

**WHAT IF THE MODERN AMERICAN CHURCH HAS ITS CHRISTIAN HISTORY WRONG?** According to ex-evangelical Michael Camp, most American believers fail Christian History 101. Drawing on his own historical research and missionary experience, he discovers that most popular Christian views of the Bible, church, sin, salvation, judgment, the kingdom of God, the “end times,” and the afterlife—pretty much all religious sacred cows—don’t align with the beliefs of the original Jesus movement. Some of them not even close.

Camp’s *Craft Brewed Jesus* paves a fascinating journey of a group of disillusioned evangelicals and Catholics. When they decide to meet regularly over craft beers to study the historic foundations of their faith, their findings both rock their world and resolve ancient mysteries. They examine well-documented narratives of the early Jesus saga, Eastern streams of a lost Christianity, and the roots of our modern religious assumptions, all while striving to steer clear of either a conservative or liberal bias. What they uncover is a vital, refreshing spiritual paradigm no longer at odds with reality.

Grab your brew of choice and trace this transformational journey based on a true story that will encourage you in your walk of life and faith.

# CRAFT BREWED Jesus

HOW HISTORY WE NEVER KNEW  
TAPS A SPIRITUALITY WE REALLY NEED

## MICHAEL CAMP

“A truly fascinating account, written by a self-identified former evangelical Christian, of a study group on a profound spiritual quest. Even those who disagree with some of the conclusions reached will benefit greatly from the wealth of historical information and from the spiritual insights contained herein. Highly recommended.”

—**THOMAS TALBOTT**, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Willamette University; author, *The Inescapable Love of God*

“Never yet has a book about the life and times of first-century Jerusalem and the world of the Jesus saga been written that even comes close to the work [Camp has] assembled here.”

—**KEN DAHL**, author, *What Is God, and How Does It Work?*

“*Craft Brewed Jesus* is instructional, poignant, and often insightful. It is a beautiful study for anyone who seeks to understand or follow Jesus seriously. An exceptionally craft brewed book!”

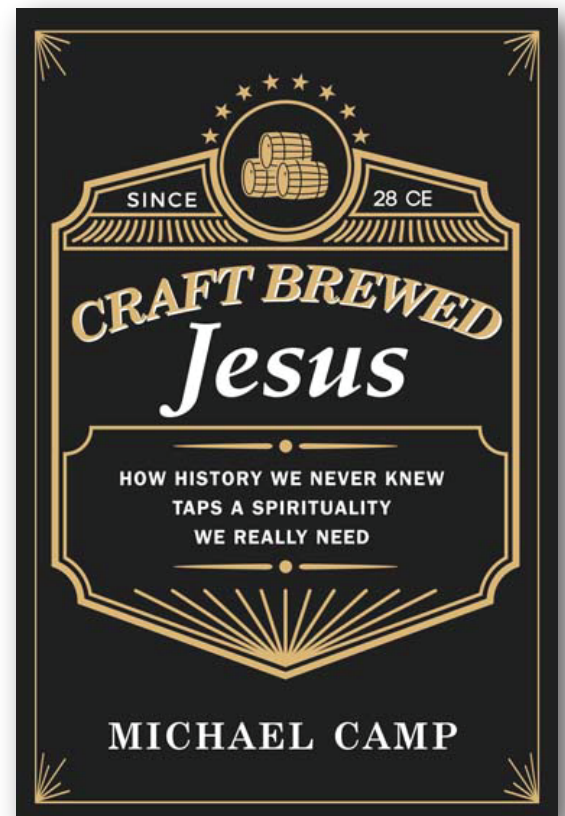
—**MICHAEL HARDIN**, author; Executive Director of Preaching Peace; co-editor of *Compassionate Eschatology*

“*Craft Brewed Jesus* rebuilds a framework for seeing God as love, not just in theory, but in actual practice—with historical reasons why it’s not just wishful thinking. . . . I read it like a starving person eating at a five-star restaurant.”

—**WENDY FRANCISCO**, singer; songwriter; editor

“In a conversational style . . . *Craft Brewed Jesus* invites the reader to wrestle with sorting out living spiritual truth from stagnant theological tradition. And all this while over a pint or two! My kind of book.”

