

Qx15 – The Incoherent NT Policy-Quagmire: Inconsistencies, Incompatibilities & Incomprehensibilities

Dear: For a change, how about taking pity on the poor old grandfather?! My predicament is this. How can I show you the policies advocated in the New Testament (NT) if these policies are incoherent (i.e., “not holding together as a harmonious or credible whole”)? In one place, the NT advocates Policy A and discourages Policy B, but elsewhere in the NT, the opposite is advocated! That’s the essence of, for example, all the “double binds” in Christianity, a few of which I showed you at the end of the previous chapter, e.g., that you’re to honor your parents but hate your mother and father (☹) and that you’re to generously give all that you possess so that you can greedily possess even more! In this chapter, I’ll show you many more such incoherencies, including inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and incomprehensibilities (or, to simplify that word, “incomprehensibles”).

In the previous chapter, dealing with immoralities, I ignored most of the incoherencies. For example, when I came to “Pass no judgment, and you will not be judged”, I just urged you never to engage in the immorality of not judging, because as a dutiful grandfather (☺), I’m certain that providing such advice is far more important than pointing out any incompatibilities in NT policies. But even in this case, the incompatibilities – the double binds – are there. Thus, after the clerics’ Jesus tells us at *Matthew 7, 1* “Pass no judgment...”, then we’re told at *Matthew 24, 4* that he urged “Take care that no one misleads you” [how can you do that without judging?!] and at *John 7, 24*, we’re told that he urged “Do not judge superficially, but be just in your judgments.” Do I hear a certain grandchild say “But, but, but...” Well, child, welcome to the world of NT policy incoherencies.

More than once, while trying to write these chapters to you, I’ve become stuck in the resulting incoherent NT policy-quagmire of inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and incomprehensibles. In contrast, if this is the first time you’ve read the NT, then I expect that you wouldn’t have noticed many of them. Yet I’m confident that, the more you read the NT, the more trouble you’ll discover.

Thus, if you waste your precious time not just reading but “studying” the NT (which I certainly don’t advocate that you do!), then I’m sure that you’d soon see many of what I’ll call inconsistencies among the three “synoptic

gospels” (*Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*) and between them and what’s in John’s “gospel” or in what Paul wrote (e.g., in *Romans* and his various other letters or “epistles”). These inconsistencies, however, even among the synoptic gospels normally aren’t too troublesome, because different “reporters” can be expected to give different reports – even in cases for which the “reporters” were actually present at an event that actually occurred! Then, though, there are what I’ll call incomprehensibles in the NT – by which I’ll mean “descriptions” within a single report that make me stop and say: “Hey, come-on now, this doesn’t make sense!” Most troubling, however, are what I’ll call incompatibilities among the different reports: one report states A happened and not B and advocates Policy C, while another report (or sometimes the same report!) swears that B happened and not A, and advocates the exact opposite policy (i.e., Policy “not-C” or $\neg C$).

And if the above description was too “symbolic” for you, Dear, then here’s a restricted example mentioned by Bishop John Shelby Spong:

Mark has Jesus say, “If you’re not against me, you’re for me.” *Luke* has Jesus say, “If you’re not against me, you’re for me.” *Matthew* changes that and says, “If you’re not for me, you’re against me.” It’s two to one against *Matthew* being authentic.

When I encounter such incompatibilities, the guck oozes over my boots until I’m stuck.

To try to extricate myself from the mud and guck of the NT’s incoherent policy-quagmire, my plan is the following. Although I haven’t finished showing you all that I plan to show you about the injustices and immoralities (and iniquities, inhumanities, and insanities!) promoted in the NT, what I want to do in this and the next chapter is show you some of its inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and incomprehensibles. Then, I’ll try to show you at least a few hints of the causes of these “troubles” – although I won’t show you all that I plan to show you about the causes until I get to the historical perspective of **Yx**.

And by the way, Dear, if you didn’t encounter many of these “troubles” (i.e., the inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and incomprehensibles) during your reading of the NT, then don’t worry about it: most of them are rather difficult to notice in a first reading. I’ll be showing you some of them in what follows; in total, there are literally hundreds of them. If you want to see most of them, then explore on the internet with search words such as

“New Testament inconsistencies” or “contradictions” – or go directly to the web site at www.skepticsannotatedbible.com.

In fact, Dear, if you’ve already finished (or almost finished) reading the NT “on your own”, you may want to start reading it again directly from the above-referenced web site (which I found only recently). Whoever has created it has invested an enormous amount of effort and done an exceedingly good job: as you can see by “clicking” on the above reference, not only has the entire Bible been reproduced, but throughout it are added notes that explicitly describe its internal contradictions and its advocated injustices, intolerances, absurdities, and so on.

But, whatever you decide to do, Dear, I’ll now embark on the task of showing you some of the “troubles” in the NT. In this chapter I’ll emphasize troubles that appear in the three synoptic gospels plus the *Gospel According to John*. The first three are called “synoptic” because allegedly they’re reporting on the same events that allegedly occurred during the same time period – even though the reports weren’t written simultaneously and all were written many decades after the alleged events occurred! In the next chapter, I’ll emphasize troubles in the rest of the NT, especially in what Paul allegedly wrote.

As I already mentioned, of these three types of troubles (viz., inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and incomprehensibles), of course it’s the incompatibilities that are most significant, because if there were no inconsistencies (or at least no differences), then the gospels wouldn’t be distinct. Also, let me admit that concluding that something within a single gospel is incomprehensible can be somewhat of a subjective judgment. Therefore, in what follows, I’ll emphasize the incompatibilities.

Under some circumstances, incompatibilities in reports by different “witnesses” wouldn’t be of much concern: different people can (of course) hear, see, and report different aspects of the same event. In the case of the Bible, however, its incompatibilities can be significant for a number of reasons, including the following.

- Many people consider the Bible to be a flawless record of “God’s holy word” – and for them, it can be a rather serious blow to their “faith” when they find contradictory accounts, because many such people still have faith in the fundamental principles that things exist and are distinct

(i.e., $A \equiv A$ and $A \neq \neg A$) or, equivalently, in the resulting fundamental principle of logic that paradoxes can't exist.

- For a host of reasons, different groups of people have put more “faith” in one *versus* another interpretation (or *versus* several other interpretations) of specific events or opinions, and as a result, different Christian “sects” (including Mormons) have evolved – and much animosity has developed between and among different sects, even though (as far as those of us on the “outside” are concerned) the difference among the sects are defined by silly little quirks whose root causes (in most cases) are incompatibilities in the NT
- For those people who want to know about “the historical Jesus” (a subject that I’ll address in **Yx**), incompatibles in *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, *John*, and Paul’s letters cause serious doubts about the reliability of all these “reports” – in fact, as I’ll try to show you in **Yx**, many historians consider essentially the entire NT (save perhaps for the first four “letters” by Paul) to be “priestly fabrications”, i.e., lies, and as I’ll be trying to show you, there are serious doubts about the authenticity even of all the letters allegedly written by Paul.

But in this **Qx**, and especially in this chapter, I don’t plan to emphasize either the causes or the consequences of these incompatibilities, but just begin to show them to you – and suggest that their existence hints that nothing in the NT should be taken as a very reliable indication of anything (save that such incompatibilities exist).

Even if you didn’t notice any incompatibilities (or incomprehensibles) during your reading of the NT, Dear, I suspect that you noticed substantial inconsistencies among the different gospels. For example, compared to the *Gospel According to Matthew*, the *Gospel According to Mark* moves along quite rapidly – suggesting either that the author of *Mark* omitted much – or that the author of *Matthew* fabricated more! Thus, *Mark* “omits” most (but not all) “astrological tales” about Jesus (i.e., stories that aren’t about a real person, but that were “written in the stars”), *Mark* reports no “virgin birth” of the clerics’ Jesus in a stable (which I showed you in **Ix** is actually an astrological tale), no crazy genealogy for Joseph (which would be irrelevant anyway, since the clerics claim that Joseph wasn’t the father of Jesus), no astrologers searching for the baby Jesus, no escaping to Egypt, no massacre of the children of Bethlehem, no “viper’s brood” comments by John the

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Baptist, no arguments between Jesus and John about who should baptize whom, and when the cleric's Jesus emerges from the baptismal water, *Mark* reports that only Jesus saw the heavens open, etc. One of the most startling inconsistencies that you might have noticed later in *Mark* is that it contains no "Sermon on the Mount", which many people consider to be the "highlight" of Jesus' career.

