

The Search for the Real Dr. Ron Charles



by Richard Peck with G. Richard Fisher

Hardly a year goes by that there is not some reinvention of Jesus. We've endured the mythical Jesus of the Jesus Seminar, the cynic-philosopher Jesus of John Dominick Crossan, Jesus as a prophet of social change created by Gerd Theissen and Richard Horsley and many others, Dan Brown's Jesus of *The Da Vinci Code*, and now the Jesus of Dr. Ron Charles.

In 2007, Charles revised and reprinted his self-published 600-page book, *The Search: A Historian's Search for Historical Jesus*. It is evident from the first few pages that this book has some serious problems as Charles states, "However, as I plunged deeper into the Gospels, I began to see some inconsistencies and some chronology problems with the neat package that had been wrapped by modern fundamentalists."¹

Anyone who says the Gospels are inconsistent is calling the Bible faulty and saying God is a liar.

A few pages later Charles suggests, "I discovered that it was very doubtful that the Gospels were written by the ones whose name the individual Gospel records bare — perhaps with the exception of the *Gospel According to Luke*."² It quickly becomes clear this man does not believe that Matthew wrote Matthew, Mark wrote Mark, or John wrote John, and he isn't certain that Luke wrote Luke.

Two paragraphs later Charles claims:

"In AD 130 Papias, the Bishop of Hierapolis, claimed that a John Mark of Canatha had written the Gospel in AD 60, using information that he had received from James, the brother of Jesus, the apostle Peter, and Barnabas. But, based on information that I found at the University of Texas library, it seemed to me that James, the brother of Jesus, ... was the most likely candidate to have authored this Gospel."³

THE AUTHORITIES DISAGREE WITH CHARLES

Any serious Church history student confronted with the assertion that Mark used "information" from both James and Barnabas for his Gospel would do well to consult the nine-volume set, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, which contains all the works of the early Church Fathers up to the year A.D. 325. Reading everything Papias wrote, one will discover that Charles is unfactual in his reporting. Here is all Papias wrote about the subject:

"Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered. It was not, however, in exact order that he related the sayings or deeds of Christ. For he neither heard the Lord nor accompanied Him. But afterwards, as I said, he accompanied Peter, who accommodated his instructions to the necessities [of his

hearers], but with no intention of giving a regular narrative of the Lord's sayings. Wherefore Mark made no mistake in thus writing some things as he remembered them. For of one thing he took especial care, not to omit anything he had heard, and not to put anything fictitious into the statements."⁴

Papias said nothing about James or Barnabas being a source of "information" for the Gospel of Mark. Papias contradicts, rather than confirms, Charles' claim. Charles is guilty of creating his own historical facts to undermine the authorship of Mark.

Next, Charles turns his attention to Matthew's Gospel. Here he states:

"Although the author of the Gospel is traditionally believed to have been Matthew, commonly identified with Levi, the former tax collector and apostle of Jesus, this belief was not proposed until the middle of the 2nd century, when Cedus, the Bishop of Berea, claimed that an angel had appeared to him and told him that Matthew, the apostle, was the author of the Gospel. More probable is that the second (or third) Gospel was written by a late 1st century or early 2nd century Jewish convert to Christianity."⁵

Evidently Charles did not bother to read Papias at all because Papias also talks about Matthew. The Church

historian Eusebius quotes Papias as saying this about Matthew:

"[This is what is related by Papias regarding Mark; but with regard to Matthew he has made the following statements]: Matthew put together the oracles [of the Lord] in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as best he could."⁶

Here we have a clear statement made by Papias that Matthew wrote, in Hebrew, his Gospel. Charles' statements are so easily refuted that one wonders if he did any research at all.

DISPUTING OF LUKE DEBUNKED

Charles is not certain whether Luke wrote Luke, but he does say that Luke's Gospel "seemed to be greatly lacking chronologically, although Luke did objectively attempt to weave the life and ministry of Jesus into Roman history."⁷ Charles thus proves in this statement his complete lack of scholarship. Luke 1:3 says, "to write unto thee *in order*." If Charles was the scholar he claims to be, he would have known that this term "in order" is from a Greek word meaning "chronological order." Luke is, in fact, the only Gospel that is said to be written in chronological order. The NASB translates the verse correctly as, "to write it out for you in consecutive order," which, of course, means the same as chronological order.

