

EASTER GIFTS, COURTESY OF THE MEDIA

The following is a list of shows and articles that have questioned the divinity of Jesus over the last decade, or at the very least offered a negative commentary. No other religion is subjected to the same type of critical analysis as Christianity is, and the presents always arrive at Easter time.

2006

- On April 2, NBC's "Dateline" discussed The Jesus Papers, the new book by Michael Baigent, coauthor of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*. Baigent contends that Jesus wasn't divine, wasn't born of a virgin birth, married Mary Magdalene and sired a child.

When Baigent was recently asked where he got the proof that Jesus was alive in A.D. 45, he said he got it from reports about a book he cannot find (we're not making this up!). When asked how he knows the tomb was empty because Jesus needed some R&R, he said, "Unfortunately, in this case, there are no facts." Put differently, the guy is a crook and "Dateline" has been had.

2005

- In 2005, Easter was on March 27. Pope John Paul II was dying at the time and so the ABC special "The Resurrection: Searching for Answers," didn't air until May 20. Hosted by Elizabeth Vargas, it reported: "Nearly every single detail of the Easter story remains a question of debate. Among them: Was the tomb really empty? And even more basic: Was Jesus ever buried in the first place?"

- On March 28 (Easter Monday), *Newsweek* ran a lengthy piece by Jon Meacham called "From Jesus to Christ" that was quite good.

But even in this article, the reader is asked to ponder, "How much of this is remembered history, and how much heartfelt but unhistorical theology? It is impossible to say."

2004

- The April 12 (Easter Monday) issue of Time magazine featured a major cover story called "Why Did Jesus Die?" It presented both liberal and orthodox Christian beliefs on the meaning of Jesus' resurrection.

- On April 5 (during Holy Week), ABC had a Peter Jennings special report, "Jesus and Paul, the Word and the Witness." Lasting three hours, it included the Doubting Thomas' from the so-called Jesus Seminar. Viewers were treated to the work of Robert Funk and John Dominic Crossan, skeptics who believe that Jesus' body was eaten by wild dogs. The documentary clearly did not take the New Testament seriously.

2003

- On April 20 (Easter Sunday), the Discovery Channel showed a documentary called "James: Brother of Jesus." It was based on a book which claimed that James was Jesus' brother and that he was the true leader of the early Church.

2002

- On March 19 (Easter was March 31st), NPR's "Talk of the Nation" ran a segment on "Biblical archaeology" wherein the host said, "Two central holidays for Jews and Christians are right around the corner, Passover and Easter. Both are based on those religions' holiest book, the Bible. For Jews, the story is the exodus from slavery in Egypt; for Christians, the story is the crucifixion of Jesus and his return from the dead on the third day. But what if those stories were not literally true? What if the ancestors of the Jews were never slaves? What if Jesus did not rise from the dead? What would happen to Judaism and Christianity?"

2001

- On April 15 (Easter Sunday), the Discovery Channel aired a three-hour documentary called "Jesus: The Complete Story." According to the *Houston Chronicle*, the film was about scientists, archaeologists, theologians and historians whose "mission is to confirm or deny the facts of Jesus' life and death as written in the Gospels, that billions of Christians around today's world accept as gospel truth." The documentary suggested that perhaps Jesus and Judas planned for Judas to hand Jesus over ahead of time.

- On April 13 (Good Friday), ABC's 20/20 had a segment called "Modern Archaeologists, Theologians and Scholars Develop New Theory About Death of Jesus, and Who Was Responsible." Barbara Walters announced, "Tonight, with the help of leading religious experts, we bring you startling revelations about the life and death of Jesus. In the nearly 2,000 years since his crucifixion, countless acts of love and terrible acts of hate have been carried out in his name. But even as the story endures, it continues to change. Tonight, Bob Brown takes you back to Jerusalem in search of the real Easter story." A Catholic priest, Fr. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor discussed how the seven last words of Jesus should not be taken historically and said of the words in Matthew "His blood be upon us and our children": "This was the root of anti-Semitism in Christianity. This was the root of the Holocaust."

2000

- The April 24 (Easter Monday) issue of *U.S. News and World Report* had a cover story called "Why Did He Die?" Jeffery L. Sheler's piece stated: "But while the Gospel story has inspired piety and devotion through the centuries, it also has spawned darker passions. From the rise of the Holy Roman Empire to the fall of the Third Reich and even today, purveyors of anti-Semitism have sought to justify their prejudices by appealing to the Gospels' depiction of Jews as

jealous villains who plotted against Christianity's founder."

1999

- The April 5 (Easter Monday) issue of U.S. News & World Report featured a 2317 word article called "Reassessing an Apostle: The Quest for the Historical St. Paul Yields Some Surprising New Theories."

The article by Jeffery L. Sheler reports that scholars suggest that as St. Paul believed the Second Coming was imminent, "he did not intend his sometimes stern judgments on doctrinal matters and on issues of gender and sexuality to become church dogma applied, as it has been, for nearly 2,000 years." It also reports that many say he didn't write many of the letters in the Bible attributed to him.

1998

- On April 9 (Holy Thursday), NPR's "Talk of the Nation" with Lynn Neary did a segment called "The Historical Jesus" with John Dominic Crossan (ex-priest and former co-director of the Jesus Seminar) as a guest. It was all about the Jesus Seminar theories. While Lynn Neary simply interviewed Crossan about his beliefs on the resurrection, it did give him quite a platform.

1997

- On March 28 (Good Friday) PBS's "News Hour" with Jim Lehrer presented a piece called "Considering Jesus" by Richard Ostling of *Time* magazine. The piece was all about the Jesus Seminar and asked the question, "Should New Testament accounts of his [Jesus'] life be taken literally or figuratively?"

While Ostling did not take any positions, the entire piece was about the Jesus Seminar, and how they say much of what is in the Bible didn't happen. Professor Marcus Borg (Oregon State University) was one of these men who says the resurrection was

only symbolic. He was given a lot more time than N.T. Wright, a scholar (Dean of Lichfield Cathedral) who said the resurrection literally happened.

1996

- The April 8 (Easter Monday) issue of *Time* magazine featured a big story called “The Gospel Truth?” The subtitle accurately conveyed the gist of the story: “The Iconoclastic and Provocative Jesus Seminar Argues that Not Much of the New Testament Can Be Trusted. If So, What are Christians to Believe?”

- The April 8 issue of *Newsweek* ran a lengthy article called “Rethinking the Resurrection” by Kenneth Woodward. The piece was fairly written, though much space was given to those like John Dominic Crossan, the Jesus Seminar writer who likes to try to debunk the story of the resurrection.