In contrast to both *Matthew* and *Mark*, *Luke* starts by introducing the reader both to the parents of John the Baptist and to the mother of Jesus (Mary), all of whom are reported to be good "Christians" – even before Christ was born! For example, in the speech (or song) at *Luke 1, 52*, which was allegedly stated (or sung) by one of the mothers, there is "... *the humble have been lifted high. The hungry he [God] has satisfied with good things; the rich sent empty away.*" [That is, as I suggested in an earlier chapter, Christianity (and therefore Mormonism) generally aims its "pitch" at the uneducated, humble poor, at the expense (figuratively and literally) of the educated, proud rich.]

As another example, at *Luke 1, 76* the father of John the Baptist says that John's purpose is "*to prepare his [Jesus'] way and lead his people to salvation through knowledge of him, by the forgiveness of their sins.*" [That concept (as you probably know and as I'll go into some detail later in these **Qx**-chapters) is the thrust of Christianity (and Mormonism), in contrast to Judaism and therefore Zoroastrianism; i.e., Christians and Mormons "believe" that sinners can be "saved" if they just buy into the cleric's con game.] How the parents knew all this before the creators of these ideas were born (i.e., allegedly John and Jesus) is one of those cases where even an uncritical, unsuspecting reader might say: "Hmm... that's strange."

Next in *Luke*, rather than stories about astrologers, there are stories about shepherds, and instead of an escape to Egypt, there's a very public ceremony, e.g., with (at *Luke 2, 14*) a host of singing angels and with (at *Luke 2, 29*) a prophet describing the baby Jesus as "*a light that will be a revelation to the heathen, and glory to thy people Israel.*" And though I admit to being rather sarcastic, let me add that if Jesus was "glory" to the Jews, then no wonder Lewis Carroll had Humpty Dumpty say:

"There's glory for you."

"I don't know what you mean by 'glory'," Alice said.

Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. “Of course you don’t – till I tell you. I meant ‘there’s a nice knock-down argument for you!’”

“But ‘glory’ doesn’t mean ‘a nice knock-down argument’,” Alice objected.

To which Humpty Dumpty could have replied: “Tell that to the Jews!”

But for now, I’ll ignore the horrible trouble that the clerics’ Jesus (i.e., in reality, the Christian clerics) caused the Jews, and return to mentioning some of the inconsistencies among the gospels, even in the way they begin.

Most dramatic is the way *John* begins:

When all things began, the Word [or Logos or Logic or “plan” or Jesus] already was. The Word dwelt with God, and what God was, the Word was. The Word, then, was with God at the beginning, and through him all things came to be... All that came to be was alive with his life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines on in the dark, and the darkness has never mastered it.

If, Dear, when you read the above, you said to yourself something similar to “What the devil is this?”, then welcome to the club! And in case you still wonder, I’ll add that, in **Yx**, I’ll try to show you its essence, namely, the prehistoric idea (carried to an extreme by the Gnostics) that light is good and dark is bad, mixed with ideas from ancient Egypt and India (Hinduism) that ‘right’ and ‘truth’ are “built into the fabric of the universe”, ideas that were incorporated into metaphysical speculations by Heraclitus, Plato and Philo, which were then adopted by the (Christian) Gnostics.

Meanwhile, in contrast to the gospels according to *Matthew*, *Mark*, *Luke*, and *John*, and although I’ll delay showing you details until the next chapter, the letters allegedly written by Paul contain essentially nothing about “the historical Jesus” – not only nothing about his “virgin birth” but also no quotations of what the authors of the synoptic gospels allege that Jesus said! For example (and as in *Mark* and *John*) Paul’s letters contain no reference to anything said in the Sermon on the Mount. As I’ll illustrate in **Yx**, historians consider this difference to be important, because they seem to agree that Paul’s letters were written about 30 years before the first synoptic gospel (which was the briefest one, i.e., *Mark*), which in turn was written 20-or-so years before *Matthew* and *Luke*, and which in turn was followed, much later, by *John*. Thereby it appears that the stories about Jesus grew with time –

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and almost certainly, all reports were manipulated during the subsequent century-and-more, attempting to “perfect the party line”.

Again, Dear, inconsistencies among the gospels are to be expected: if there weren't differences, the gospels wouldn't be distinct! But on the other hand, some of the incompatibilities are so dramatic that some skeptics and cynics (such as a certain old grandfather) become quite suspicious about the reliability of the reports. For example, my suspicions are aroused when *Mark*, *John*, and Paul make no mention of the Sermon on the Mount. Wouldn't you be similarly suspicious of three of Abraham Lincoln's biographers if they didn't mention his Gettysburg Address? If the Gettysburg Address and the Sermon on the Mount occurred, surely appropriate “biographers” should at least mention them!

But incompatibilities among the gospels aside for a while, some of the internal incomprehensibles (i.e., within a single gospel) cause me more problems. These problems are not so serious as those from incompatibilities among reports about the same incident in the different gospels, but still they “gnaw at me” with the concern that “something's amiss”. And again, I grant to anyone who wants to argue the case that what I choose to call “incomprehensible” is a subjective judgment, but in spite of what the clerics recommended, I plan to judge – for I've been alerted by the clerics' warning: “take care that no one misleads you”!

For example, consider the following incomprehensible within *Matthew*. At *Matthew 12*, 31 we're told that Jesus said:

“Any man who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven...”

But that statement conflicts with what he allegedly said at *Matthew 10*, 32:

“Whoever then will acknowledge me before men, I will acknowledge him before my Father in heaven; and whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.”

I mean, if a person is promised forgiveness even for speaking “a word against the Son of Man”, then how come Jesus then said he'd “disown him before my Father in heaven”? That suggests that “forgiveness” by Jesus isn't worth a damn – which of course is an interesting thought, but the thought that bothers me is: both of these statements can't be right!

Next, consider one of the many incomprehensibles that occur within *John*, namely the stuff that starts at *John 1, 21*:

John [the Baptist] testified further: “I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove and resting upon him [Jesus]. I did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize in water had told me, ‘When you see the Spirit coming down upon someone and resting upon him, you will know that this is he who is to baptize in Holy Spirit.’ I saw it myself, and I have borne witness. This is God’s Chosen One.”

Actually, the above version differs from the versions in the three synoptic gospels, but let me ignore that incompatibility for now. Instead, now compare the above with the stuff at *John 7, 37*:

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and cried aloud, “If anyone is thirsty let him come to me; whoever believe in me, let him drink.” As Scriptures says, “Streams of living water shall flow out from within him.” He was speaking of the Spirit which believers in him would receive later; for the Spirit had not yet been given, because Jesus had not yet been glorified.

Hello? The “spirit had not yet been given” to Jesus? But, but, but... you said that John the Baptist said that... Ah, whatever. But, although I say “whatever”, the incomprehensibles within *John* actually start to get to me, not because I trust anything written in the Bible, but because stupid incomprehensibles (as with any stupidity) can easily get to me.

As another example, consider the following from *John 3, 17*, in which Jesus reportedly said:

“It was not to judge the world that God sent his Son into the world, but that through him the world might be saved.”

But then, *John 9, 39* states:

Jesus said, “It is for judgment that I have come into this world...”

Riiiiight! Both those statements can’t be right!

To show you more examples of incomprehensibles, I’ll quote (from each of the gospels) the descriptions of the “episode” dealing with the “betrayal” of the clerics Jesus by “the traitor” Judas. Then, I’ll use these quotations to illustrate both what I call incomprehensibles (within each gospel) as well as obvious incompatibilities (among the different gospels). I’ll start with the description that begins at *Mark 14, 32*.