Charles then writes that:

"In researching John's Gospel, I discovered that up until the time of the Council of Bishops held in Toledo, Spain, in AD 1215, it was generally believed by the Christian world that John, the apostle of Jesus, had been killed along with his brother, James, by Herod Agrippa in AD 44. It was at this 1215 Council of Bishops that John was proclaimed to have lived until AD 104; ... *although no evidence had ever been found to justify the council's proclamations concerning John*. It was also at this Council that John 'became' the author of the *Gospel According to John, The Revelation*, and the *I, II, and III Epistles of John*."⁸

Once again, Charles is out to cast doubt on the authenticity of the Scriptures by telling readers that John didn't write the Gospel of John, the three epistles of John, and the book of Revelation, and that John died in A.D. 44, along with his brother James. Charles even goes so far as to say that *no evidence has ever been found* to justify the council's proclamation that John was the author of these books in the New Testament. Charles' claim is easy to refute. Any credible Bible translation, published by a reputable institution, will say concerning Revelation 1:9, that John wrote Revelation while on the island of Patmos.

Church historian Philip Schaff tells us:

"The Apocalypse professes to be the work of John, who assumes a commanding position over the churches of Asia. History knows only one such character, the Apostle and Evangelist, and to him it is ascribed by the earliest and most trustworthy witnesses, going back to the lifetime of many friends and pupils of the author. It is one of the best authenticated books of the New Testament."⁹

Greek scholar A.T. Robertson emphasizes:

"Justin Martyr states expressly that the Apostle John wrote the Apocalypse. Irenaeus called it the work of a disciple of Jesus. ... a respectable number of modern scholars still hold to the ancient view that the Apocalypse of John is the work of the Apostle and Beloved Disciple, the son of Zebedee."¹⁰

In the *Acts of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John*, whose authorship is attributed to Leucius, we have a clear statement from one of the early Church Fathers that John wrote Revelation during the reign of Domitian while he was on the island of Patmos.¹¹ Here is evidence that Charles says doesn't exist, and it confirms that John wrote Revelation while on the island of Patmos during Domitian's reign.

AN ACCOUNT FROM A NEAR-CONTEMPORARY

Additional evidence comes from the writings of Irenaeus in his work, *Against Heresies*. Irenaeus, who lived from approximately 120 to 202 A.D., wrote concerning John:

"...for if it were necessary that [Antichrist's] name should be distinctly revealed in this present time, it would have been announced by him who beheld the apocalyptic vision. For that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign."¹²

When Irenaeus started writing this work between 182 and 188 A.D., he was only 87 years removed from John's vision. At the age of 20, Irenaeus was only 45 years removed from John's vision. There is little question about Irenaeus having the most accurate information as to when Revelation was written. Not only did Irenaeus live during the time closest to that of John's vision, he is also known as one of the most accurate Christian writers.

Regarding the statement by Charles that John died in A.D. 44 along with his brother James, one begins to wonder if Charles knows anything about Church history because Papias claimed to be a *hearer* of John and a companion of Polycarp.¹³ Keep in mind that Papias was born in A.D. 70 and would have been 25 years old when John had the vision of Revelation. Either Papias heard John before being sent to Patmos or after he left the island of Patmos. Papias contradicts three statements made by Charles on Mark, Matthew, and John.

It is clear by the end of the second chapter that Charles is a fabricator and revisionist of history who has difficulty knowing and telling the truth. In subsequent chapters he seeks to establish a variety of scenarios — some which disagree with one another — including the claim that Jesus was a Roman citizen,¹⁴ that He most likely grew up and lived in Mecca for 18 years,¹⁵ and that His mother Mary was adopted by Joseph of Arimathea who also was the "life-long legal

parental guardian" of Jesus.¹⁶ Charles goes on to describe that after being baptized by John the Baptist, Jesus waited three years before He started His ministry,¹⁷ and that His first miracle of changing water into wine was most likely done for Jesus' sister's wedding,¹⁸ or as one Muslim source told Charles, it was actually Jesus' wedding.¹⁹ Why Charles thinks a Muslim source would be more credible than the Bible and Church historians is hard to fathom.

Charles explains that the Sermon on the Mount was given to only six of his disciples in a cave,²⁰ and throughout the book his statements are typically backed up by paraphrased accounts given to him by mostly Muslim and Roman Catholic sources. The person doing the paraphrasing can add or delete any information he finds does not support his statements, and thus, at best the person is taken out of context, and at worst information is added to support the author's statements. Nothing can be confirmed as fact.

