Eusebius's Quest for the Historical Jesus: Historicity and Kerygma in the First Book of the Ecclesiastical History

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Over a century after the first publication of Albert Schweitzer's classic text in 1906, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, the enterprise to resurrect Jesus from his ecclesiastical entombment lives anew – to emancipate him who rent the chains of Hades from the prison of the apostolic kerygma. The attention paid to the New York Times best-selling novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, illustrates the resurgence of popular interest in the historical Jesus. Scholarship on the historical Jesus remains notoriously divergent, and yet, in the absence of consensus, the centrality of methodology has become apparent.¹ Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 263–339 AD), known today as the Father of Church History, was one of the

¹ John Dominick Crossan notes: 'Historical Jesus research is becoming something of a scholarly bad joke. There were always historians who said it could not be done because of historical problems. There were always theologians who said it should not be done because of theological objections. And there were always scholars who said the former when they meant the latter. Those, however, were negative indignities. What is happening now is rather a positive one. It is the number of competent and even eminent scholars producing pictures of Jesus at wide variance with one another. ... The problem of multiple and discordant conclusions forces us back to questions of theory and method' (*The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991], xxvii–xxviii).
first authors in antiquity with no claim of either firsthand witness or oral tradition to write an account of the life of Jesus. The Ecclesiastical History commences, as one would imagine, with a portrait of the founder of Christianity. Although the details he recounts contribute almost nothing to our contemporary store of information, an investigation of the historiography Eusebius employed in this unique reconstruction could perhaps prove instructive for the contemporary quest. As we will discover, in the historiography of Eusebius, the historical Jesus cannot be reconstructed from extra–scriptural testimony alone, for the true nature of Christ can be comprehended only through divine revelation. Nevertheless, Eusebius appeals to extra–canonical evidence in order to confirm the factual accuracy of the gospel accounts.

The academic estimations of Eusebius's chronicle as a font of historical fact are varied, and his works are often accused of being too apologetic to be of historical value. Robert Grant charged Eusebius with the most egregious oversights and distortions:

In ancient and modern times Eusebius of Caesarea has found severe critics of his historical reliability, but there is a question whether or not these critics have gone as far as they should go. It seems highly probable that under the influence of his apologetic purposes Eusebius suppressed, neglected, or falsified a good deal of the historical information available to him.  

A few years later, at the conclusion of an insightful analysis of the thematic tensions in The Ecclesiastical History, Grant advocated a less acerbic judgement: 'And whether or not one agrees with every detail of the portrait of Eusebius that begins to emerge, it is at least a picture of a human being, neither a saint nor intentionally a scoundrel'  

More recently, Timothy D. Barnes has attempted to restore Eusebius's reputation as a serious historian, rather than merely an apologist for imperial Christianity.  

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2 'Eusebius and His Church History', in Understanding the Sacred Text (Valley Forge: Judson, 1972), 235. Grant also claimed that Eusebius was inordinately influenced by his patron, Constantine the Great: 'Pro–Constantinian bias is responsible for much of Eusebius' falsification of facts' ('The Case against Eusebius: or, Did the Father of Church History Write History?' in Studia Patristica, vol. 12 [Berlin: Akademie–Verlag, 1975], 416).


4 In defence of the integrity of the bishop of Caesarea, Barnes contends that the
Because of the controversy over the accuracy of Eusebius's historical narratives, students of ancient Christianity must scrupulously analyze the theological commentary that Eusebius incorporates into his oeuvre. Before commencing his account of the life of Jesus, Eusebius inserts a theological prolegomenon, and one detects in this introduction clear echoes of his classic apologetic motifs. In this four–chapter preface preceding the nine–chapter narrative of the earthly existence of the Lord, Eusebius reworks, in abbreviated fashion, the essential thesis of his cumbersome treatises, the Preparation for the Gospel and the Proof of the Gospel. These multi–volume tomes comprise a comprehensive argument for Christianity as the true successor to the faith of the Jewish Patriarchs. In the ideological economy then current, antiquity equalled authenticity, and Christianity had much to gain from the claim that the dispensation of the incarnation was anticipated even from the primeval period. As one commentator notes:

The characterization of the patriarchs as the precursors, exemplars, and prophets of Christianity enables Eusebius to distinguish Christianity from both Judaism and other Greco–Roman religions while allowing him to claim unsurpassed antiquity for what its opponents saw as a new religion.

alleged contradictions in Eusebius's magnum opus are inauthentic ('Some Inconsistencies in Eusebius', Journal of Theological Studies 35 [1984]: 474). Addressing the accusation that Eusebius wrote from the standpoint of a religio–political polemicist, Barnes asserts: 'He did not compose his major works under the influence of Constantine, nor was he primarily an apologist who wrote to defend the Christian faith at a time of danger. As Eusebius grew to manhood, the peaceful triumph of Christianity seemed already assured: Eusebius began as a scholar, made himself into a historian, and turned to apologetics only under the pressure of circumstances' (Constantine and Eusebius [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981], 104).

Eusebius was not the first church father to enlist the discipline of history into the service of apologetics. Tertullian had employed history for polemical purposes a century earlier (Mark S. Burrows, 'Christianity in the Roman Forum: Tertullian and the Apologetic Use of History', in The Christian and Judaic Invention of History [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990], 75). Glenn Chesnut argues that Eusebius was all but forced to turn to apologetics, for in antiquity there was no ideal of nonreligious historiography, and Eusebius could not accept the classical authors' notion of the operation of fate and lesser deities (The First Christian Histories [Paris: Editions Beauchesne, 1977], 60).

Interpreted insightfully as a response to Porphyry, the *Preparatio Evangelica* attempts to answer the accusation that Christianity was innovative and therefore illegitimate. In this book, Eusebius exhibits an astonishing mastery of philosophical literature and cites a barrage of pagan authors, reproducing their opinions fluently but without interruption for page after oppressive page. His thesis underneath this labyrinth of references is the same one that he presents in the preface to *The Ecclesiastical History*. That is, the fallen condition of humanity required an era of ethical formation before the transforming proclamation of the gospel could be comprehended and embraced. Once human nature had reached its nadir, the pre-incarnate Christ intervened and, via appearances and theophanies, initiated a period of preparation for the redemption that was soon to be achieved. This preliminary movement found its fullest expression in the moral code of Moses, Eusebius avers:

At that crisis, when nearly all mankind had been submerged by a vast surfeit of wickedness ... the first–begotten and first–created Wisdom of God, the pre–existent Word Himself in His measureless love for mankind showed Himself, now by a vision of angels to His subjects, now in person as God's saving power to one or two of God's beloved servants of old. ... When these [servants] in turn had sown the seeds of true religion in numbers of men, a whole nation, sprung from the ancient Hebrews and devoted to true religion, arose in the world. On these – a mass of men still tied and bound by ancient habits – he bestowed, through the prophet Moses, images and symbols of a mystical sabbath and of circumcision, and instruction in other spiritual principles. ... Their Law became famous and like a fragrant breeze penetrated to every corner of the world.

For Eusebius, the prehistory of Christianity is the history of the pre-incarnate Christ. One is thus immediately alerted to the apologetic orientation of Eusebius's presentation of the historical of Jesus.

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The modern scholar – intensely conscious of the critical criteria for historicity – cannot avoid noticing that Eusebius approaches his account of the life of Jesus with the presupposition of the divinity of the person of Christ. ‘The nature of Christ is twofold’, Eusebius declares, ‘it is like the head of the body in that He is recognized as God, and comparable to the feet in that for our salvation He put on manhood as frail as our own’. At first it would seem that Eusebius’s christological statement was crafted to deliver an antecedent probability to the validity of Jesus’ message and miracles. In the words of Eusebius, seeing the Son of God in human history has always required ‘pure eyes’. One therefore concludes that Eusebius’s quest was certainly coloured by the kerygma. However, one also notes that Eusebius specifically affirms that his principal aim in appealing to orthodox christology was not licence for credulity but a defence against the contention that the recentness of the appearance of Christ revealed a fatal flaw in the Christian religion. Eusebius avers at the end of his preface to the life of Jesus:

This must suffice as [an] introduction to my story proper: it was necessary in order to guard against any inclination to think of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, as novel, because of the date of His sojourn in the flesh.