—**BRYAN BERGHOF**, author, *Pub Theology*



**MICHAEL CAMP** spent twenty-five years in the evangelical movement, including as a missionary to Muslims, a development worker in Africa, and a lay leader in independent, charismatic, and Baptist churches. Today, as a business leader, he writes, blogs, attends pub theology gatherings, and facilitates microfinance projects through his local Rotary Club in Bainbridge Island, Washington. He is the author of *Confessions of a Bible Thumper* (2012). Learn more at [www.michaelcampbooks.com](http://www.michaelcampbooks.com).

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# Craft Brewed Jesus

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*How History We Never Knew Taps  
a Spirituality We Really Need*

Michael Camp

RESOURCE *Publications* • Eugene, Oregon

CRAFT BREWED JESUS

How History We Never Knew Taps a Spirituality We Really Need

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*To Lori,  
with love and gratitude*

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## Author's Note

THIS IS LARGELY A work of creative nonfiction with a dose of my own artistic liberty. It's based on the true story of my friends and me studying Christian history together over the course of a year or so. One of us developed an outline of that history called *The Timeline*. We met in each other's homes to watch documentaries and discuss the readings and our findings. Moreover, we often met at local pubs and restaurants for further discussions. Where the story veers from a precise factual record is when I sometimes create settings, dialogue, and some character's conclusions that carry the story forward but may not reflect exactly how it happened. I trust you will overlook this side track off the nonfiction path and understand the inner journey we all took is a substantially true account.

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## Acknowledgments

*CRAFT BREWED JESUS* would not be possible without the small city of supporters in my life who encouraged me every step along the way to question the status quo, honestly tell the story, write with abandon, and not dwell on what other people think.

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## 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,”<sup>1</sup> undoubtedly fueled by evangelical scandals over the years<sup>2</sup> and a reputation for being anti-intellectual.<sup>3</sup> 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 percent are mainline or other Protestants, and a small minority are of other religions. It's no

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. E.g., see Noll, *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*.

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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 6 percent are atheists or agnostics while the remainder is often called “spiritual but not religious.” “Nones” are growing at a rapid pace.<sup>4</sup> 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.”<sup>5</sup> “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 US population while the religiously unaffiliated is rising.<sup>6</sup>

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?

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

4. “Nones’ on the Rise,” Pew Research Center, October 9, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise>.

5. Grossman, “Richard Dawkins to Atheist Rally.”

6. “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape>.

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is really not a Christian nation and never was.<sup>7</sup> 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/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 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,

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



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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.<sup>8</sup> 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*.

In my first book, *Confessions of a Bible Thumper*, I threw a lot of stones at American evangelicalism as a former, committed evangelical missionary and church leader. Progressive evangelicals, people in the "emergent" church, and mainline Christians welcomed my message, even if not in full agreement, while traditionalists had a predictable response. They cried foul and threw stones back. Regardless, my intention was not to bruise believers but to offer loving, constructive criticism of an American religious movement

8. Wright, "How Many Americans."

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that, despite being well meaning, is in dire need of a new spiritual paradigm. This book takes steps beyond critique to suggest positive change.

With some exceptions, much of American conservative Christianity is imploding. Let's first look at exceptions so we can see clearly what the issues are. During the 2014 Ebola crisis, most Americans saw and heard Dr. Kent Brantly in some news story on how he contracted Ebola while heroically caring for patients in Liberia early on in the outbreak. What many may not have realized was that Dr. Brantly was serving in an organization called Samaritan's Purse, a conservative Christian aid agency headed by Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham. Dr. Brantly credited his recovery to his personal faith and the concerned prayers of thousands of like-minded believers. He deserves the hero title and the admiration of all of us. Few would be so courageous.

As evidenced by this example, evangelicalism has always had two noteworthy strengths to which its followers have been attracted. One, encouraging personal connection to God through Jesus, and two, a focus on practical love and assistance for the needy. These are what drew me and many of my friends into the movement back in the 1980s. We were encouraged to seek God personally and had profound spiritual experiences. I served in evangelical aid/mission agencies or churches, that had these values for many years (Food for the Hungry, Wellesley Baptist Church, Mission to Unreached Peoples, World Concern, and World Vision). These commendable values are not the reason for the evangelical/fundamentalist implosion occurring today. Conservative Christianity has an image problem because of its warped theology and the negative impact of that theology on people, not because of its focus on personal spirituality and outreach to the poor and needy. So what is the core problem?

Fifty years after the American Jesus Movement of the sixties and seventies, when youth and hippie culture sought spiritual freedom in Jesus, and when many of us discovered the presence of a personal loving God, scandals continue to rock fundamentalist/evangelical Christianity. The core of the problem is *control* in the guise of submitting to biblical imperatives.