As far as the 18 years of Jesus (from ages 12 to 30) there are enough biblical indicators to place Him continuously in Nazareth. The so-called secret years of Jesus are not really secret at all. Claims that Jesus was in Mecca, India, or Egypt are totally false. Luke 2:51 says Jesus was subject to His parents in Nazareth. The word "subject" is in a Greek tense meaning constantly or continuously as an ongoing process or habit. Luke 2:52 says that while He was in Nazareth (v. 51) He kept on increasing (continuously) in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man. In other words, He grew up in Nazareth. Later Luke says that weekly attendance in the synagogue in Nazareth — where He had been brought up — had been Jesus' habit. (Luke 4:16). A lesser argument, but bearing some weight, is the absence of Joseph or mention of Joseph during the teen years of Jesus. If Joseph had died, as some scholars suggest, then Jesus would have been compelled into the position of breadwinner for Mary and His younger siblings. This, as well, would have kept Him in Nazareth. There is nothing anywhere in the text or in the writings of the early Fathers

to suggest that Jesus was anywhere but Nazareth between ages 12 and 30. Suggestions that He was somewhere else are esoteric nonsense.

ACADEMIC CREDENTIALS SUSPECT

Charles' fabrications of history can cast doubt on his academic credentials as well. An internet search turned up various websites that listed his credentials and educational claims. A Georgia Production Partnership website says he "holds several theological degrees from Florida International University and Berean University, engineering technology degrees from the University of Southwestern Louisiana and Kilgore College, and honorary PhDs from Cambridge University and the University of Tirana."²¹ These and other grandiose academic claims are made on his vita.²²

DeWayne K. Bowie, Registrar at the University of Southwestern Louisiana in Lafayette, La., (now called the University of Louisiana, Lafayette) confirmed that Ronal D. Charles attended this University as an undergraduate student for only two semesters in 1970.²³

At Kilgore College, in Kilgore, Texas, the registrar's office confirmed that Ronal D. Charles had attended Kilgore for three semesters between 1967 and 1969. However, he was not awarded any degrees from Kilgore College.²⁴

According to Lynne Kroh, the registrar of Global University, Berean University did not begin offering undergraduate-level courses until 1985. Charles indicated that he acquired his degree between 1978 and 1980 when the school wasn't even in existence. Berean College did not become Berean University until it was renamed in 1995. Global University was created in 2000 by the merger of ICI and Berean Universities. The registrar searched the school database and archived files, but was unable to find any student records under the name of Ronal D. Charles.²⁵

Charles also claims an honorary Ph.D. from Cambridge University in Cambridge, England. Inquiries to

Cambridge University for such information are referred to their special website, which lists all the honorary degrees conferred by Cambridge since 1977. Ronal D. Charles was not on that list.²⁶ Cambridge University confers honorary degrees only to "members of the Royal Family, British subjects who are of conspicuous merit or have done good service to the State or to the University, and foreigners of distinction."²⁷ Foreigners of distinction on whom Cambridge has conferred honorary degrees upon in the past are Albert Einstein, General Eisenhower, and Mother Teresa. It's doubtful that Cambridge would ever consider Charles in this category.

Finally, Charles listed on his vita three degrees from Florida International Seminary in Plymouth, Fla., obtained from 1980 to 1982. Joan Spring, the seminary's registrar, confirmed that Charles does indeed have three degrees from Florida International Seminary: a bachelor's degree in Theology, a master's in Biblical History, and a doctorate in Biblical History. It sounds really impressive — even more so when achieved in just a three-year span. When asked how Charles could earn all three degrees so quickly, Spring responded that these were only home correspondence courses and that he did no course work on campus.²⁸

Excluding his claimed degree from the University of Tirana, which cannot be confirmed at this time,²⁹ the only degrees that Ronal D. Charles has are his three home-correspondence course degrees from Florida International Seminary. Claims to possess degrees from Cambridge University, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Berean University, and Kilgore College are all untrue.

In addition to these overstatements, Charles also claims to have received a "Presidential National Merit Scholarship." Elaine S. Detweiler, Vice President - Public Information at the National Merit Scholarship Corporation, checked their records and found no record of Ronal D. Charles receiving a National Merit Scholarship.³⁰

Detweiler also noted that she had never before heard anyone use the

term “Presidential” in describing a National Merit Scholarship, so she suggested that perhaps Charles was referring to the Presidential Scholar’s Program and suggested checking there, too. Melissa Apostolides, in the United States Department of Education, confirmed that Ronal D. Charles never was named a Presidential Scholar.³¹

Charles also claims on his resume to be a Rhodes Scholar designate. Beth W. Maslowsky, of The Rhodes Trust, said after checking the records of the Rhodes Trust, that there is no Rhodes Scholar by the name of Ronal D. Charles. Because Charles claims to be a Rhodes Scholar designate, Maslowsky thought that perhaps he meant to say that he only applied for a Rhodes Scholarship. After checking those records too, they have no record of Ronal D. Charles even applying for a Rhodes scholarship.³²

Charles has a serious problem with the truth. Not only does he fabricate quotations from early Church Fathers to support his views in his book, *The Search*, he also questions the trustworthiness of the Scriptures.

