properties. Outsiders must have been a fairly numerous element in Galilean and Judean society.³³

²⁹ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 187.

³⁰ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 188.

³¹ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 189.

³² Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 192.

³³ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 194.

The Pharisees are those who considered themselves insiders but who, from the later, Christian perspective, were viewed as perpetual outsiders because they were unbelievers. The clue to the development of this contrast lies in how the contrast *insider/outsider* is understood.³⁴

This paradox of Jesus – outsiders are in, insiders are out – throws light on another saying: “I swear to you, the toll collectors and prostitutes will get into God’s domain, but you will not.” Here Jesus is speaking to religious authorities of some sort – the keepers of the social codes. Prostitute is a code word for “women who behave in an unseemly manner in public.” To become disciples of a male teacher, to follow him about in his travels and discuss matters of moral importance with him at public meals, would have been quite enough to attract the label.³⁵

In a well-ordered society, people know their places. In Jesus’ world the few very rich and the many very poor knew their places. The social distance between them was mediated by brokers who dispensed favors bestowed by patrons on compliant peasants and peons. In contravention of social order, Jesus was socially promiscuous: he ate and drank publicly with petty tax officials and “sinners,” yet he did not refuse dinner with the learned and wealthy. He was seen in the company of women in public – an occasion for scandal in his society. He included children in his social circle – children were regarded as chattel, especially females, if they were permitted to live at birth – and advised that God’s domain is filled with them.³⁶

CHAPTER TWELVE: THE DEATH OF JESUS (P. 219-)

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: RESURRECTION AND RETURN (P. 257).

EPILOGUE: JESUS FOR A NEW AGE (P. 297-)

A NEW AGE:

We have entered a new age, we have crossed the threshold of a new era. We live in a post-Christian age. Others insist that we have launched the postmodern period (Funk. P. 297).

³⁴ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 194.

³⁵ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 194.

³⁶ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 196.

1). The “new age” refers first and foremost to the end of the Christianized era. Funk is not trying to say that Christianity ended but proposing that the Christianized, industrialized West can no longer pretend to sponsor the only game on planet earth.³⁷

The “new age” also refers to a greatly altered context for biblical study and theology, another trend that gave rise to the renewed quest. The scholarship of the Bible once belonged to the churches. It has now moved out into secular institutions and functions quite apart from, and in some respects in opposition to, the denominations. The Fellows of the Jesus Seminar approach the Bible, the gospels in particular, as a cultural artifact rather than as an ecclesiastical handbook. He says “we are interested in assessing the import of the Bible, and of the pioneers and prophets who figure prominently in its story, for society at large, rather than merely for the churches and their programs.”³⁸

A further factor is the rising tide of ecumenism. Scholars of the Bible no longer adhere to denominational lines of interpretation.³⁹

2). In the global arena, the symbolic world that is ingredient to traditional Christianity no longer occupies a foundational position. As the economic and technological superiority of the West fades, the symbols that attend the Christian myth will lose whatever appeal they once had. Meanwhile, in the West, the old symbolic universe is on the decline. It lingers on in weakened form. Those who cling to the old are having increasing difficulties in assigning meaning to such biblical statements as “he ascended into heaven.” Appeals to an endorsing God, to heaven and hell, to a divine redeemer, to Christ as the sole mediator between god and humankind, have begun to lose their bite and more frequently fall on unhearing ears.⁴⁰

Funk suggests that we live in a time when new sensibilities are being formed that will serve us as we make the transition into the new era. And it is to that prospect, with all the risk it entails, that we must now address ourselves.⁴¹

3). The advent of a “new age” has brought with it the chance to start over. The quest should think of how it must have been in those first, tentative decades, in the thirties and forties of the common ear, when the Jesus movement was young, amorphous, a fledgling struggling to find its wings. That is the correct perspective form which to view the present challenge.⁴²

Funk claims that there is nothing in the creed, in the gospels, in Christian tradition, and in the historical and scientific methodologies with which we study them that is immune to critical assessment and reformulation. We cannot put a protective shield around any part of the Christian heritage if we aspire to set Jesus free. Everything is on the table.⁴³

³⁷ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 297.

³⁸ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 297.

³⁹ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 297.

⁴⁰ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 298.

⁴¹ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 298.

⁴² Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 298.

⁴³ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 299.

4). In the “new age,” all theology is post-Auschwitz, as a German theologian recently remarked. Theology conducted in the aftermath of Auschwitz means, among other things, that we can no longer trust the authority structure of an ecclesiastical tradition that learned, at several crucial junctures in its history, it was unable to resist the ultimate compromise. We might have gathered something of the American propensity to read scripture in a self-serving way as an endorsement of black slavery. Now we have the Nazi horror to look back on as well. .. We can no longer give Christianity prior consent without determining what we are embracing as a part of the bargain.⁴⁴

5). There is mounting evidence that Christian folk have, in fact, entered a “new age.” The climate of conversation has begun to change in small circles and in scattered public conversations in North America and Europe. This dialogue is going on in both likely and unlikely places. Some of it “underground.” Funk claims that in his book people made a giant U-turn in the history of Jesus tradition – from Nicea to Nazareth and back to Nicea tracking on the outward journey how scholars get back to Nazareth and Jesus, and, on the return trip, how the transition was from Jesus to the Christ, how the iconoclast became the icon. Funk gives his response to these questions in twenty-one thesis.⁴⁵