Let's look at some examples. In the seventies, a movement arose in evangelical and charismatic churches called "shepherding." Despite its good intentions to enable church leaders to care for their "flock" (not a bad notion in and of itself), it ultimately adopted abusive techniques to keep church members obedient to God and church authorities.<sup>9</sup> It was exposed

9. "What Is Heavy Shepherding?," <http://www.gotquestions.org/heavy-shepherding>.

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as an idolatrous religious system, in which leaders act as God over followers. Think cults. The problem is, this extreme form of “pastoral care” never really went away. Only the terms and structure changed.<sup>10</sup> I daresay a minor or major form of it exists in most conservative, charismatic, and evangelical churches today. Why? Because there’s a foundation of bad theology not informed by earliest Christian history.

Most evangelical churches have an erroneous belief in “church authority” and what some call the need for “spiritual covering.” One example is my former church I wrote about in my previous book, *Sovereign Grace Ministries (SGM)*. Myriad ex-members have painstakingly documented spiritual abuse in SGM churches across the nation.<sup>11</sup> It’s another form of shepherding that seeks to control people. Examples include: in the name of “discipleship” members are taught only to marry inside the denomination or its associations; to unquestioningly support leadership even when there are glaring dysfunctions; to accept “church discipline” for not following legalistic interpretations of the Bible, and to get leadership approval for personal decisions. People who resist are shunned or told to leave the church because they have “a problem with authority.” In 2013, twenty churches left the SGM denomination. A civil lawsuit has been brought against the legal church entity and several leaders (including founder C. J. Mahaney, whom I met, and two others I counted as friends from my involvement in the 1980s) accusing them of covering up sexual abuse in the church in the name of handling matters “biblically.” One of my friends in the SGM church my wife and I attended wrote a book about this trend of irresponsible handling of sexual abuse. She was kicked out of the church when she exposed it.<sup>12</sup> Leading evangelical authorities have defended SGM and C. J. Mahaney despite the mounting evidence against them.<sup>13</sup> Because conservative evangelicals tend to think cases like this are isolated, they find superficial solutions to these types of problems. But SGM is not an isolated case.

Another example is Mars Hill Church, a mega-church family of congregations based in my current home of Seattle. One of its founding

10. “Shepherding Movement—Reformed, Revamped, Ree-e-diculous,” *Wartburg Watch*, April 9, 2009, <http://thewartburgwatch.com/2009/04/09/the-shepherding-movement-%E2%80%93-reformed-revamped-reee-diculous>.

11. See these websites or blogs: “SGM Survivors,” “SGM Refuge,” “SGM Nation,” and “BrentDetwiler.”

12. Melancon, *Things I Learned*.

13. John Piper and Albert Mohler of the Gospel Coalition.

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pastors, Mark Driscoll, arose in the 1990s as a relevant, fresh leader bringing “the gospel” to one of the most “unchurched” cities in America. His was a hipster veneer—once known as “the cursing pastor”—with a conservative, Calvinistic, theological core. By all accounts, in the beginning, it appeared like a healthy Christian community with a passion for spiritual and practical outreach.

But by the mid-2000s Mars Hill Church was a regular subject on Seattle’s KOMO 4 news station with reports by ex-members of obsessive control (a different form of shepherding), spiritual abuse, outright bullying, manipulation, and shunning members put under “church discipline.”<sup>14</sup> Later were reports of mishandling ministry funds, plagiarism on the part of Mark Driscoll, mandatory signing for pastors of a “Unity of Mission” clause that amounts to a non-compete agreement for future ministry or else face dismissal, and using church money to hire an agency to help one of Driscoll’s books reach the *NY Times* bestseller list. One fellow evangelical, Tullian Tchividjian, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Florida said, “It was a one-man show, Mark’s way or the highway. He was in complete and total control.”<sup>15</sup> Paul Tripp, another pastor and former member of the Mars Hill board of advisors and accountability brought in to help mediate the conflict, said, “This [Mars Hill Church] is without a doubt, the most abusive, coercive ministry culture I’ve ever been involved in.”<sup>16</sup>

When I visited one of the downtown Seattle churches in early 2013, I was shocked to see the tightness of Driscoll’s grip. All sermons in fourteen branch churches were preached by Driscoll. They were video-streamed from the church headquarters. More than half of the books and DVDs in the church “bookstore” were by Driscoll. When questioned, members saw no potential problems with this. It was a personality cult.

