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“Where Would Jesus Publish?”

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ABSTRACT

Christians seek to follow the teachings of Jesus in every aspect of our lives. For academics who publish and librarians who purchase and license publications, where articles are published is important. The debates over scholarly communication, the future of publishing, and the impact of Web 2.0 technologies influence how information content is released, accessed, and archived. Therefore, by discussing Open Access publishing, traditional publishing, and new media content distribution with parallel references to the life and teachings of Jesus, as drawn from Scripture, we Christians can more faithfully apply our Biblical viewpoint to our role in the publishing process.

While the exceedingly popular “WWJD: What Would Jesus Do?” movement waned sometime ago, it has spawned related questions that seek to connect our faith with daily life in focused ways, including “How Would Jesus Vote?”, “What Would Jesus Drive?”, “What Would Jesus Eat?”, and even “Who Would Jesus Bomb?”.¹ These questions led me as a Christian and relatively new academic librarian on the tenure-track to wonder somewhat humorously and then seriously “WWJP: Where Would Jesus Publish?”.

You might immediately think that Jesus has nothing to say about publishing scholarly works; after all, most Christians do not believe He wrote anything other than a scribble in the sand (Jn 8:6-8), or at least not anything that has survived. Still, others might wonder why someone would think to ask what Jesus might have to say on such a modern, non-moral topic. The previously mentioned campaigns and nearly every sermon throughout the millennia entreat us to seek God’s will in every aspect of our lives through the study of the Scriptures, prayer, and service. A quick perusal of libraries and bookstores will yield significant numbers of titles examining what Jesus has to teach us about love, leadership, business, ethics, government, social service, war/peace, and, of course, faith, whether one is a Christian or not.² Therefore, I think my question is valid. Other library literature has discussed in great depth and passionately the pros and cons of various publishing methods, but none found have so far asked what Jesus might have to say on this issue. So, let us investigate where Jesus might have published and where He might have us publish.

Publishing Process

If we are honest, academics often are rushed by our tenure committees to publish before we think we are ready, as Jesus was encouraged by Mary to change the water into wine as His first public miracle, before He was ready

to do so (Jn 2:4). Once we have written, we then begin to submit our articles to publishers, which recalls Jesus’ parable of the sowing of the seeds (Mt 13:3-8). In this parable, I see a corollary between the Word and our article submissions – some articles fall on publishers who refuse, some on publishers who choke our work through revisions and delays, and some on publishers who eagerly publish and thus allow our work to thrive in the community of readers. The period of waiting between submission and acceptance reminds me of Christ’s 40 days and nights in the wilderness (Mt 4:1-11); we struggle with waiting, look for direction and comfort, and face the temptations by the journal’s peer reviewers to change what we intend to communicate, as Satan tried to convince Jesus to reinterpret His mission. After years of our academic service, we face temporal leaders who claim to hold the power of life and death over us, for example, tenure committees – horror stories abound throughout academia of those who have faced these bodies only to discover that they faced a predetermined downfall regardless of the facts – these stories naturally conjure in my mind Jesus’ sham trails leading up to His crucifixion (Mk 15:1-15). As you can tell, Jesus’ life can illuminate well our present day academic life with regard to publishing.

Open Access Publishers

Certainly Christ would have us consider Open Access (OA) publishers. Jesus challenged the established authorities and assumptions of His day, as OA publishing contradicts scholarly communication’s long held practices, beliefs, and structures. Specifically, Jesus violated the traditional understandings of the elders (Mt 15:2), of the Sabbath (Mk 2:23-28), and of the family (Mt 10:35-37; Mt 12:46-50). He preached a new, uplifting message of an accessible and loving God (Jn 3:16). He came not to please, but to make war (Mt 10:34-35). He taught us not to put new wine into old bottles (Mt 9:17). All of these are similar to

OA's invectives against traditional publishing – going against tradition, free access to information, adversarial relations toward those who stand in the way.

As Jesus' ministry quickly grew, it was spread by word of mouth and was surrounded with rumors (Lk 7:17); it also has been so with OA. Just as OA has amazed people and drawn protest and derision from traditional publishers, so did Jesus' teachings draw condemnation in His day (Mk 11:18; Mt 9:3; Mt 12:2; Mt 12:14) – especially the criticism that Jesus was performing tasks only God could do (Mk 2:7). This should sound familiar from publishers to OA startups. As Jesus drove the moneychangers from the temple (Jn 2:14-16), I am reminded of OA's attempts to run corporate publishers from academe. Additionally, given that publishers hope to land prestigious authors, would they even accept an article submitted by someone from the backwater town of Nazareth (Jn 1:46)? OA is seemingly much more accessible to new authors.