After his thoroughgoing theological prolegomenon, one would assume that Eusebius’s portrait of Jesus would be nothing but an uncritical recitation of the gospel tradition. It is therefore surprising to discover that he does not mention any of the miracles of Jesus, the crucifixion, or the resurrection except in citations from extra–scriptural sources. Eusebius indeed affirms the essentials of the apostolic preaching, but never from the gospels alone. In this way, he evidences an

9 Hist. Eccl., 1.1.7–1.2.1 (Williamson, 33).
10 However, elsewhere Eusebius had contended that the interpretation of Jesus’ incredible displays of power as signs of his divinity required no theological prolegomenon. Eusebius deduces: “if therefore, as [Josephus] attests of him, he was a doer of wonderful works ... it is clear, that he possessed something excellent beyond the rest of mankind” (Theoph., 5.45 [On the Theophania, trans. Samuel Lee (Cambridge: University Press, 1843), 331]; see also Dem. Evan., 3.41).
11 Hist. Eccl., 1.2.6 (Williamson, 35).
12 Ibid., 1.4.1 (Williamson, 45).
13 Eusebius mentions the crucifixion and resurrection in two passages in book one of The Ecclesiastical History – once in the Testimonium Flavium (ibid., 1.11.7) and
acute awareness of the religious persuasion of the authors whose works he incorporates into his reconstruction of the life of Jesus.\textsuperscript{14} In his only citation from the book of Acts, he is careful to indicate that Luke was an ecclesiastical writer, and he refers to him as ‘our own Luke’ [ἡμῖν ὁ Loukos].\textsuperscript{15} He attempts to bolster the credibility of the clergyman Julius Africanus and avers that he was ‘no ordinary historian’\textsuperscript{16} Eusebius introduces his reader to Josephus early in the account, and the space dividing references to the ‘most famous of Hebrew historians’ is never more than a few paragraphs.\textsuperscript{17} Josephus proves to be Eusebius’s principal source, and Eusebius copies almost ten times more material from the Antiquities of the Jews and the Jewish War than from sacred Scripture.\textsuperscript{18} Certainly, the comprehensiveness of Josephus’s works have rendered his testimony invaluable for both ancient and modern scholars. Nevertheless, it was not a mere absence of alternative sources that so recommended Josephus’s writings to Eusebius. Of particular interest to Eusebius was Josesphus’s impeccable accuracy – a quality which won him approval from the eminent critics, King Agrippa and Emperor Titus.\textsuperscript{19}

Eusebius orchestrates his account to accommodate the testimony of Josephus, if at all possible, even when this necessitates an involved

\textsuperscript{14} Once the preface to book one is over, Eusebius quotes Acts and the epistles merely three times (\textit{ibid.}, 1.5.3, 1.12.2, 1.12.4) and the gospels only once (\textit{ibid.}, 1.8.16).


\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Ibid.}, 1.6.2 (Williamson, 51).

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid.}, 1.5.3 (Williamson, 49).

\textsuperscript{18} In the Loeb Classical Library edition of The Ecclesiastical History, translated by Lake and Oulton, counting from the commencement of the main narrative (1.5.1) until the conclusion of the life of Jesus (1.13.22), Eusebius quotes a total of 126 Greek words from Scripture and 1,092 from Josephus. Aside from Scripture and Josephus, Eusebius also draws from Julius Africanus concerning the discrepancies between the Matthean and Lukan genealogies (\textit{ibid.}, 1.7.2–16, see also 1.6.2), and from the supposed correspondence of Jesus and Agbarus (\textit{ibid.}, 1.13.6–21).

