

We are at the end of yet another year and I would like to take the occasion to reflect on the blog, how we've been doing and where we're going, now on the cusp of 2020. (Yikes. Already?)

The blog has been doing extremely well. When I started this venture in April 2012, I had no clue what I was getting into, what it would take, and what it would give. It is taking more and giving way more than I anticipated at the time.

I have always had two principal goals, very different from each other but both vitally important, the *raison d'être* of the blog. The first, of course, is to disseminate serious critical knowledge about the New Testament and early Christianity to a wider public.

It is amazing how much bad and simply wrong information is out there on the Internet. Especially on topics pertaining to religion. In particular the religion that most people in the western world – those who subscribe to a religion – happen to subscribe to. A lot of it is schlock; a lot is misinformation; a lot is ignorant; a lot is the personal opinion of people who haven't even bothered to cracked a book in order to acquire it.

This blog is dedicated to providing hard-fought scholarly knowledge about the most important book in the Western world and the beginnings of its most important religious tradition which, as it turns out, became the most important historical, cultural, social, political, and economic force in the history of our civilization. OK, then. That seems to matter.

In an age when expertise is shunted, on this blog we are taking out stand. There are scholars who are both very smart and very dedicated who have mastered numerous ancient languages to read original Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Aramaic, Coptic, and Syriac (and other!) sources and who have learned German, French, Italian, and Spanish (and other languages!) in order to see what yet other very smart and dedicated scholars have learned and know about these sources, scholars who have studied these sources and the scholarship on them rigorously as professionals for thirty or forty or more years. Trust me, they know more about the New Testament and Early Christianity than the guy who lives across the street who has a lot of opinions and access to the Internet. Or your well-groomed Televangelist.

The view of the blog is that it would be very, very good indeed for those in the general public who are interested in these topics to know what the experts say, where they disagree, what the evidence is, what the arguments are, what the general consensus seems to be – about everything from the life of Jesus, to the writings of Paul, to the authorship of the books of the New Testament, to who decided which books were to be included in the New Testament, to how the ancient manuscripts were recopied over the centuries, to the development of Christian doctrines about who Christ really was or how the Trinity came into being, to the various kinds of “heresy” in early Christianity, to the status of women in the early church, to the persecutions and martyrdom of Christians, to the spread of Christianity through the empire, to .... to a thousand other things.

The blog tries to provide that information. It's been going for well over seven and a half years now. I have posted just over five posts every week since we started, each and every week. These days posts are running an average of 1300-1400 words. Them's a lot of words. I try to make every post to be informative and reliable, based on critical scholarship – not just what I happen to think, but what experts who have devoted their lives to this kind of work think. It will come as a surprise to many people I suppose, but very \*little\* of what I have posted over the years is anything at \*all\* that I have come up with myself. It happens

on occasion, but very rarely indeed. Most of what I say is pretty standard among critical scholars who have done this sort of thing for most of their adult lives (even when there are differences among them).

So before getting to the other reason for the blog, here are some year-end statistics. This past year I made 268 blog posts. That includes the “guest posts” that I have been soliciting of late, which seem to generate positive responses, even among readers who can’t buy for a second what the guest poster is saying. I’ve had conservative evangelical apologists and hard-core atheists guest-post, along with very fine critical scholars. The point is to be confronted with serious-thinking people with different opinions than ours that we can consider and weigh. It is a very, very bad thing indeed to listen only to people that you already know you agree with. Whether we’re talking politics, religion, or the NFL.

Since the blog began, I have done 2222 (weirdly) posts altogether. That’s over two and a half million words. All of it is archived. Feast away!

This past year I have posted exactly 14,801 comments by readers; there were also a couple of dozen (I guess?) that I chose not to post because they were inappropriate, irrelevant, irreverent, needlessly political (on both sides) (why are there two, by the way?), or just too snarky. Since the blog began, there have been 91,176 comments. I look at all of them, and try to answer all the questions I get. My answers can’t be lengthy (I do have a day job), but if longer answers are required I sometimes dedicate an entire post to the issue.

The second *raison-d’être* for the blog is particularly near and dear to my heart, as we used to say. I started the blog principally as a fund-raising tool, to make money for charity. As you know, I don’t keep a dime for myself. On the contrary, since the blog started I have paid all the overhead expenses out of my own pocket. When I started, I had no idea what we would be able to raise or what it would take to make me want to keep it going (though I was thinking that if it was a bust I’d do something else with my life....). My thought at the time was that we could raise \$20,000 a year. Boy was that wrong. This past calendar year we raised \$167,000; so far over the history of the blog we have raised over \$825,000. That’s some serious change.

The blog gives the money to five charities: Urban Ministries of Durham (which deals with hunger and homelessness in my local community, an amazing organization); the Food Bank of Eastern North Carolina; the Durham Literacy Center; CARE; and Doctors without Borders.

I want us to do better. And we are now taking steps to make the blog grow much more significantly. The growth in membership has been gratifying. Last year at this time we had 6729 members and were shooting for 7000; this year we have 8338 and are shooting for 10,000. And many, many more. Could you help us? Spread the word. Seriously. Tell anyone who might be interested: family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, dentists, postal workers, and plumbers. And THINK ABOUT GIVING GIFT SUBSCRIPTIONS! Just go the home page and click the bright red link!

The most gratifying development this past year is that several blog members with special skills have generously started volunteering their time and expertise to help us imagine how to make to improve and grow the blog, make it more widely known and accessible to the general public, implement new ideas while keeping to the things that are already working well or even extremely well, and raise more money. I will be making some announcements about our upcoming plans in the coming weeks, and welcome any ideas you yourself have.

For now I want to thank my assistant Steven Ray, who built the blog, runs it, patches it, takes care of all technical issues, deals with all membership issues and payments, answers all my questions, and much more. Steven has been with us since before the beginning, and without him this blog would never have come into existence and would never have survived, let alone thrived. He's the best at what he does and I appreciate his dedication and hard work. Many, many thanks Steven!

And many thanks to all of \*you\*. Ultimately, of course, you are the blog's actual *raison-d'être*. I appreciate very much all your enthusiastic support and immensely enjoy interacting with you. As we move forward, please feel free to tell me your feelings about the blog or make any suggestions you can or would like for its improvement, in any way.

Now it's on to the New Year! I hope you have a good one. May we all thrive.



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