When they [Jesus and his disciples] reached a place called Gethsemane, he [Jesus] said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” And he took Peter and James and John with him. Horror and dismay came over him, and he said to them, “My heart is ready to break with grief; stop here, and stay awake.” Then he went forward a little, threw himself on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, this hour might pass him by. “Abba, Father,” he said, “all things are possible to thee; take this cup away from me. Yet not what I will, but what thou wilt.”

He came back and found them asleep; and he said to Peter, “Asleep, Simon? Were you not able to stay awake for one hour? Stay awake, all of you; and pray that you may be spared the test. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” Once more he went away and prayed. On his return he found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy; and they did not know how to answer him.

The third time he came and said to them, “Still sleeping? Still taking your ease? Enough! The hour has come. The Son of man is betrayed to sinful men. Up, let us go forward! My betrayer is upon us.”

Suddenly, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve [apostles], appeared, and with him was a crowd armed with swords and cudgels, sent by the chief priests, lawyers, and elders. Now the traitor [Judas] had agreed with them upon a signal: “The one I kiss is your man; seize him and get him safely away.” When he reached the spot, he stepped forward at once and said to Jesus, “Rabbi”, and kissed him. Then they seized him [Jesus] and held him fast.

One of the party drew his sword, and stuck at the High Priest’s servant, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus spoke: “Do you take me for a bandit, that you have come out with swords and cudgels to arrest me? Day after day I was within your reach as I taught in the temple, and you did not lay hands on me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” Then the disciples all deserted him and ran away.

Among those following [Jesus] was a young man with nothing on but a linen cloth. They tried to seize him; but he slipped out of the linen cloth and ran away naked.

Now, Dear, I’m sorry, but I can’t accept this little story as accurate, because to me, it’s incomprehensible, implausible, inconceivable – or just plain unbelievable. To start, consider the first paragraph quoted above. It states *Horror and dismay came over him* [Jesus], *and he said to them, “My heart is ready to break with grief...”* The paragraph then proceeds to describe what was bothering him: he wanted God to “take this cup away”, i.e., that he wouldn’t be betrayed, tried, crucified, and so on, i.e., that he wouldn’t die, allegedly as a “sacrificial atonement” for people’s sins. By analogy, we’re also given the “explanation” for Jesus’ “horror and dismay” that (as with his

disciples) Jesus' spirit was willing, but his flesh was weak. But, Dear, as I already wrote, I don't buy it.

Of course, the reaction of people to different events depends on the people and the events, but consider some data. Thus, although I don't know what's going on in the world when you're reading this, yet while I'm writing it, almost daily another Islamist is blowing himself up as a "suicide bomber": in each case, probably a rather ordinary person has convinced himself (or has been convinced) that if he dies for the "Jihad" (i.e., another clerical "holy war"), then he'll go straight to "Paradise". In contrast, in the story about Jesus (in which we're to believe that Jesus is convinced that, upon his death, he's going to go directly to Heaven, to sit at the right-hand side of God), we're now told that he gets "cold feet". It doesn't compute.

Further, up to this point in the story, we're led to believe that Jesus is not only a hero among men, he's even the son of God. Really? If a nobody-Islamist blows himself up (or, recently, even 'herself') for "the cause", if a war hero faces death for his or her comrades, if Socrates willingly drinks poison to protect the Greek legal system, then how could it be (as described in the above quotation) that the "perfect person", the son of God, would be unwilling to wipe out the sins of all humanity – especially when he had convinced himself that he was headed straight for heaven? Again, I don't buy it.

Dear: I'm certain that, to save humanity, essentially anyone would willingly sacrifice one's life – let alone a son of some God, convinced that his death would be exceedingly temporary! And yet, the storybook author of *Mark* says otherwise? As a certain grandchild is wont to say: "Gimme a break!" The stupidity of this story is enough to drive me to another limerick:

*Although Jesus prayed he wouldn't die,
What is written is surely a lie:
If you happened to find
You could save all mankind,
Would you pray for your chance to pass by?*

Sorry, Dear, but as I've written before, stupidity really gets to me.

Meanwhile, the incomprehensibles in the above quotation don't stop with these unbelievable depictions of Jesus. The author describes Jesus as telling

the others to stay behind – except for three of the apostles, who went part way, rested, and fell asleep. Jesus then allegedly goes on farther, prays, and the author then tells us the words in his prayers. Riiiiight? Pray tell: who overheard his prayer?

Another incomprehensible concerns the business about Judas needing a “signal” to identify Jesus for the “crowd armed with swords and cudgels”. Somebody’s gotta be kidding! Up to this point in the story, we’re told of huge crowds that Jesus had attracted, both in the countryside and in the cities. And now we’re to believe that Judas was needed to identify Jesus? The story just doesn’t compute.

And then we’re to believe the little skirmish at the end? One of the disciples cuts off somebody’s ear and the rest of the disciples “all deserted him [Jesus] and ran away”; one follower even ran away naked? The disciples were convinced that Jesus was the son of God, and yet they “all deserted him and ran away”! What a pathetic conclusion to such a ridiculous story.

Maybe whoever wrote *Matthew* (perhaps written ~20 years after *Mark* was written) came to a similar conclusion about the silliness of the report in *Mark* about the disciples running away, for although the author of *Matthew* almost certainly just copied the version in *Mark*, the author adds the following “monologue” just after the ear is cut off (*Matthew 26, 52*):

But Jesus said to him, “Put up your sword. All who take the sword die by the sword. Do you suppose that I cannot appeal to my Father, who would at once send to my aid more than twelve legions of angels? But how then could the scriptures be fulfilled, which say that this must be?”

Which is cute – but also incomprehensible: if God didn’t respond to Jesus’ prayer to have the “cup pass me by”, then what makes Jesus think (or any reader think!) that God would respond to a request for aid from “twelve legions of angels”?! I mean, maybe a few squadrons, but twelve legions!

And then there’s the version of the same story starting at *Luke 22, 39*:

Then he [Jesus] went out and made his way as usual to the Mount of Olives, accompanied by the disciples. When he reached the place he said to them “Pray that you may be spared the hour of testing.” He himself withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and began to pray: “Father, if it be thy will, take this cup away from me. Yet not my will but thine be done.”

And now there appeared to him an angel from heaven bringing him strength, and in anguish of spirit, he prayed the more urgently; and his sweat was like clots of blood falling to the ground.

When he rose from prayer and came to the disciples, he found them asleep, worn out by grief. “Why are you sleeping?” he said. “Raise and pray that you may be spared the test.”

Already, Dear, you can see incompatibilities between this version in *Luke* and the versions in *Mark* and *Matthew* (in which Jesus prayed three times), but that incompatibility aside, in this version of *Luke*, one again wonders about its inconsistency: how did anyone know what Jesus was praying about or that an angel appeared to him? And if the storyteller knew that the disciples were “worn out by grief”, then how come Jesus didn’t know it, asking them “Why are you sleeping?”

And the finale in *Luke* is also different:

While he [Jesus] was still speaking, a crowd appeared with the man called Judas, one of the Twelve, at their head. He came up to Jesus to kiss him; but Jesus said, “Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?”

When his followers saw what was coming, they said, “Lord, shall we use our swords?” And one of them struck at the High Priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered, “Let them have their way.” [Which is different from the version by *Matthew*.] Then he touched the man’s ear and healed him. [A miracle that *Mark* and *Matthew* neglected to mention!]

Turning to the chief priests, the officers of temple police, and the elders, who had come to seize him [although in *Mark* (and similarly in *Matthew*) it says that the crowd was “sent by the chief priests, lawyers, and elders”, i.e., these “officials” weren’t among the crowd], he said “Do you take me for a bandit, that you have come out with swords and cudgels to arrest me? Day after day, when I was in the temple with you, you kept your hands off me. Yet this is your moment – the hour when darkness reigns.”

