

Sometimes it's enough to make my blood boil. Maybe someone can explain it to me.

If you were to interview the 7,346,235,000 occupants of this planet, you would find *no* group of people who declare themselves MORE committed to "truth" than the evangelical Christians. Evangelical Christianity, historically, is about nothing other than the Truth. Jesus himself said "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, no one comes to the Father except by me" (John 14:6); and "You shall know the Truth, and the Truth will set you free" (John 8:32). The Christian faith, for these people, is all about finding the Truth that leads to eternal life.

So why do so many of their spokespersons simply tell lies? Or at least propagate willful ignorance? Those are the two choices: they either know what they're saying is absolutely false or they don't go to the bother of finding out, when the information is readily available to anyone who wants to take 38 seconds to look for it.

I don't get it. Well, OK, I do. My books on forgery argued that in antiquity Christians did this because they thought that in some circumstances it was appropriate to disseminate false information in order to convert or convince people, to propagate a lie in order to promote the truth. Possibly some modern spokespersons for the evangelical cause feel the same way? (In this post I will be talking about just one instance. I know of many others....)

It just seems terribly ironic to me. Why should the people they *attack* (by spreading misinformation about them) (either intentionally or in willful ignorance) be the ones who are not afraid of the truth, when *they're* the ones insisting on the divine virtue of Truth?

So, you're wondering where this rant is coming from.

I've been following the rather brilliant posts about the exposure of the culprit behind the nonsense of an alleged first-century copy of the Gospel of Mark by our fellow blog member and occasional guest poster Brent Nongbri on his own blog. One of the posts has drawn my ire. NOT against Brent! But against the subject of one of his post. It concerns the original director of the Green Collection (a private collection of ancient biblical antiquities, especially manuscripts, many of them on display now in the Bible Museum in Washington), Scott Carroll, who touts himself as a great expert on ancient manuscripts, even though it is not clear what his actual qualifications are, other than the fact that he has been employed by very wealthy persons to buy manuscripts (that's not the same thing as being able to analyze them - a very technical skill that takes many years of training). I say it's not clear because I can't find a c.v. for him anywhere, nowhere that he actually indicates his training, other than that he's bought a lot of manuscripts for very rich people.

Carroll is evidently the person who purchased the alleged blockbuster first-century copy of Mark (which actually dates to the end of the second century or beginning of the third, and is simply a tiny scrap with parts of a few verses on it) for the Green Collection (financed by the Green family that runs the retail outlet Hobby Lobby). [NOTE: in an earlier post I indicated he bought it for the Museum of the Bible. I got that wrong. The Museum of the Bible does not purchase manuscripts. It displays the manuscripts purchased for the Green Collection by the owners of the Hobby Lobby.]

Carroll is a hard-core evangelical who goes around the world declaring that his manuscript purchases validate the "truth" of evangelical claims about the Bible (and hence, by implication, about their understanding of the Christian faith). Two days ago I read one of Brent Nongbri's blogs in which he provided an actual transcript of one of Scott Carroll's

talks, where he maligns me personally, by name, as a crazy liberal who now has been categorically disproven in his claims by the discoveries of ancient manuscripts.

But what he says about my “claims” are absolutely, demonstrably, incontrovertibly FALSE. Grotesquely false. He either knows it and is lying through his teeth to convince his evangelical audiences (who evidently express their enthusiastic approval when he makes this comment), or he has willfully remained ignorant by not simply checking to see if what he claims I think, say, write, and teach is what in fact I have thought, said, written, and taught.

Here is the transcript of the talk, taken from Brent’s post:

<https://brentnongbri.com/2019/06/24/revisiting-some-scott-carroll-comments-in-light-of-the-first-century-mark-purchase-agreement/>. (I need to point out that Brent has record of Carroll saying the *same* thing in public talks going back to 2012!)

There is an interesting comment in Carroll’s [2016 talk to the Koinonia Institute](#) at about the 40 minute mark (and, once again, thanks to the resourceful David Bradnick for digging up this video):

“Let me add one more text from, uh, the gospels I don’t have a picture of, that should be published sometime this year. And you’ll hear about it, and when you do, you’ll remember, ‘Oh yes, uh, Scott Carroll mentioned it.’ There’s actually a, a fragment of the Gospel of Mark that’s been discovered that has been tentatively dated somewhere between 70 AD and like 110 AD. So Gospel of Mark, maybe dating as early as 70 AD. Um, this is outstanding because, uh, the more liberal scholars, uh, like Bart Ehrman from, uh, from the University of North Carolina, uh, has said that the, uh, Gospel of Mark was the *last* gospel written, and was probably written around 200. So this will completely, uh, cause him to have to rework his chronologies. That’s what these liberal scholars do. They’ll take things that are early and date them late, and take things that are late and date them early and try to turn topsy-turvy the, um, our understanding of, of things. And so, he’s already crying foul that he’s not had time to, uh, see the manuscript at all, but **it’s fortunately in the hands of conservative scholars who usually don’t get an opportunity to work with these things, who are in the process of preparing them for publication.** So, uh, that is something to look for. That’ll be major-While these other things may not be international news, that’ll be major international news when that’s published. And so, you heard it here first, and you heard it well in advance of its publication.”

What can I say? Since I was a graduate student 40 years ago I have never, ever thought, said, or written any such drivel. I have *always* thought that Mark was the first Gospel written, and that it was produced sometime around the year 70 CE. I used to think it was probably written slightly before the Jewish war, maybe 68-70 CE; I now think it was written slightly later, maybe 70-72 CE. That’s the extent of my change.

It would be very, very, easy to see that this is what I’ve always said. It is in every book I have ever written about the Gospels and/or Jesus. Among other things, it is in my textbook

on the New Testament that first appeared in 1997 and has been in wide circulation ever since. That would be, uh, 19 years before Carroll claims I said something completely and crazily different.

So why is he either lying or spreading willful ignorance? Because it serves his purposes. His evangelical audience relish the idea that now the Truth will show why these liberal biblical critics are flat-out wrong, why these opponents of truth will be shown up for what they really are. That's an important goal for people like Scott Carroll. They are enthusiastic to spread slander and false information in support of their cause, willing to propagate easily discredited misinformation or to flat-out lie in service of their Truth.

Why are people like that so afraid of simply being honest and fair, and having reasonable disagreements?



[Is There a Way to Know if a Manuscript is the “Original”?](#)
[The Hobby Lobby, Biblical Manuscripts, and Academic Scandal](#)