\textsuperscript{19} Eusebius quotes Josephus’ claim that his histories were superior to those of a certain Justus of Tiberias. ‘I had no such apprehensions as yourself with regard to what I myself had written: I submitted the work to the emperors themselves, when the events had hardly passed out of sight. For, conscious that I had observed absolute truthfulness in my account, I expected to receive testimony to my accuracy, and was not disappointed. I also submitted my history to many others, some of whom had actually seen service in the war, including King Agrippa and several of his relations. For the Emperor Titus was so anxious that from my work
exposition of peripheral material. In his narrative of the birth of Christ, for example, Eusebius positions the account chronologically by recounting that the census under Quirinius was administered during the same year. Given a number of considerations, it would seem obvious that Eusebius is patterning his story after Luke's gospel. The Evangelist and Eusebius both appeal to the same historical data in order to introduce the same narrative. However, instead of acknowledging his sacred source, Eusebius draws attention to the fact that a passage from The Antiquities of the Jews confirms perfectly the parenthetical comment of Acts 5:37 concerning Judas of Galilee. He was the notorious rebel who spearheaded an uprising against the Romans in response to the perceived injustice of the census. In as far as Eusebius's purpose in relating the details of the census was to communicate the chronology of Jesus' birth, the evidence from Josephus is entirely extraneous. Yet, it may be surmised that Eusebius considered the excursus important because it confirmed the integrity of the second volume of Luke—Acts and therefore also intimated the veracity of the first volume.

In the infancy narrative, Eusebius attempts to interweave the testimony of Josephus to confirm the gospel accounts, but succeeds only in distracting his reader from the seamless unfolding of the story. Relying chiefly on Matthew, and this time owning his debt to the 'sacred gospel record', Eusebius tells the story of the birth of Jesus, the visit of the Magi, and the flight of the holy family to Egypt all in a single paragraph. He then devotes the next five paragraphs to the details of the horrific death of Herod the Great, an episode documented not just once but twice by Josephus. Eusebius faithfully, but banally, copies out both of these parallel passages. He frames the dual quotations with comments reminding his reader that Herod had provoked this divine judgement in his desperate attempt to exterminate the infant Christ. This section of Eusebius's history is disproportionately focused upon incidental evidence drawn from

alone should men derive their knowledge of the events, that he wrote with his own hand an order for its publication, while King Agrippa wrote sixty-two letters testifying to the truthfulness of my account' ( Hist. Eccl., 3.10.8–11 [Williamson, 123]; see also Josephus, Vita, 367).

20 Hist. Eccl., 1.5.2. See also: Luke 2:1–2 and 3:1 – famously the only datable text in all of the four gospels.


22 Hist. Eccl., 1.8.2.

23 Ibid., 1.8.5–8, 1.8.9–15; Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, 17.168–70; Jewish War, 1.656–60, 662.
Josephus, for the chapter is almost entirely consumed with Herod's wasting disease and eventual demise. Eusebius's insistence on incorporating every possible collaborating text from Josephus nearly overwhelms the advancement of his own narrative.

In calculating the chronological span of the public ministry of Christ, Eusebius acknowledges his dependence upon the Evangelist and determines that Jesus' baptism occurred approximately fifteen years after Tiberius had become Caesar. Luke 3:2 states that John began his own ministry of baptism 'in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas'.

In Eusebius's tortured reading of this verse, the Evangelist states that Jesus commenced preaching while Annas held the office of high priest and was crucified under the administration Caiaphas. Eusebius again seeks confirmation from Josephus, not to furnish independent information concerning Jesus' preaching among the Jewish people, but surprisingly to enumerate the four high priests who were elected after Annas and before Caiaphas. For some reason, convinced that the high priest's term expired annually, Eusebius estimates that Jesus ministered for a corresponding period of four years. He cites Josephus in order to enhance the account of the Evangelist, yet he is silently indebted to the tradition of sacred Scripture for an entire constellation of assumptions, not the least of which is that the historical Jesus engaged in public ministry in the first place. The bishop of Caesarea delights to note the confirmatory witness of Josephus: 'The Gospel named Caiaphas as high priest in the year of the Savior's passion, and so the time of Christ's teaching accords with this evidence'.