Finally, Dear, I challenge you to try to find a similar story in *John*. At the start of *John 18*, a new version of the final scene is given:

... Jesus went out with his disciples and crossed the Kedron ravine. There was a garden there, and he and his disciples went into it. The place was known to Judas, his betrayer, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. So Judas took a detachment of soldiers, and police provided by the chief priests and the Pharisees, equipped with lanterns, torches, and weapons, and made his way to the garden. Jesus, knowing all that was coming upon him, went out to them and asked, “Who is it you

want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they answered. Jesus said, “I am he.” And there stood Judas the traitor with them. When he said, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. Again Jesus asked, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they answered. Then Jesus said, “I have told you that I am he. If I am the man you want, let these others go.” (This was to make good his words, “I have not lost one of those whom thou gavest me.”) Thereupon Simon Peter drew the sword he was wearing and struck at the High Priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant’s name was Malchus.) Jesus said to Peter, “Sheathe your sword. This is the cup the Father has given me; shall I not drink it?”

Now, I congratulate the author of *John* for removing one of the incomprehensibles within each of the other three gospels: in this version, Judas isn’t needed to identify Jesus, which was silly. Instead, the reader infers that Judas was needed to locate the garden. But this version has its own problems.

As far as I’m concerned, the basic incomprehensible of the version in *John* is that people don’t behave in the manner described. A “detachment of soldiers and police”, fully armed with weapons and authority, first doesn’t pause to let a known criminal ask: “Who is it you want?” And then next, we’re to believe that the soldiers and police “drew back and fell to the ground”? Apparently the author of *John* also addressed the problem of the others running away (one without his clothes), by having Jesus defend them, saying “If I am the man you want, let these other go”, but then the reader is expected to believe that “Simon Peter drew the sword he was wearing and struck at the High Priest’s servant, cutting off his right ear” – while the servant had drawn back and was sprawling on the ground? Gimme a break!

But, Dear, the above doesn’t reveal my challenge to you. What I challenge you to do is find the part of the story in *John* corresponding to *Matthew’s* and *Mark’s* “My heart is ready to break with grief; stop here, and stay awake” and “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” or *Luke’s* “his sweat was like clots of blood falling to the ground.” As you can check in the other versions of the story, these alleged “events” came just after Jesus told Peter various versions of “I tell you, tonight before the cock crows you will disown me three times”, which you can find at the end of *John 13*. But within *John 14, 15, 16, & 17*, Dear, have fun trying to find even a hint that Jesus got cold feet!¹

¹ Incidentally, Dear, in Chapter XX of the book by Graham Lawrence (which you can find at <http://freespace.virgin.net/graham.lawrence/gospelintro.htm>) he writes: “Poor Peter has been misjudged down the centuries. The greatest reason for this is the terrible fiction of him denying Jesus ‘before the cock

Instead (and I would say “understandably”, for the author of *John* seems also to have concluded that the stories in the other gospels – that Jesus got cold feet – were incomprehensible), *John* describes a triumphant Jesus, as I’ll now illustrate

“Set your troubled hearts at rest.” (*John 14, 1*)

“I am the way, I am the truth, and I am life; no one comes to the Father except by me.” (*John 14, 6*)

“Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father... I am in the Father and the Father in me.” (*John 14, 9*)

“I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener.” (*John 15, 1*)

“There is no greater love than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends.” (*John 15, 13*)

“The victory is mine; I have conquered the world.” (*John 16, 33*)

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify thy Son, that the Son may glorify thee. For thou hast made him sovereign over all mankind.” (*John 17, 1*)

So, again, Dear, I congratulate the author of *John* for removing the incomprehensibility that Jesus would have been afraid to save all mankind by his temporary death, when even a lowly suicide bomber shows the “courage” to pass through to his next life and when, throughout history, probably a million people have given up their lives to save only one person’s life or a few people’s lives – and without relying on the dream that their death would be only temporary.

In fact, Dear, there’s even a line in *John* that explicitly rejects the version given in the other three gospels. It’s at *John 12, 27*, where Jesus reportedly says (to which I’ve added the underlining):

“Now my soul is in turmoil, and what am I to say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this that I came to this hour.”

crowds twice’ (*John 14, 30; 14, 66-72*). Only a Gentile [i.e., non-Jew] could have created this story, a Gentile far from Palestine and completely ignorant of the fact that no one was allowed to rear or keep fowls in Jerusalem at that time. It was forbidden. This story could not be true.”

But then, Dear, look at the incompatibility that this change causes, between the version in *John* and the versions in the synoptic gospels! Further: what about the truth?! Everything in the Bible is true? The “gospel truth”? Which gospel? Which truth? That Jesus was a coward or that he was a hero who “conquered the world”?

Pity the poor people who bought the line that they were to believe both versions. Approximately 400 years before these crazy gospels were written, Aristotle wrote:

This, then, is the most certain of all principles... it is impossible for the same man at the same time to believe the same thing to be and not to be; for if a man were mistaken on this point he would have contrary opinions at the same time.

It just goes to show that Aristotle didn't know everything. Shucks, lots of people “believe the same thing to be and not to be”; Christians, Muslims, and Mormons are especially good at it – although possibly not so competent at it as Lewis Carroll's Red Queen, who claimed: “Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.” She added that it takes practice – and certainly re-enforcement helps (along with admonitions that doubters are headed for Hell), but apparently nothing beats being indoctrinated in such balderdash while you're still a trusting child.

But anyway, Dear, that's just one of many incompatibilities among the gospels, incompatibilities whose significance depends on the reader's perspective. Thus, if the reader is convinced that everything in the Bible is “God's holy word”, then even the slightest discrepancy can be troublesome – whereas other readers might just shrug “whatever”. On the other hand, surely some incompatibilities shake the confidence of even the most “partisan” reader, who otherwise might be quite willing to wink at “minor irregularities or translation errors.” Below I'll provide some examples.

To show you an example of an incompatibility that bothers some authors, I'll again quote Mangasarian:

Again, *Matthew* says that to escape the evil designs of Herod, Mary and Joseph (with the infant Jesus) fled into Egypt, *Luke* says nothing about this hurried flight, nor of Herod's intention to kill the infant Messiah. On the contrary he tells us that after the forty days of purification were over, Jesus was publicly presented at the temple, where Herod, if he really (as *Matthew* relates) wished to seize him, could have done so without difficulty. It is impossible to reconcile the flight to Egypt with the

presentation in the temple, and this inconsistency is certainly insurmountable and makes it look as if the narrative had no value whatever as history.

As an example of what first might be brushed off as a translation error, consider “the story about the pigs”. At *Matthew 8*, 28, after Jesus crossed a lake in a boat with his disciples, we learn:

When he reached the other side, in the country of the Gadarenes, he was met by two men who came out from the tombs; they were possessed by devils, and so violent that no one dared pass that way.

Meanwhile, the same story at *Mark 5*, 1 states

So they came to the other side of the lake, into the country of the Gerasenes. As he stepped ashore, a man possessed by an unclean spirit came up to him from among the tombs...

Whether the country was Gadarenes or Gerasenes, or whether there were two men or only one man “possessed”, lead me to shrug: “whatever”.

But other (more knowledgeable) readers don’t brush those differences off so lightly. For example, in an article entitled “Did Jesus Exist?”, Frank R. Zindler saw much more in this story:²

The most absurd geographical error *Mark* commits is when he tells the tall tale about Jesus crossing over the Sea of Galilee and casting demons out of a man (two men in *Matthew’s* revised version) and making them go into about 2,000 pigs which, as the King James version puts it, “ran violently down a steep place into the sea... and they were choked in the sea.”

Apart from the cruelty to animals displayed by the lovable, gentle Jesus, and his disregard for the property of others, what’s wrong with this story? If your only source of information is the King James Bible, you might not ever know. The King James says this marvel occurred in the land of the Gadarenes, whereas the oldest Greek manuscripts say this miracle took place in the land of the Gerasenes. *Luke*, who also knew no Palestinian geography, also passes on this bit of absurdity. But *Matthew*, who had some knowledge of Palestine, changed the name to Gadarene in his new, improved version; but this is further improved to Gergesenes in the King James version.

² Copied from <http://www.atheists.org/christianity/didjesusexist.html>; the original source of Zindler’s article is *The American Atheist*, Summer 1998 (Updated from *The Probing Mind* series, January 1987).

By now the reader must be dizzy with all the distinctions between Gerasenes, Gadarenes, and Gergesenes. What difference does it make? A lot of difference, as we shall see.