It is hard to understand why Charles has made up so much about Jesus and himself. His book and resume wither under the light of scrutiny. In the light of the Bible, Church History, and just plain facts,

he is, in the words of Scripture, “weighed in the balances and found wanting” (Daniel 5:27).

Endnotes:

1. Ron Charles, *The Search*. Bloomington, Ind.: 1st Books Library (AuthorHouse), 2007, pg. vii.
2. *Ibid.*, pg. 12.
3. *Ibid.*
4. A. Cleveland Coxe, Editor, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1951, Vol. 1, pp. 154-155, brackets in original.
5. *The Search*, op. cit., pg. 13.
6. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, op. cit., Vol. 1, pg. 155, brackets in original.
7. *The Search*, op. cit., pg. 14.
8. *Ibid.*, pg. 15, emphasis added.
9. Philip Schaff, *History of the Chirstian Church*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1910, Vol. 1, pg. 832.
10. Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*. Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933, Vol. VI, pp. 272, 273.
11. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, op. cit., Vol. 8, pg. 562.
12. *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 559-560.
13. Paul L. Maier, *Eusebius — The Church History*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel Publications, 1999, pg. 126.
14. *The Search*, op. cit., pp. 93, 167.
15. *Ibid.*, pg. 100.
16. *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 167, 169-170.
17. *Ibid.*, pg. 178.
18. *Ibid.*, pg. 232.
19. *Ibid.*, pg. 235.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 294, 297.
21. Georgia Production Partnership, GPP News Room web page (dated Aug. 3,

2004). Document available at: www.georgiaproduction.org/public/newsroom/2004/id20040730_001.shtml.

22. Copy on file.
23. Letter from DeWayne K. Bowie, Registrar of University of Louisiana, Lafayette, dated Feb. 11, 2008.
24. Phone conversation between Richard Peck and the Registrar’s Office of Kilgore College, Feb. 12, 2008.
25. Letter from Lynne Kroh, Global University Registrar, dated Feb. 7, 2008.
26. Cambridge University website. Information available at: www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/degrees/honorary/list.xls.
27. Cambridge University website. Information available at: www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/degrees/honorary/.
28. Phone conversation between Richard Peck and Joan Spering, Feb. 7, 2008.
29. Regarding the University of Tirana, PFO has been unable to obtain a reply from this university as to Charles’ alleged honorary Ph.D. degree in Foreign Relations which he said was granted in 1990. Such information is difficult to obtain due to the country’s political unrest at the time.
30. Phone conversation between Richard Peck and Elaine Detweiler, Vice President - Public Information, National Merit Scholarship Corp., Feb. 7, 2008. Confirmed with a letter stating the same, dated Feb. 11, 2008.
31. Phone conversation between Richard Peck and Melissa Apostolides, Executive Director, U.S. Presidential Scholars Program, Feb. 13, 2008. Confirmed with a letter stating the same, dated Feb. 13, 2008.
32. Phone conversation between Richard Peck and Beth Maslowsky at The Rhodes Trust, Feb. 13, 2008. Confirmed by an email stating the same, dated Feb. 13, 2008.



THE THIRD JESUS

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Chopra’s caricature of the early Church as a divided, squabbling group of failures is historically false. Early believers were not confused about “whether to follow Peter or Paul.”⁷ Chopra tries to paint the first-century Church as being in chaos and its members living in doctrinal ambiguity and division because they missed the mystical side of the “Jesus riddle.” The continuity and pattern of the apostles’ doctrine is clear from Acts 2:42 to the end of the book of Revelation.

Chopra needs to know that there was no division between Peter and Paul, with Peter calling Paul a “beloved brother” (2 Peter 3:15) as he affirmed Paul’s writings. It is clear that Paul spent time in the company of Peter (Galatians 1:18) and even when they disagreed about the exclusion of Gentiles in table fellowship with Jews (a new social situation created by the Gospel), Peter makes clear in his second epistle that Paul is still a “beloved brother.” Acts 15 shows all the early apostles in unity and harmony as they worked out together the unfolding questions of the relationship of Jew and Gentile in the infant Church.

COLORED BY HIS PERSPECTIVE

Chopra is a Hindu, so he will interpret things through a Hindu framework and worldview. Everything, including Jesus, will be flavored with Hindu presuppositions, and reconstituted for modern consumption. Hindus are committed to certain presuppositions, including “reincarnation” and finding “God deep within oneself.”⁸ Reincarnation becomes a form of self-atonement and a way of breaking bad karma or bad consequences. One cannot escape the cycle and may even come back as “a bird or a worm or an insect.”⁹