Mars Hill eventually went into free fall as at least nine former elders and another umbrella organization Driscoll helped start called Acts 29 finally called for Driscoll’s resignation. Despite a leave of absence and some public apologies from Driscoll, he remained in control. Finally, amid mounting pressure, he resigned in 2014, although the then current church elders still declared him “fit for ministry.” This infuriated accusers because it appeared

14. See <http://marshillrefuge.blogspot.com>; <http://joyfulexiles.com>; <https://www.facebook.com/groups/433217200154935> (We Are Not Anonymous); and <http://musingsfromunderthebus.wordpress.com>.

15. Bailey, “How the ‘Cussin’ Pastor’ Got into Megatrouble.”

16. Throckmorton, “Mark Driscoll,” 1.

like neither Driscoll nor the church elders could acknowledge how serious the abuse was. By the end of 2014, the centralized Mars Hill church folded and the local churches either became independent or closed their doors.

The problem is this new reorganization does nothing to address the root problems with Mars Hill. Church organization was not the main problem. The new Mars Hill structure—centralized churches becoming autonomous, self-governing entities—is still susceptible to spiritually abusive practices. Autonomous churches are the model of the highly-abuse-susceptible Calvary Chapel, as we'll see. Even Driscoll was not the main issue. Getting rid of or reforming one bad apple doesn't solve it. The problem is much deeper. The remaining former Mars Hill churches don't get this. Neither does wider evangelicalism, evidenced by mega-church evangelical pastor Rick Warren preaching the last sermon at Mars Hill before the reorganization.

As we'll discover when we examine history, the problem within modern "Bible-believing" churches isn't an occasional autocratic leader or ill-conceived church polity. The root problem has to do with bad theology based on a poor study of history. A theology that leads churches to idolize the Bible, church authority, and charismatic personalities to the point of warping the message of Jesus and spiritually abusing people.

Then there's the fear-based, escapist "rapture" and "end times" paranoia that gained popularity in the seventies and continues to manipulate people today to abandon hope for an earthly future (and conversely, only have hope for a heavenly one). Most notably, is how much this warped end-of-the-world theology is accepted in mainstream Christianity, as evidenced by the widely popular, best-selling *Left Behind* book series by Tim LaHaye and its movie counterpart released in 2014 starring Nicolas Cage. In the worst case study of this belief, members of a Christian church in South Korea, heavily influenced by American evangelicals, committed suicide or abandoned their families when a popular "return of Christ" prediction arose in 1992, and, lo and behold, failed to materialize.<sup>17</sup> Again, we'll see how this is based on bad theology based on a poor reading of history and an irresponsible handling of the New Testament.

Other familiar names come to mind. Bill Gothard, a popular fundamentalist teacher and conference leader starting in the 1980s eventually fell from grace (as a brand new evangelical Christian, I attended his widely popular "Basic Youth Seminar" in 1981, which is known for its extreme

17. Watanabe, "No Doomsday Rapture."

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legalism regarding women in submission to men, God's design for authority, biblical obedience, and even rock music). In 2014, he resigned from his organization after allegations of sexually harassing women and failing to report child abuse cases. Ted Haggard, mega-church pastor and former president of the National Association of Evangelicals was ousted for living a double life and toying with homosexuality. Calvary Chapel, a popular evangelical denomination, has had its share of scandals over the years, including allegations of pastoral misconduct, lawsuits,<sup>18</sup> and spiritual abuse.<sup>19</sup> Many other church movements have seen ex-members set up websites that chronicle the authoritarian and abusive techniques of church leaders.<sup>20</sup>

In 2013, the evangelical organization named Exodus, the largest and most influential "ex-gay" ministry in the movement, folded and made the astounding admission that they were wrong in their counseling techniques that tried to "pray away the gay." They apologized to the LGBT community. "Exodus is an institution in the conservative Christian world, but we've ceased to be a living, breathing organism. For quite some time we've been imprisoned in a worldview that's neither honoring toward our fellow human beings, nor biblical," Alan Chambers, the former president, said.<sup>21</sup> Another former Exodus leader, John Paulk, says the "ex-gay" counseling technique known as "reparative therapy" not only doesn't work, but "does great harm to many people."

Other dysfunctions include the evangelical patriarchy movement, where men are taught it's their "biblical" right to control their wives and daughters. Wives are taught to submit to their husbands, not pursue professions outside the home, and sometimes are taught to refrain from the use of birth control. Daughters are expected to live at home under the authority of their fathers until he approves a husband for her who takes over that authority. These are not taught as options, but a lifestyle commanded by God.