Gerasa, the place mentioned in the oldest manuscripts of *Mark*, is located about 31 miles from the shore of the Sea of Galilee! Those poor pigs had to run a course five miles longer than a marathon in order to find a place to drown! Not even lemmings have to go that far. Moreover, if one considers a “steep” slope to be at least 45 degrees, that would make the elevation of Gerasa at least six times higher than Mt. Everest!

When the author of *Matthew* read *Mark*'s version, he saw the impossibility of Jesus and the gang disembarking at Gerasa (which, by the way, was also in a different country, the so-called Decapolis). Since the only town in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee that he knew of that started with G was Gadara, he changed Gerasa to Gadara. But even Gadara was five miles from the shore – and in a different country. Later copyists of the Greek manuscripts of all three pig-drowning gospels (*Matthew*, *Mark*, and *Luke*) improved Gadara further to Gergesa, a region now thought to have actually formed part of the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. So much for the trustworthiness of the biblical tradition.

Then there are the incompatibilities in the reports about the fate of “the traitor”, Judas. Thus, according to *Acts 1*, 28:

This Judas, be it noted, after buying a plot of land with the price of his villainy, fell forward on the ground, and burst open, so that his entrails poured out. This became known to everyone in Jerusalem...

Well, “everyone in Jerusalem” may have known this, but apparently it was unknown to the author of *Matthew* (probably a Greek), who wrote at *Matthew 27*, 5:

So he [Judas] threw the money down in the temple... and...went and hanged himself.

And though I again shrug “whatever”, I must admit to being annoyed by such a blatant disregard for whatever might be “the truth”.

A similar concern about “the truth” arises from incompatibilities among the stories in the four gospels about John the Baptist. At first, these incompatibilities don't seem too bad, as you can see from the following four quotations.

Mark 1, 9: “It happened at this time that Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee [which, appears to be Mark's erroneous interpretation of “Jesus the Nazarene”, which means

“the enlightened one”, for apparently there was no town of Nazareth until several centuries later] and was baptized in the Jordan by John. At the moment when he [Jesus] came up out of the water, he [Jesus] saw the heavens torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon him. And a voice spoke from heaven: ‘Thou art my Son, my Beloved; on thee my favor rests’.”

Matthew 3, 14: “Then Jesus arrived at the Jordan from Galilee, and came to John to be baptized by him. John tried to dissuade him. ‘Do you come to me?’ he said; ‘I need rather to be baptized by you.’ Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so for the present; we do well to conform in this way with all that God requires.’ John then allowed him to come. After baptism, Jesus came up out of the water at once, and at that moment heaven opened; he [Jesus or John?] saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove to alight upon him; and a voice from heaven was heard [by whom?] saying, ‘This is my Son, my Beloved, on whom my favor rests’.”

Luke 2, 21: “During a general baptism of the people, when Jesus too had been baptized and was praying, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove; and there came a voice from heaven, ‘Thou art my Son, my Beloved; on thee my favor rests’.”

John 1, 29: “The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming towards him. ‘Look,’ he said, ‘there is the Lamb of God; it is he who takes away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I spoke when I said, “After me a man is coming who takes rank before me”; for before I was born, he already was... I saw the Spirit coming down from heaven like a dove and resting upon him. I did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize in water had told me, “When you see the Spirit coming down upon someone and resting upon him, you will know that this is he who is to baptize in Holy Spirit.” I saw it myself, and I have borne witness. This is God’s Chosen One’.”

As I already mentioned, inconsistencies among the above four quotations don’t seem too dramatic, although some readers could complain that the different stories leave unclear who actually saw the dove descend: just Jesus, Jesus and John, or everyone?

But a major incompatibility becomes clear when additional stories about John the Baptist are examined. Thus, the above quotation from *John* makes clear that John the Baptist immediately recognized Jesus as “God’s Chosen One” and “he who takes away the sin of the world”. But then, Dear, consider the following reports about what happened later.

Matthew 11, 2: “John, who was in prison, heard what Christ was doing, and sent his own disciples to him with this message: ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect some other?’”

Luke 7, 18: “John, too, was informed of all this by his disciples. Summoning two of their number he sent them to the Lord with this message: ‘Are you the one who is to come, or are we to expect some other?’”

Now, Dear, if we agree with monkeys and babies that $A \equiv A$ and $A \neq \neg A$, then somebody’s lying: either it’s a lie in *John* that John the Baptist immediately recognized Jesus as “God’s Chosen One” or it’s a lie in *Matthew* and *Luke* that John the Baptist sent out such a message.

Yet, I admit that the above incompatibility doesn’t bother me very much; I again have the tendency to shrug “whatever”. On the other hand, I become quite annoyed at incompatibilities in reports about a person’s “last words” – which I admit may be a peculiarity of us “old fogeys”! For example, Dear, I want to know that the “last words”, as listed below, of the following people were accurately reported – for reasons also listed.

- The Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama): “...be ye lamps unto yourselves. Be ye a refuge to yourselves. Betake yourselves to no external refuge. Hold fast to the truth as a lamp” – because these last words contain such an important message for every human.
- Socrates: “Citro, I own a cock to Asclepius; will you remember to pay the debt?” – because these “last words” show that, to the end, Socrates was honorable.
- Voltaire (perhaps the person most responsible for Europe now being so far ahead of the U.S. in ridding itself of “the god idea”, his last words said in response to a priest who admonished him to renounce Satan): “Now, now, my good man, this is no time for making enemies” – because those last words were so like him!
- Thomas Jefferson: “Is it the Fourth [of July]?” – because these “last words” show that, to the end, Jefferson was devoted to the type of government he worked so hard to create.
- Goethe: “More light!” – because early in his own brilliant life (encouraging people to rely on their own best efforts), Goethe, who shed so much light in the world, had said: “Someday perhaps the inner light will shine forth from us, and then we shall need no other light.”

- Charles Darwin: “I am not the least afraid to die” – because, after probably doing more than any other person to rid humanity of the damaging ideas of gods and an “after life”, even Darwin’s “last words” showed people how to die.
- Friedrich Nietzsche (although I’m not certain of this quotation): “Sweep up the dust” – because it so beautifully summarizes his disdain for Zoroaster’s and all subsequent clerics’ claims of an afterlife, instead advertising the naturalists’ view of “dust to dust”.
- Ludwig Wittgenstein (the philosopher, who died in 1951): “Tell them I’ve had a wonderful life” – because it’s what I hope I say!
- Richard Feynman (the physicist): “I’d hate to die twice; it’s so boring” – because these “last words” of Feynman remind me how he lived, both enjoying his life and doing his best.

And besides “famous last words” that reveal or inspire, there’s also some that are just too stimulating to ignore, such as Oscar Wilde’s: “Good grief! This wallpaper is killing me. One of us has got to go!”

Consequently, Dear, maybe you understand why I’m annoyed with the gospels, when the different authors report the “last words” of the clerics’ Jesus as follows:

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” [or “why hast thou shamed me?”]
(*Mark 15, 34*)

“Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?”, which means, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (*Matthew 27, 46*)

“Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.” (*Luke 23, 46*)

“It is accomplished.” (*John 19, 30*)

First, I don’t like it that at least some of these reporters have obviously supplied misinformation. Next, if the last words of the clerics’ Jesus were as given in *Mark* (and if it’s correct that *Mark* was the synoptic gospel written first, and then the author of *Matthew* plagiarized and added “fluff” to *Mark*), then these last words seem not only to negate the entire life’s work of the

clerics' Jesus but also are inconsistent with the reported reason for his dying, i.e., to "save" humanity, dying as a "sacrificial atonement" for our "sins".

The "last words" of Jesus as given in *Mark* (and *Matthew*), however, do have a plausible explanation from the Gnostics' viewpoint. To see what I mean, Dear, consider the following quotation:³

I have read many threads now that post questions such as "If Jesus was an ordinary man, would you still follow Him?" and "Was Jesus just a great teacher?" Most responses are that He wasn't just a man or just a great teacher, etc. But most agree that some of what he taught [contained] some good moral values. I question the validity of this thought.