In his abbreviated account of John the Baptist, Eusebius accentuates the corroborating role of his citations from Josephus: 'the same writer acknowledges that John was a man of unimpeachable virtue, and a baptist, confirming the description of him contained in the gospel narrative'. The accuracy of Josephus's witness to John the Baptist is not notably contested by modern scholars, and Robert E. Van Voorst notes: 'that Josephus can write sympathetically about a controversial figure like John the Baptist indicates that he could write a neutral description about

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24 The above Scripture is quoted from the RSV. See Eusebius, Hist. Eccl., 1.10.1–2.
25 Ibid., 1.10.4–5.
26 Ibid., 1.10.6 (The Church History: A New Translation with Commentary, trans. Paul L. Maier [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1999], 44). For a concise explanation of Eusebius's error in chronology, see the helpful footnote in Maier's translation.
27 Hist. Eccl., 1.11.3 (Williamson, 63).
Jesus as well. After quoting Josephus on the beheading of John the Baptist, Eusebius inserts the endlessly controverted Testimonium Flavianum, the classic extra-biblical documentation of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus:

At this time appeared Jesus, a very gifted man – if indeed it is right to call him a man; for he was a worker of miracles, a teacher of such men as listened with pleasure to the truth, and he won over many of the Jews and many of Gentile origin as well. This was the Christ; and when at the instigation of our leading men he had been condemned to the cross by Pilate, those who had loved him at the first did not cease to do so; for on the third day he appeared to them alive again, the inspired prophets having foretold this and countless other wonderful things about him. Even now the group of people called Christians after him has not died out.

Eusebius is the first author in antiquity to cite this passage, and his passion for this text is quite evident, for he quotes it three times in all and always in the context of defending the historicity of the gospels. Opinions concerning the authenticity of the Testimonium vary from complete acceptance to complete rejection. John Michael Wallace-Hadrill argues for Eusebius's scholarly integrity:

It is in any case exceedingly improbable that Eusebius himself is to be held responsible for the alteration of Josephus' text, as some have held him to be. If he had perpetrated what would be one of the cleverest frauds of literary history, can we believe that he would have treated his own fraud in the almost casual manner of quoting the Testimonium differently on three occasions?

29 Hist. Eccl., 1.11.7–8 (Williamson, 63–64); see Josephus, Jewish Antiquities, 18.63.
30 Hist. Eccl., 1.11.7–8; Dem. Evan., 3.5; Theoph., 5.44. No author referred to this paragraph for nearly a century after Eusebius. When the text finally did reemerge, it appeared in Jerome's Lives of Illustrious Men, 13.5–6, a work that derived a significant amount of its information from Eusebius.
31 "Eusebius of Caesarea and the Testimonium Flavianum (Josephus, Antiquities, XVIII. 63f.)," Journal of Ecclesiastical History 25 (1974): 361–62. K. A. Olson, on the other hand, contends that the text was entirely composed either by Eusebius or another Christian author ("Eusebius and the Testimonium Flavianum", Catholic Biblical
However, for the purpose of this article, whether this passage is authentic, partially authentic, or entirely fabricated is not of central importance. From the perspective of Eusebius, the unique virtue of the Testimonium was not that it delivered any new information concerning the historical Jesus, but that it had been written by a Jewish historian and therefore could not be accused of the contamination of a Christian bias. Eusebius informs his reader that his objective in providing this quotation was not to establish the historicity of an otherwise unattested tradition, but to affirm the essential correctness of the evangelists:

When a historian sprung from the Hebrews themselves has furnished in his own writing an almost contemporary record of John the Baptist and our Saviour too, what excuse is there left for not condemning the shameless dishonesty of those who forged the Memoranda blackening them both?