1. The aim of the quest is to set Jesus free.

Liberate Jesus from the scriptural and creedal and experiential prisons in which we have incarcerated him. The gospel of Jesus must be liberated from the Jesus of the Jesus of the gospels and allowed to speak for itself. The creedal formulation of the second, third, and fourth centuries would be de-dogmatized and Jesus would be permitted to emerge as a robust, real, larger-than-life figure in his won right.⁴⁶

2. The renewal quest prompts us to revamp our understanding of the origins of the Christian faith itself.

“Christianity as we know it did not originate with Jesus of Nazareth” will have to be revisited to read, Christianity originated with Jesus of Nazareth. We need to review the practices and beliefs of the primitive Christian communities to determine whether they are consonant with the intention of Jesus of Nazareth. We will want to revisit Nicea and the early creeds, the Nicene Creed and the Apostle’s Creed. We need to determine which of the stories about Jesus are based on historical reminiscence and which are not, we will want to develop a criticism of the myth or plot of the foundational stories. Just as the first believers did, we will have to start all over again with a clean theological slate, with only the parables, aphorisms, parabolic acts, and deeds of Jesus as the basis on which to formulate a new version of the faith.⁴⁷

3. The renewed quest also has serious ramifications for how we understand the Christian life.

⁴⁴ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 299.

⁴⁵ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 300.

⁴⁶ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 300.

⁴⁷ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 301.

4. The renewed quest points to a secular sage who may have more relevance to the spiritual dimension of society at large than to institutionalized religion.

The Easter event forms a barrier that separates Judaism and everything preceding from Christian faith. Christian seekers were advised that nothing of significance occurred before that. In effect, the Easter barrier turns the quest of the historical Jesus into an empty exercise. The basis for Christianity consists of the confession of Peter, Paul, and other early leaders, rather than anything Jesus did or said. Yet in identifying the risen Christ as the object of faith, believers in effect have robbed Jesus of Nazareth of any real incarnate existence and have shifted the responsibility for the faith to those who experienced his resurrected presence. The Apostle's Creed implied that nothing worth mentioning lay between the miraculous conception of Jesus and his death on the cross. The creed left a blank where Jesus should have come.⁴⁸

5. We can no longer rest our faith on the faith of Peter or the faith of Paul.

6. Jesus himself is not the proper object of faith.

7. In articulating the vision of Jesus, we should take care to express our interpretations in the same register as he employed in his parables and aphorisms.

8. Give Jesus a demotion

9. We need to cast Jesus in a new drama, assign him a role in a story with a different post.

10. We need to re-conceive the vocation of Jesus as the Christ.

11. Jesus kept an open table.

Jesus ate with sinners, toll collectors, prostitutes, lepers, and other social misfits and quarantined people during his life. (He also hobnobbed with the affluent and powerful, but those associations seem to pose less of a problem for us). Yet his followers, in ritualizing the meal Jesus ate periodically with his friends, began to limit participation to those who belonged to the Christian community. In the *Didache*, a first-century Christian manual, the rule is: "No one is to eat of the Eucharist except those who have been baptized in the Lord's name. This is what the Lord said about this restriction: "Don't give what is sacred to dogs." We have to ask, would Jesus have condoned, to say nothing of authorized, a table open only to self-authenticating believers? Should we reconceive the scope of eating together in Christian communities, as well as the function of the Eucharist?⁴⁹ I don't think this is the idea of Jesus. Never!!!!!!!

12. Jesus made forgiveness reciprocal.

13. Jesus condemned the public practice of piety.

⁴⁸ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 303.

⁴⁹ Robert W. Funk, *HONEST TO JESUS* (San Francisco:Harper SanFrancisco, 1996), 310.

14. **Jesus advocated an brokered relationship to God.**
15. **Jesus robs his followers of Christian “privilege.”**
16. **Jesus makes it clear that all rewards and punishments are intrinsic/**
17. **We will have to abandon the doctrine of the blood atonement.**
18. **We will need to interpret the reports of the resurrection for what they are:
Our glimpse of what Jesus glimpsed.**
19. **Redeem sex and Mary, Jesus’ mother, by restoring to Jesus a biological if
not actual father.**
20. **Exorcise the apocalyptic elements from Christianity.**
21. **Declare the New Testament a highly uneven and biased record of various early
attempts to invent Christianity.**

I have had strong interest in historical Jesus although I have been confessing Jesus as the Lord as our church has been teaching us. I decided to follow what Jesus did and taught while he was on earth. Without know that the creedal Jesus didn’t do all the job I needed.

Church leaders are focusing on Paul’s teaching so much I used call Christian church “the Paul’s church.” I used to say pastors like Paul better than Jesus. They get lots of instruction from Paul instead of Jesus, such as support and obedient to government authorities even when they are killing dictators and discriminating women quoting one sentence from Paul, and not understanding his co-work with women.

So I agree with the notion that we need to recover Jesus from Peter and Paul.