Gnosticism comes from the Greek word *gnosis* which means knowledge. Gnostics are "those in the know". What they historically claimed to know were the secrets that could bring salvation. For the Gnostic, a person isn't saved by having faith in Christ or doing good deeds, rather a person is saved by knowing the truth – the truth about the world we live in, the true God, but most importantly, about who we ourselves are.

According to them, the Ultimate Divine Being is completely removed from this world. He is absolute spirit with no material aspects or qualities. He has many offspring known as *aeons* who are spiritual beings. During a catastrophe one of these *aeons* somehow fell from the divine realm leading to lesser divine beings being created. These lesser divine beings created our material world.

I could go forever about what they think and why, but their overriding point is blatant: The god who made this world, the one of the OT, is a secondary and inferior deity. We won't gain freedom to eternity by worshipping him, but instead, we will be trapped here. We can only gain true eternity through knowledge and wisdom bestowed upon us by divine beings. In Christian gnostic religions, the one who bestows this knowledge was Christ. But Christ wasn't the son of God as the church would have you believe, which is why there are so many holes in the account of His life. Instead, he was an *aeon* temporarily housed in Jesus to impart the knowledge one needed if they could hear. Of his 12 disciples, only Judas could hear, so after Jesus imparted his knowledge, and was on the cross, the *aeon* left; hence the final words, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?"

I'm suspicious that the clerical authors of *Luke* and *John* saw how incomprehensible such "last words" (and the rest of the stories) would be for non-Gnostics (or Agnostics), so they invented new "last words" for their Jesus! That is, in summary, these incompatibilities among the synoptic

³ Posted at <http://debatingchristianity.com/forum/viewtopic.php?p=94963#94963> by "Confused" in the subject "Gnostics" on 25 January 2007.

gospels really bother me – not because I “believe” anything in the Bible, but because they ruin even the fictitious stories being told!

And one of the reasons for my calling these stories “fictitious”, Dear, is that (as “Biblical scholars” have shown) most of the “death scene” described even in the first-written gospel (i.e., *Mark*) is just a rewrite of what appears in the OT, in the *Psalms* – written at least 500 years earlier than *Mark*! To see this, Dear, read the following sets of quotations – and I won’t say “read it and weep”; instead, how about “read it and laugh”!

Psalm 69, 21: They put poison in my food and gave me vinegar when I was thirsty.

Mark 15, 23: He [Jesus] was offered drugged wine, but he would not take it.

Mark 15, 36: A man ran and soaked a sponge in sour wine [vinegar] and held it to his lips on the end of a cane.”

Psalm 22, 18: They share out my garments among them and cast lots for my clothes.

Mark 15, 24: They divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should have.

Psalm 22, 7: All who see me jeer at me, make mouths at me and wag their heads:

“He threw himself on the Lord for rescue; let the Lord deliver him, for he holds him dear!”

Mark 15, 29: The passers-by hurled abuse at him: “Aha!” they cried, wagging their heads, “... come down from the cross and save yourself...”

Psalm 22, 1: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me...?

Mark 15, 35: My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

And if, Dear, you neither wept nor laughed, then surely you at least said:

“Gimme a break!” – and maybe you even added: “It’s all a fake!”

Meanwhile, the “true believer” would say something similar to: “It just goes to show that all happened as prophesies foretold.” To which some of us respond with Bill Cosby’s: “Riiiiiiight.”

Anyway, Dear, to summarize this nonsense (and even more – which I didn’t get to – yet), let me again quote from the book by Graham Lawrence entitled *The Fallible Gospels*.⁴

No betrayal, no denial by Peter, no false witnesses, no silence before his accusers.

No mocking, no casting lots for garments, no darkness at noon. No last words on the cross, no vinegar to drink, no death cry. All taken from the Psalms and the Prophets.

⁴ Available at <http://freespace.virgin.net/graham.lawrence/gospelintro.htm>.

How frustratingly little history we have around an occasion that has meant so much to so many throughout the ages.

And I should add, Dear, that incompatibilities among the gospels about what allegedly happened after the clerics' Jesus was allegedly crucified can apparently be quite upsetting – at least for “believers” – I assume because such people “bought” what Paul allegedly was selling (as given at *I Corinthians 15, 13*):

If there be no resurrection, then Christ was not raised [from the dead]; and if Christ was not raised, then our gospel is null and void, and so is your faith...

So now, Dear, consider what each of the gospels has to say about what happened after the death of the clerics' Jesus.

Mark 16, 1: “When the Sabbath was over, Mary of Magdala, Mary the mother of James, and Salome [i.e., three women] bought aromatic oils intending to go and anoint him [the body of Jesus]; and very early on the Sunday morning, just after sunrise, they came to the tomb. They were wondering among themselves who would roll away the stone for them from the entrance to the tomb, when they looked up and saw that the stone, huge as it was, had been rolled back already. They went into the tomb, where they saw a youth sitting on the right-hand side, wearing a white robe; and they were dumbfounded. But he said to them, ‘Fear nothing; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised again; he is not here; look, there is the place where they laid him. But go and give this message to his disciples and Peter: “He is going on before you into Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you”.’ Then they [the women] went out and ran away from the tomb, beside themselves with terror. They said nothing to anybody, for they were afraid.” [Which, with this fear, ends *The Gospel According to Mark* in “the most ancient” versions; i.e., stories about seeing Jesus after his death were not included in the original.]

Matthew 28, 1: “The Sabbath was over, and it was about daybreak on Sunday, when Mary of Magdala and the other Mary came to look at the grave [i.e., two versus three women]. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake [not mentioned by the writers of the other gospels]; an angel of the Lord descended from heaven; he came to the stone and rolled it away, and sat himself down on it. [As opposed to the report in Mark that the angel (or “a youth”) was sitting inside of the tomb “on the right-hand side” – of what isn’t stated.] His face shone like lightning; his garments were white as snow. At the sight of him the guards shook with fear and lay like the dead [although no guards, i.e., no additional observers, were mentioned by Mark].

“The angel then addressed the women: ‘You’, he said, ‘have nothing to fear. I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; he has been raised again, as he said he would be. Come and see the place where he was laid, and then go

quickly and tell his disciples: “He has been raised from the dead and is going on before you into Galilee; there you will see him.” That is what I had to tell you.’

“They hurried away from the tomb in awe and great joy [although Mark said they were “beside themselves with terror”], and ran to tell the disciples.” [After which, in contrast to Mark, Matthew reports that the two women, as well as the eleven apostles, saw the resurrected Jesus.]

Luke 23, 55: “The women [identified at *Luke 24, 10* to be “Mary of Magdala, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, i.e., three women]... took note of the tomb and observed how his body was laid. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes; and on the Sabbath they rested in obedience to the commandment. But on the Sunday morning very early they came to the tomb, bringing the spices they had prepared. Finding that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb [although *Matthew* reported that, after a “violent earthquake, the two (versus the three) women watched an “angel of the Lord roll the stone away], [the three women] then went inside; but the body was not to be found.

“While they stood utterly at a loss, all of a sudden two men in dazzling garment were at their side [versus only a single youth or an angel in *Mark* and *Matthew*]. They [the three women] were terrified, and stood with eyes cast down, but the men said, ‘Why search among the dead for one who lives? Remember what he told you while he was still in Galilee, about the son of Man: how he must be given up into the power of sinful men and be crucified, and must rise again on the third day’ [which is not what *Mark* and *Matthew* reported].” Then they [the three women] recalled his words and, returning from the tomb, they reported all this to the Eleven [apostles] and all the others.” [After which, different from both *Mark* and *Matthew*, *Luke* reports that the Eleven Apostles but not the three women saw the resurrected Jesus.]

John 20, 1: “Early on the Sunday morning, while it was still dark, Mary of Magdala [alone?] came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the entrance, and ran to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved. [Does this mean that Jesus didn’t love Peter?] ‘They have taken the Lord out of his tomb,’ she cried, ‘and we [it’s not identified who the “we” are] do not know where they have laid him.’ So Peter and the other [disciple] set out and made their way to the tomb. They were running side-by-side, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He peered in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but did not enter. Then Simon Peter came up, following him, and he went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying, and the napkin which had been over his head, not lying with the wrappings but rolled together in a place by itself. Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first went in too, and he saw and believed; until then they had not understood the scriptures, which showed that he must rise from the dead.