The spurious historical account of the life of Jesus to which Eusebius alludes in the above quotation – also known as the Acts of Pilate – was a work of imperial propaganda that denied the divinity and resurrection of Jesus. Posing as an official document commissioned by Pilate and published as a textbook for students during the Great Persecution (ca. 303–11 AD), the Acts of Pilate was designed to undermine the credibility

Quarterly 61 (1999): 322). John P. Meier maintains a compromise position, arguing that the paragraph is essentially authentic with only minor interpolations (‘Jesus in Josephus: A Modest Proposal’, Catholic Biblical Quarterly 52 (1990): 90; see also N. T. Wright, Jesus and the Victory of God (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 439). Origen states that Josephus did not accept Jesus as the Messiah and thus most scholars conclude that he was not aware of the Testimonium as cited by Eusebius (Contr. Cels., 1.47). However, as N.T. Wright argues, Josephus’s reference to Jesus as ho Christos (the Christ) could be interpreted not as a personal confession but merely as a title to identify the Jesus of whom he writes as the figure of Christian faith (Jewish Antiquities, 18.63 [Jewish Antiquities, Books XVIII–XX, trans. Louis H. Feldman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 9:50]; The New Testament and the People of God [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992], 354).


33 Hist. Eccl., 1.11.9 (Williamson, 64).

of the records of the evangelists.\textsuperscript{35} It appears, in fact, that the \textit{Acts of Pilate} was precisely the counter-tradition against which Eusebius positioned his reconstruction of the life of Jesus. In the attempt to counteract the infuriating slander of Emperor Maximin and his associates, Eusebius writes:

They actually forged \textit{Memoranda} of Pilate and our Saviour, full of every kind of blasphemy against Christ. These, with the approval of their superior, they sent to every district under his command, announcing in edicts that they were to be publicly displayed in every place, whether hamlet or city, for all to see, and that they should be given to children by their teachers instead of lessons, to study and learn by heart.\textsuperscript{36}

The \textit{Acts of Pilate} advocated a portrait of Jesus that was diametrically opposed to the gospel tradition. In the attempt to arbitrate between these conflicting christologies, Eusebius investigates the historicity of their supporting records, never assuming to recalculate the theological implications of the historical data. Upon the discovery that the \textit{Memoranda} incorrectly claimed that Pilate became prefect over Judea in the seventh year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, instead of in the twelfth year as Josephus records, Eusebius immediately dismissed the \textit{Acts of Pilate} as a vicious forgery.\textsuperscript{37}

We are now adequately prepared to draw a preliminary conclusion. We have witnessed that the elements of the apostolic kerygma are either entirely absent or minimally present in Eusebius’s portrait of the historical Jesus. Not one word from any of Jesus’ aphorisms is ever repeated, and

\textsuperscript{35} See the insightful article by Xavier Levieils, ‘La polémique anti-chrétienne des \textit{Acts de Pilate}, Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses 79 (1999): 311

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Hist. Eccl.}, 9.5.1 (Williamson, 361). Eusebius recounts that the campaign was insidiously successful (\textit{ibid.}, 9.7.1).

\textsuperscript{37} Eusebius explains: ‘[Josephus] writes that Pontius Pilate was given the administration of Judea in the twelfth year of Tiberius … and that Pilate remained in office ten whole years, almost until Tiberius’s death. This clearly proves that the recently published \textit{Acts of Pilate} are forgeries, since they claim that the crime of the Savior’s death occurred in the fourth consulship of Tiberius, which was the seventh year of his reign, a time when Pilate was not yet in charge of Judea. Josephus clearly states that it was in the twelfth year of his reign that Tiberius appointed Pilate procurator of Judea’ (\textit{ Hist. Eccl.}, 1.9.2–4 [Maier, 60]).

