



Craft Brewed Jesus by Michael Camp

For more, visit: www.michaelcampbooks.com

Advance Reader's Copy – Uncorrected Proof

Excerpt from Chapter One

Why We Need a New Spirituality

I'm convinced America needs a new spirituality. Desperately. One rooted in reason, love, and a worldview grounded in sound, historical evidence, not in religious fundamentalism or pseudo-spiritual wishful thinking. One not at odds with reality. And one that allows you to responsibly enjoy good, craft beer. As we'll learn, after all, this is what the monks of old did.

The premise of this journey you are about to embark on is that modern America is spiritually broken. On one hand, traditional Christian faith is being increasingly questioned from all sides. A Barna Group study reveals a serious image problem for Christianity, most notably for conservatives (about 34 percent of the population), with perceptions of adherents as “hypocritical,” “insensitive,” “judgmental,” and “anti-gay,”¹ undoubtedly fueled by evangelical scandals over the years² and a reputation for being anti-intellectual.³ Young evangelicals David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons presented the results of this groundbreaking research of sixteen to twenty-nine-year-olds in their book, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity...and Why It Matters*.

Another 22 percent of Americans are Catholics, 21% are mainline or other Protestants, and a small minority are of other religions. It’s no secret that Catholic churches, notwithstanding the rising popularity and refreshing progressive outlook of Pope Francis, as well as mainline Protestant churches, have been declining for years.

On the other hand, nearly 20 percent of Americans are grouped into what sociologists call “nones,” that is, people who have no religious affiliation at all. Of these, nearly six percent are atheists or agnostics while the remainder is often called “spiritual but not religious.” “Nones” are growing at a rapid pace.⁴ The atheistic brand are the ones most likely to mock people of faith—think Bill Maher, Sam Harris, and Richard Dawkins. They claim tolerance for well-meaning religious people but preach to their followers to “show contempt for faith.”⁵ “Nones” who prefer the “spiritual but not religious” label are most likely to be ambiguous about what they believe or hungry for someone to give them a reasoned, more focused spirituality. A subset of Nones are “Dones,” people who are done with church but still might believe. A recent Pew Research Center survey confirms all of these trends showing all Christian traditions dropping as a share of the U.S. population while the religiously unaffiliated is rising.⁶

Taken together, most of these groups engage in our modern, American culture war, each taking conservative or liberal positions and accusing the other of either abandoning our religious roots or using faith to legislate morality. Could it be that both positions are misguided?

¹ Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*, 22-23.

² Jim Bakker served time in federal prison in the early 90s for fraud and conspiracy charges; Jimmy Swaggert was implicated in sex scandals involving prostitutes in the 90s; in 2006 Ted Haggard, a mega-church pastor and the president of the National Association of Evangelicals, admitted using crystal meth and being involved with a male prostitute, and in 2007, Richard Roberts, son of the late Oral Roberts, was forced to resign as President of Oral Roberts University when he was named as a defendant in a lawsuit alleging improper use of university funds, to name a few.

³ For example, see Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

⁴ Pew Research Religion and Public Life, “‘Nones’ on the Rise.”

⁵ Grossman, “Richard Dawkins to atheist rally: ‘Show contempt’ for faith,” lines 26-27.

⁶ Pew Research Center, “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” lines 3-4.

Consider this claim that sheds light on our society: With some notable exceptions, few of us Americans, whether evangelicals, progressive Christians, or “nones,” have a faith or lack of faith that is informed by sound, historical facts and evidence. Or, the history we purport to “know” is only half the story. For example, conservatives largely base their faith on a Christian worldview that ignores swaths of historical and biblical scholarship. When they cite the roots of “Christian” America, they conveniently forget the widespread tradition of Universalism among early settlers (e.g. the Moravians and Quakers) and its adherents among famous Americans (e.g. John Murray, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Hannah Whitall Smith, Hannah Hurnard, and many others). They also ignore historical evidence that shows America is really not a Christian nation and never was.⁷ Liberals, on the other hand, although perhaps clued in to more good history (e.g. the myth of Christian America), still sometimes base their faith (or lack thereof) on that same warped historical and biblical perspective. They, for instance, seem unaware that Jesus did not found a new religion or institutional church (but a way of life that transcends all religions and philosophies). They either perpetuate a liberal version of institutional Christianity or reject Christianity altogether on the grounds that it is a corrupt institution. Strident atheists like Sam Harris likewise base their evaluation of Christianity on the unhistorical paradigm of modern fundamentalism and evangelicalism.

For these reasons, it’s time to take a second look at what really transpired in early Christian history; to learn how the Christian, first-century sacred texts (the New Testament and other writings) were compiled and what they really taught based on linguistic and historical evidence (as far as is possible); to understand how a fresh view of history can change our perception of our world, undercut the foundation of our culture wars, possibly initiate a ceasefire, and finally, offer hope for the future. For believers, a second look can actually strengthen one’s faith and passion to follow Jesus, not erode it. It can bolster one’s convictions when one discovers a perspective more in line with reason, personal experience, and a comprehensive view of history. For unbelievers, a second look can help one see there’s no need or basis to either have contempt for faith or be defensive about skepticism. In other words, learning earliest Christian history can lead to a new spirituality based on reality that respects both faith and doubt.

How to Gain a Fresh Perspective

A fresh approach is needed to take this second look. For many people, it can’t be done within the confines of the organized church. As will be reinforced along the way, institutional religion rarely allows people to think for themselves and come to their own conclusions. I call

⁷ See Boyd, *The Myth of a Christian Nation*, and Noll et al, *In Search for Christian America*.

this new perspective on the early Jesus Movement and Christian history a *Craft Brewed Jesus*—one mirrored by the craft beer movement in America today. As craft brewers are small, independent, innovative, use ingredients based on historic styles, and tend to be involved in their communities through charitable giving, followers of a craft brewed Jesus are not entrenched in large corporate, institutional religion, they think for themselves, take the historic path to truth, and give back out of love for humanity.

Craft Brewed Jesus is more than the title of a book. It's an approach of spiritual or philosophical wayfarers who no longer entrust themselves to religious or secular dogma. They are free to cross boundaries and go outside institutional barriers. For believers, it's the path that's willing to rethink traditional theology in light of new discoveries. We are no longer confined to a pew where masses listen to one-way preaching, or when discussion is allowed, it is hemmed in by church walls. We can enter into a two-way exchange in a pub, café, or other open setting. We are free to question, explore, and follow where the religious and historical evidence leads.

How Bad It Is

How has ignorance of history and biblical scholarship negatively shaped our world? Before we look at dogmatic brands of liberalism and modern science, let's look more closely at conservative Christianity. Thirty-four percent of Americans consider themselves born again Christians, with most affiliated with evangelical denominations.⁸ Most of these are biblical literalists, in that they believe the entire Bible is the authoritative “Word of God” and “our only guide for faith and practice.” They rarely question traditional biblical interpretations. They are the ones most likely to be certain about their faith, immersed in our nation's culture war, and accused of pursuing political power in the name of God. Depending on who does the math, they believe two-thirds or more of humankind will wind up in an everlasting hell because they failed to “accept Christ.” Although experience tells us most of them are nicer and smarter than their theologies, and that there are many notable exceptions to this among some evangelical churches, there is countless documentation on their dirty little secret: many streams of conservative Christianity border on cults and are guilty of what is called *spiritual abuse*...

For more, visit: www.michaelcampbooks.com

⁸ Wright, “How Many Americans are Evangelical Christians?” line 19.