“So the disciples went home again; but Mary stood at the tomb outside, weeping. As she wept, she peered into the tomb; and she saw two angles in white sitting there, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. [So, in contrast to

the other three gospels, now only Mary saw the two angels, or one angel, or one youth.] They said to her, ‘Why are you weeping?’ She answered, ‘They have taken my Lord away, and I do not know where they have laid him.’ With these words she turned around [although according to the other gospels, the angel or angels or youth now should give Mary (plus the other women) a message] and [Mary] saw Jesus standing there, but did not recognize him. [Why she didn’t recognize him isn’t explained.] Jesus said to her, ‘Why are you weeping? Who is it you are looking for?’ [Which seems to be not only a bizarre question (because not only was it obvious why she was weeping but also she had already explained why – and she shouldn’t have had to explain anything to some god or some son of some god!) but also seems quite cruel, with the questioner seemingly wanting to shock more than to comfort the bereaved Mary.]

“Thinking it was the gardener, she said, ‘If it is you, sir, who removed him, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away.’ Jesus said, ‘Mary!’ She turned to him [although we were just told she had already turned to him] and said, ‘Rabbuni!’ (which is Hebrew for ‘My Master’). Jesus said, ‘Do not cling to me [or touch me], for I have not yet ascended to the Father. [Why Mary’s clinging to him, or touching him, would have impeded his ascension isn’t explained; I guess even sons of gods have rules they must follow.] But go to my brothers [his disciples], and tell them that I am now ascending to my Father and your Father, my God and your God.’ Mary of Magdala went to the disciples with her news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’ she said, and gave them his message [which is a message different from the message that the writers of the other gospels state that the angel (or angels or youth) asked to be relayed – which surely instills doubt in the reliability of the messengers (and the message)].”

Finally, there’s still another story allegedly written by Paul at *1 Corinthians 15, 3*:

First and foremost, I handed on to you the facts [“facts”, no less!] which had been imparted to me [by whom?]: that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures [What “scriptures”? The gospels according to *Matthew*, *Luke*, and *John* had not yet been written, and if the gospel according to *Mark* had already been written (which is highly doubtful) it makes no mention of Jesus dying for anybody’s sin (in *Mark*, Jesus just “saves” people by “casting out devils”); instead, *Mark* states that, when Jesus died, he said that God had forsaken him, i.e., that whatever might have been “the cause” for which he had been sentenced to death, he felt that he was dying in vain]; that he was raised to life on the third day, according to the scriptures [Again, what “scriptures”? Did some later cleric slip the phrase “according to the scriptures” into what Paul wrote?]; and that he appeared to Cephas [i.e., Peter], and afterwards to the Twelve. [Twelve apostles? Without Judas, there would be only Eleven.] Then he appeared to over five hundred of our brothers at once [a “fact” not mentioned by the authors of the four gospels – although “the fact” is mentioned at *Acts 1, 15* that there were only 120 of “the brotherhood in total!], most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, and afterwards to all the

* Go to other chapters via

apostles. [Hello? You already stated that “the Twelve” saw him! Or is it that, in the original, Paul wrote just “...he appeared to Cephas, then he appeared to James, and afterwards to all the apostles”? Did some later cleric slip in all these other “facts”? If Paul had written just the “short version”, then that would be consistent at least with what’s given in *Matthew*, *Luke*, and *John*, but not *Mark*, which neglected to mention any sightings of Jesus after his alleged death!]

In summary, Dear, my opinion is this. If people want to believe that Jesus rose from the dead, then I say “whatever” – but surely a reasonable question is to ask of such people is: “Which story do you believe?”

In this regard, Dear, can you imagine what would happen if these five different reports were given at a modern trial? Even if “hearsay evidence” were admitted at the trial, I’m confident that even a mediocre prosecuting attorney would tear all the “evidence” to shreds. Further, I wouldn’t be surprised if the judge at such a trial would charge at least four of the “witnesses” with perjury. I wrote “four”, because I suspect that the author of *Mark* would get away without a citation for perjury (at least for the part of his story about Jesus rising from the dead – his stories about “miracles” is another matter). But the author of *Mark* would be “off the hook” only because he neglected to mention “the fact” that Jesus rose from the dead, ending his story with the statement that the body of Jesus was missing from the tomb (which, if true, wouldn’t need a “supernatural” cause).

In fact, there has been a trial, of sorts – or at least a poll. The outcome separates the billion-or-more Christians (and affiliated sects such as the Mormons) from the billion-or-more Muslims from the billion-or-so Hindus from the billion-or-so Buddhists from the billion-or-so people who “believe” in other religions and from the billion-or-more of us who consider all supernatural junk to be bunk. The billion-or-more Christians believe that Jesus rose from the dead; the other five-billion-or-more of us consider the New Testament, the Christian story, to be just that, a story – a fictional story, in the same class as any comic book. We consider the Old Testament to be similar. In fact, the Old and the New Testament fit together like a comic book about Batman and Robin!

Meanwhile, though, obviously many people take the Bible more seriously than a Batman and Robin comic book, and for them, the incoherencies in the advocated polices (i.e., the inconsistencies, incompatibilities, and incomprehensibles) have caused and continue to cause substantial troubles. A particular example (which apparently is taken seriously by many people)

deals with the question about whether a “believer” gains “eternal life” through deeds, through deeds plus faith, or through faith alone. To see the incompatibilities, consider the following differences about how to “gain eternal life” (or how to become “justified” to “deserve” eternal life).

1. Faith alone, according to *John 6, 40*:

“For it my Father’s will that everyone who looks upon the Son and puts his faith in him shall possess eternal life; and I [Jesus] will raise him up on the last day.”

Similarly at *John 11, 25*:

“I [Jesus] am the resurrection and I am life. If a man has faith in me, even though he die, he shall come to life; and no one who is alive and has faith shall ever die.”

2. Not “righteousness” (as a Jew might be “righteous”) by deeds, but “faith” is needed, allegedly according to Paul (*Romans 9, 30*):

Then what are we to say? That Gentiles [i.e., non-Jews] who made no effort after righteousness, nevertheless achieved it, a righteousness based on faith; whereas Israel made great efforts after a law of righteousness, but never attained to it. Why was this? Because their efforts were not based on faith, but (as they supposed) on deeds [which, by the way Dear, is what I think any sane person would hope, i.e., that “righteousness” would be gained by good deeds!].

3. Not faith, but deeds, according to James (*James 2, 25*):

You see then that a man is justified by deeds and not by faith in itself.

Now, Dear, although new Christian sects have been created to emphasize one or the other of these “pathways to paradise”, the rest of us say:

“Whatever!” Martin Luther, however, was more troubled by it:

Many sweat to reconcile St. Paul and St. James, but in vain. “Faith justifies” and “faith does not justify” contradict each other flatly. If any one can harmonize them I will give him my doctor’s hood and let him call me a fool.

To begin to summarize some of these “policy incoherencies”, Dear (and I wrote “begin”, because I’ll show you more in the next chapter), let me quote two people who have obviously studied the NT far more carefully than I ever want to.

One is M.M. Mangasarian, who seems to have spent at least a decade as a minister in some branch of Christianity. This summary is from his book *The Truth about Jesus: Is He a Myth?*, apparently written in about 1910 and which you can find on the internet. Someday soon, Dear, I hope that you'll read the entire book; for now, consider just the following long quotation [in which I've added a few notes in brackets such as these].

Again, when we come to consider the random, disconnected, and fragmentary form in which the teachings of Jesus are presented, we cannot avoid the conclusion that he is a *dramatis persona* [i.e., a fictional character of a drama or play] brought upon the stage to give expression not to a consistent, connected, and carefully worked-out thought, but to voice (with many breaks and interruptions) the ideas of his changing [stage] managers. He is made to play a number of contradictory roles, and appears in the same story in totally different characters.