54 \textit{Themelios} 32/1
there is no reference at all to the virgin birth or his burial in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. Conspicuously missing is any mention of Jesus’ miracles, for Eusebius expounds upon their historical veracity and theological significance elsewhere in the *Demonstratio Evangelica* and in the *Theophania*. In both of the above works, Eusebius draws his argument for the miracles of Jesus to a climax with the quotation of the *Testimonium Flavianum*. Josephus serves as a confirmatory voice for the witness of the apostles in *The Ecclesiastical History*, rather than as an independent source from which to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus. Although the writings of Josephus could add academic credibility to the narrative, for Eusebius, no evidence beyond the apostolic kerygma was necessary to prove the truth of the gospel. The apostolic preaching is in and of itself a convincing demonstration of the authenticity of Jesus’ miracles and resurrection. As Eusebius reasons this is because it is inconceivably improbable that the disciples would have unanimously died for an unambiguous lie. In one justly famous passage he drafts an imaginary statement of purpose for the conspiring and consciously fraudulent apostolic circle in order to illustrate the ludicrousness of the supposition:

Let us now make this our business. We will tell the same falsehoods, and invent stories that will benefit nobody, neither ourselves, nor those we deceive, nor him who is deified by our lies. And we will extend our lies not only to men of our own race, but go forth to all men, and fill the whole world with our fabrications about him. ... For what could be finer than to make both gods and men our enemies for no reason at all, and to have no enjoyment of any kind, to have no profit of our dear ones, to make no money, to have no hope of anything good at all, but just to be deceived and to deceive without aim or object? ... Now is all this plausible? Does such an account have the ring of truth? Can any one persuade himself that poor and unlettered men could make up such stories, and form a conspiracy to invade the Roman Empire? Or that human nature, whose

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38 See especially *Dem. Evan.*, 3.4–5; *Theoph.*, 5.41–45. In *The Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius alludes to the fact that Jesus performed miracles, though he never indicates their circumstances or nature (1.11.7, 1.13.1, 1.13.20).

39 [*Ibid.*], 3.5; *Theoph.*, 5.44.
characteristic element is self-preservation, would ever be able for the sake of nothing at all to undergo a voluntary death?\textsuperscript{40}

The present author would submit therefore, that at least for Eusebius, the attempt to rediscover the true spirit of the founder of Christianity, apart from the interpreted tradition of the gospels, is an ultimately futile endeavour. In his own words, Eusebius confesses: ‘I think then it has been well said: “One must put complete confidence in the disciples of Jesus, or none at all”.\textsuperscript{41} Eusebius’s efforts to incorporate extra-scriptural sources into his account of the historical Jesus more often divert the reader’s attention from the main thrust of the narrative, and his rare references to the evangelists are all that establish a coherent storyline and sequence of events. However, the uniqueness of the gospels as apostolic testimonies does not discourage Eusebius from attempting to demonstrate the historicity of the New Testament from extra-canonical documents. The secular history of Josephus proves Johannine sacred theology, at least in the mind of the apologist and antiquarian Eusebius.\textsuperscript{42} In contrast to the best-selling authors of the current historical Jesus literature, it would appear that Eusebius, the author of the first historical Jesus, in no way intended to challenge the monopoly of the apostles.


\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 3.5 (Ferrar 1:140). He then adds: ‘And if we are to distrust these men, we must distrust all writers’ (ibid., [Ferrar, 1:140–41]).

\textsuperscript{42} My former mentor at Fordham University, Avery Cardinal Dulles, comments astutely: ‘The adventures of non-Catholic biblical criticism over the past century make it evident that he who rejects the Christ of faith will soon end up by reducing the Jesus of history to a pale figure without religious significance. Conversely, he who makes light of the flesh-and-blood Jesus of history in the name of a more spiritual faith will end up prostrating himself before a timeless myth. If we are true to the Gospels, we shall insist on retaining both fact and interpretation, both history and faith’ (Apologetics and Biblical Christ [Westminster: The Newman Press, 1964]. 40–41).