For these and other reasons, young evangelicals are leaving the church or abandoning the old theologies.<sup>22</sup> Everywhere I go, I meet restless evangelicals who have either left the movement or are gravitating toward its emergent, progressive arm. As author Barbara Symons attests in her

18. Brodersen, "Case for Big Change."

19. See Calvary Chapel Abuse (blog), <http://calvarychapelabuse.com/wordpress>.

20. See blogs: [marshillrefuge.blogspot.com](http://marshillrefuge.blogspot.com), [sgmsurvivors.com](http://sgmsurvivors.com), [sgmrefuge.com](http://sgmrefuge.com), [calvarychapelabuse.com](http://calvarychapelabuse.com), and [spiritualsoundingboard.com](http://spiritualsoundingboard.com).

21. "Exodus International Shuts Down," *Huffington Post*, June 20, 2013.

22. As documented by Kinnaman and Lyons, *unChristian*.

journey of escape from “Christianity,” these issues are by no means isolated. They are rampant.<sup>23</sup> In my experience, whether it’s church authoritarianism, biblical literalism, or assessments on homosexuality, the root of these abuses is a Christian worldview that has lost its grounding in history.

Now, let’s take a look at secular America. It has its own form of fundamentalism. With some exceptions, it is awash in materialistic dogma that spurns anything spiritual in the name of science. Richard Dawkins says faith is largely dangerous in his book *The God Delusion*. Sam Harris states “faith is a conversation stopper” and “theology is ignorance with wings.”<sup>24</sup> He claims, “It is time that we admitted that faith is nothing more than the license religious people give one another to keep believing when reasons fail.”<sup>25</sup> Bill Maher, in his 2008 “mockumentary” film, *Religulous*, asserts, “The irony of religion is that because of its power to divert man to destructive courses, the world could actually come to an end. The plain fact is, religion must die for mankind to live.”<sup>26</sup>

As Frank Schaeffer argues in his book *Patience with God*, these “New Atheists” like Dawkins, Harris, and Maher are only a secular version of religious fundamentalists. Both secular and religious fundamentalists insist they own the truth. According to them, any diversion from it means you’re either a fallen-away heretic or a dim-witted religious idiot. As conservative Christians claim progressives and liberals are unbiblical at best and apostate or dangerous at worst, and that America must renounce its unfaithful ways or lose the blessings of God, secular religionists claim faith is “ignorant,” “unreasoned,” and “destructive,” and its death is key to our survival. At the end of the day, both sets of claims sound the same. Believe the way we do or else.

What new atheists miss is how much they are engaging in the same form of black-and-white thinking they claim religious people have. They astutely and rightly critique unthinking, literalist, exclusivist, fundamentalist religion. But they rarely imagine that faith in God doesn’t require that one stop thinking or using reason, or one never question the Bible, or one must believe in the doctrine of hell. Gaining a new perspective on history actually reveals the opposite. Thinking, reasoning, historically critiquing

23. Symons, *Escaping Christianity*; Escobar, *Faith Shift*; and Evans, *Faith Unraveled*.

24. Harris, “Goodreads Quotes,” [https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/16593.Sam\\_Harris](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/16593.Sam_Harris).

25. Harris, *Letter to a Christian Nation*.

26. “Religulous Quotes,” IMDb, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tto815241/quotes>.



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## WHY WE NEED A NEW SPIRITUALITY

the Bible (which is not equal to altogether tossing it), and rejecting the traditional view of the afterlife are part of a historically-grounded faith.

What's more is the form of secular thought that often cites science as the solution to all of humankind's problems, as Neil deGrasse Tyson implies in the new 2014 television show, *Cosmos*. Producer Ann Druyan hopes audiences will "take the revelations of science and act accordingly," in terms of saving the planet environmentally. But science in itself has no authority to change someone to "act accordingly" whether to avert global warming or be a more caring person. As important as science is, it is limited. It cannot form our ethics or sense of purpose. It can tell us how our world works but not its meaning. Spirituality can.

Science must be in tandem with spirituality and ethics in order to be effective in making the world a better place. Moreover, science can inspire and spur important questions about our spiritual heritage and origins that an open-minded society should address. A new spirituality can bridge the gap between science and faith (and between rationality and mysticism), not insisting they must always be kept separate, but allowing open, respectful dialogue on the implications for each field of study—one that can respect both a materialistic and theistic perspective without each mocking the other. One that refuses to become a fundamentalist on either the religious or materialistic side.