One editor or compiler of the Gospel describes Jesus as an ascetic and a mendicant, wandering from place to place, without "roof over his head" and crawling at eventide into his cave in the Mount of Olives. He introduces him as the "Man of Sorrows", fasting in the wilderness, counseling people to part with their riches, and promising the Kingdom of Heaven to Lazarus, the beggar. [This is a different Lazarus from the Lazarus that Jesus allegedly "rose from the dead".]

Another redactor [editor] announces him as "eating and drinking" at the banquets of "publicans and sinners" – a "wine-bibbing" Son of Man. "John the Baptist came neither eating nor drinking, but the Son of Man came both eating and drinking," which, if it means anything, means that Jesus was the very opposite of the ascetic John.

A partisan of the doctrine of non-resistance puts in Jesus' mouth the words: "Resist not evil", "The meek shall inherit the earth", etc., and counsels that he who smites us on the one cheek should be permitted to strike us also on the other, and that to him who robs us of an undergarment, we should also hand over our outer garments.

Another draws the picture of a militant Jesus who could never endorse such precepts of indolence and resignation. "The kingdom of heaven is taken by violence", cries this new Jesus, and intimates that no such beggar like Lazarus, sitting all day long with the dogs and his sores, can ever earn so great a prize. With a scourge in his hands this Jesus rushes upon the traders in the temple-court, upturns their tables, and whips their owners into the streets. Surely this was resistance of the most pronounced type. The right to use physical force could not have been given a better endorsement than by this example of Jesus.

It will not help matters to say that these money-changers were violating a divine law, and needed chastisement with a whip. Is not the man who smites us upon the cheek, or robs us of our clothing, equally guilty? Moreover, these traders in the outer courts

of the synagogue were rendering the worshipers a useful service. Just as candles, rosaries, images, and literature are sold in church vestibules for the accommodation of Catholics, so were doves, pigeons and Hebrew coins, necessary to the Jewish sacrifices, sold in the temple-courts for the Jewish worshiper. The money changer who supplied the pious Jew with the only sacred coin which the priests would accept was not very much less important to the Jewish religion than the rabbi. To have fallen upon these traders with a weapon, and to have caused them the loss of their property, was certainly the most inconsistent thing that “meek” and “lowly” Jesus preaching non-resistance could have done.

Again, one writer makes Jesus the teacher *par excellence* of peace. He counsels forgiveness of injuries not seven time but seventy times that number – meaning unlimited love and charity. “Love your enemies”, “Bless them that curse you”, is his unusual advice. But another hand retouches this picture, and we have a Jesus who breaks his own golden rule. This other Jesus heaps abuse upon the people who displease him; calls his enemies “vipers”, “serpents”, “devils”, and predicts for them eternal burnings in sulfur and brimstone.

How could he who said, “Come unto me all ye that are heavy laden”, say also, “Depart from me ye cursed”? Who curses them? How can there be an everlasting hell in a universe whose author advises us to love our enemies, to bless them that curse us, and to forgive seventy times seven? How could the same Jesus who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers”, say also, “I came not to bring peace, but a sword”? Is it possible that the same Jesus who commands us to love our enemies, commands us also to “hate” father, mother, wife and child, for “his name’s sake”? Yes! The same Jesus who said, “Put up thy sword in its sheath”, also commands us to sell our effects and “buy a sword”.

Once more: A believer in the divinity of Jesus (I am going to say) *invents* the following text: “The Father and I are one”. An opponent to this Trinitarian dogma introduces a correction which robs the above text of its authority: “The Father is greater than I”, and makes Jesus admit openly that there are some things known to the father only. It is not difficult not to see in these passages the beginnings of the terrible controversies which, starting with Peter and Paul, have come down to our day and which will not end until Jesus shall take his place among the mythical saviors of the world [i.e., until the Jesus described in the Gospels is recognized to be similar to other mythical “gods”, such as Zeus, Horus, and innumerable other fictitious gods].

To harmonize these many and different Jesuses into something like unity or consistency, a thousand books have been written by the clergy. They have not succeeded. How can a Jesus represented at one time as the image of divine perfection, and at another as protesting against being called “good”, for “none is good, save one, God”? How can these two conceptions be reconciled except by a resort to artificial and arbitrary interpretations? If such insurmountable contradictions in the teaching and character of another would weaken our faith in his historicity,

then we are justified in inferring that in all probability Jesus was only a name – the name of an imaginary stage hero, uttering the conflicting thoughts of his prompters.

In **Yx**, I'll return to the question of whether or not Jesus was an entirely fictional character (and my answer will be: “Of course I don't know, but I don't think so; I think there was a ‘real’ Jesus – but he had relatively little in common with the Jesus depicted by the clerical authors who wrote the gospels of the NT”), but for this chapter, Dear, “all” I wanted to show you is some of the troubles that a reader can get into, trying to gain understanding of what policies are being promoted by the clerics who wrote the NT.

And the second person that I want to quote is the amazing Gerald Massey (about whom I've written some in an earlier chapter). The following quote is from his *Lectures*, which you can find on the internet and which are stated to be “originally published in a private edition c. 1900.” The particular lecture in which the following quote appears is entitled THE “LOGIA OF THE LORD;” OR, PRE-HISTORIC SAYINGS ASCRIBED TO JESUS THE CHRIST.

The sayings [of Jesus] themselves, selected in a last assortment, have not even the consistency of a kaleidoscope. They will not fall into any set form of themselves, or reflect any mental unity anywhere. And so each sect or system of interpretation has to take them and construct its own kaleidoscope, and determine its own views, doing all it can to impose them upon others. Texts may be quoted on all sides for purposes the most antagonistic. Diversity radiates outwardly from them because there was no unity of origin, no individual life at the heart of them all.

Please, Dear, read that quotation again. How I wish I could say so much, so well, with so few words! Probably you wish I could, too!

Anyway, Dear, maybe you're beginning to understand why I've been describing the NT as a policy quagmire and why I suggested that a little pity for the poor old grandfather would be appropriate. My goal was (and still is!) to show you policies it advocates. But that goal was adopted based on the premiss that the NT advocated a set of coherent and consistent policies! Then, reality sets in. What policies does the clerics' Jesus advocate:

- To be a peacemaker or similar to him, bring a sword?
- To love your enemies or, similar to him, burn them in hell?
- To not judge others or, similar to him, judge some as a “viper's brood”?
- To honor your father and mother or, similar to him, insult them?

- To be humble or, similar to him, claim that you're son of some god?

And so on it goes, as I'll be showing you. And thus, Dear, some of the "troubles" in the New Testament.

Yet, Dear, if you would like to determine if anyone can resolve such incompatibilities, contradictions, confusions, and so on, then you may want to speak to some clerics. I'm certain that you could find a huge number of them, from a huge number of sects, who would be delighted to show you how all the troubles can be overcome – at least according to their priesthods, whose collection plates just happen to be handy.

Oh, and while you're at it, Dear, if you want, you can also have any cleric "resolve" the issue of the importance of the rites of the last supper (i.e., eating the body and drinking the blood of Jesus) and the issue about being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, or in the name of "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost", or being baptized by immersion in water or with just a few drops of water on your head, or whatever – especially the important issue of whether you gain "eternal salvation" through deeds, or faith, or a combination of those, or by wearing a cross around your neck, or by paying the clerics sufficiently, or whatever. But because resolving those and other incompatibilities is a little more difficult, Dear, make sure you bring along your checkbook – although I've heard that many clerics now accept credit cards.

Sorry, Dear, my sarcasm is beginning to show. As a remedy, I'm gonna take a break and get some exercise. May I suggest... Hmm. I suspect you figured out the rest of that sentence by yourself.

But in addition, after you get some exercise and are wondering what to do (having finished all your homework, doncha know, as well as even reading ahead in your texts), then rather than your getting totally bored (and then getting into who-knows-what kind of mischief), perhaps you'd read as much of the rest of the New Testament as you can stomach. And if you do find that you can't stomach much more, I'd say: go easy on *Acts* (there's nothing there of much interest or reliability) and maybe even avoid *Revelations* entirely (because whoever wrote it was almost certainly spaced-out on drugs or a raving lunatic).