### Lights in the Darkness

To be sure, there is a vibrant, open-minded spiritual movement in America. From progressives represented by authors such as Diana Butler Bass, Brian McLaren, Phyllis Tickle, Rob Bell, Anne LaMott, Rachel Held Evans, Brad Jersak, Doug Pagitt, and Frank Schaeffer to movements like the Wild Goose Festival, Darkwood Brew (a "convergence" of mainline Christians and post-evangelicals), and other "Emergent" streams, to nontraditional Jesus scholars, such as the late Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan. In addition, there are many more progressive evangelicals (envelope pushers) than most people realize that are comfortable rubbing elbows with these folks. People like N. T. Wright, Philip Yancey, and Greg Boyd. In fact, I have found myself at home within this progressive movement and find it exhilarating and refreshing in contrast to my legalistic, largely closed-minded, conservative evangelical past (yes, there were exceptions).



## CRAFT BREWED JESUS

What's more, there appears to be a healthy melding of faith and science today as evidenced by the types of books that have arisen in recent years. For example, Antony Flew, a renowned atheist committed to following where the evidence would lead, wrote about his personal evolution from materialist to theist (nowhere near the fundamentalist variety) in his book *There Is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*. Apart from a minor section in the Appendix, the book is solely about reason, the laws of nature, cosmology, and the teleological organization of life. It is not a "biblical" argument. And it doesn't have to be. Contrary to what some fundamentalists might claim about all truth deriving from the Bible, God gave us reason, logic, science, and reflection through which we can encounter the Divine.

Likewise, renegade evangelical and theistic evolutionist Francis Collins argues persuasively for a faith-science bridge in *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*. Moreover, in his books *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* and *Map of Heaven: How Science, Religion, and Ordinary People Are Proving the Afterlife*, Dr. Eben Alexander urges readers to embrace a new open-minded spirituality that recognizes both the scientific pointers to a spiritual realm and the firsthand testimony and statistics of near-death experiences.

Another example is Krista Tippett exploring "the nexus of science and spirituality" in *Einstein's God: Conversations about Science and the Human Spirit*. In ten illuminating interviews with scientists—from cosmologist and astrobiologist Paul Davies to physicist and theologian John Polkinghorne, she explores the roots for a rational faith based on scientific findings. As Davies states, "For me the crucial thing is that the universe is not only beautiful and harmonious and ingeniously put together, it is also fit for life. . . . The universe has not only given rise to life, it's not only given rise to mind, it's given rise to thinking beings who can comprehend the universe. Through science and mathematics, we can, so to speak, glimpse the mind of God." And on the remarkable nature of the science behind the universe's fitness for life: "You soon discover you need to fine-tune those settings to extraordinary precision in order for there to be life. And the question is, what are we to make of that?"<sup>27</sup>

Finally, open-minded atheist Bradley Monton, while maintaining his philosophical stance, examines theistic arguments based on the science of

27. Tippett, *Einstein's God*, 35–36.

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## WHY WE NEED A NEW SPIRITUALITY

intelligent design theory (yes, the *science*, as he argues) in his book *Seeking God in Science: An Atheist Defends Intelligent Design*.

Both Christian and secular fundamentalists reject the ideas in such books because the conclusions are not doctrinally pure—either religious purity that insists on traditional faith, biblical creationism, or “Christian” terminology; or scientific purity that insists on materialistic evolution or non-theistic explanations. But a new spirituality welcomes them because they are honest, reasoned, and evidence based.

Despite these lights, I worry about the progressive Christian and “spiritual-but-not-religious” movements in America represented by some of these examples. I’m concerned that they don’t realize how important well-studied history is to a grounded faith, and because of that, they will abandon an approach to follow where the historical evidence leads, and accept any and every idea that comes along even if it has no sound, historical underpinning.

This brings us to where this story really begins. How my friends and I discovered how much history matters. And how we learned in-depth examples of how history can and should inform our faith or lack of faith. How it sheds light on a new spiritual paradigm that we desperately need. It started with a group of spiritual seekers enjoying good food, wine, and beer and wondering about the origins of their spiritual heritage. It included a lot about the history and importance of beer and brewing. This is your invitation. Grab your favorite brew, and join us on this path to find a “craft brewed Jesus,” one rooted in history. Not the traditional history you may have heard. Not revisionist history. Not bad history. But good, solid, historical scholarship.