Christ further taught that our message should be a light to the world and that it should not be hid under a bushel basket (Mt 5:14-16). We also are compelled by Him to “give to him that asketh thee” and turn not away “him that would borrow” from us (Mt 5:42 KJV). We are told “lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth” (Mt 6:19) and are reminded to take no thought of the material world (Lk 12:1-7). These lessons can be viewed to direct that our academic writings not be hidden behind publishers' proprietary databases and embargos that require paid subscriptions and annual maintenance fees and yet prohibit interlibrary loans to non-subscribing libraries. These teachings could also require that we refuse royalty and copyright payments, should a publisher concede those to the author in the first place.

Jesus also called many to follow Him immediately without waiting until certain tasks were finished (Mt 8:21-22). Many though, like the young rich man, walked away sad having heard what they must give up (Lk 18:18-25). How many academics have talked about the wonders of OA, only to forsake publishing

there until we are tenured, for fear of our work being excluded from consideration in tenure decisions? Surely Jesus' warnings that His disciples would be scourged in councils (Mt 10:16-23) could warn us against using OA publishers.

Traditional Corporate Publishers

While certainly there is much to Jesus' teachings that would seem to point overwhelmingly that His followers should use OA journals, there are some strong indications that choosing traditional publishers is appropriate at times, too. Christ after all did teach many times in the synagogues and in the temple and on the Sabbath (Mt 21:23; Mk 1:21; Mk 1:39; Lk 6:6; Lk 21:38; Jn 6:59, Jn 7:14), which were the accepted, traditional locations and days for religious teachings in His time. Jesus neither avoided the religious leaders of his time (Mt 16:1; Mk 8:11-12), nor did he speak against the authority of the government (Mt 22:21). Since Christ did not seek to completely topple tradition and societal structure, so we perhaps should not forsake traditional publishers, either. As Jesus used traditional means when appropriate, so should we.

Non-Publisher Distribution

Perhaps the Open Access publishers and the traditional publishers can be compared to the Sadducees and the Pharisees of Jesus' day – arguing over whether there is a fee for information and whether it should be printed, as leaders in Jesus' time argued over whether there was to be a bodily resurrection and where one should worship (synagogue or Jerusalem's Temple). Meanwhile, as they discussed their doctrines, another way to God, or, in our scholarly communication allusion, to information, emerged to challenge and finally triumphed over them both.

So, rather than trying to read our modern publishing world into the teachings and actions of Jesus, perhaps we should look instead to the methods He used to teach – and eschew publishing using a publisher, OA or traditional, all together. After all, Christ never used a publisher and His message has endured. What

How many academics have talked about the wonders of open access, only to forsake publishing there until we are tenured, for fear of our work being excluded from consideration in tenure decisions?

*[M]aybe Jesus,
if asked where
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respond: “Verily,
verily, I say unto
you, Podcast.”*

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2 See, among many others: Carter, J., & Coleman, J. (2008). *How to argue like Jesus: Learning persuasion from history's greatest communicator*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books; Jones, L. B. (1995). *Jesus, CEO: Using ancient wisdom for visionary leadership*. New York: Hyperion; Miller, P. E. (2001). *Love walked among us: Learning to love like Jesus*. Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress.

did Jesus use instead? Jesus spoke directly to people and it is written that only those who “hear” His word will be saved (Jn 5:24-25). Thus, maybe Jesus, if asked where He would have us publish, would respond: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Podcast.”

More seriously, though, it is clear from the Gospel accounts that it was Jesus’ habit to deliver many of His lessons to individuals in private, to His close disciples, and sometimes to large crowds. Most of these teachings seem to have been prompted by questions and actions of those around Him, rather than out of His desire to preach on a particular topic that day. For example:

- Jesus talked one-on-one with Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-21), the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:4-26), and Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10).
- He taught his small band of disciples on many occasions: about eating, sowing, and reaping (Jn 4:34-38), at the Mt. of Olives (Mt 24:3), at the Lord’s Supper and succeeding lessons (Jn 13-17), and at the Resurrection (Jn 20:19-31).
- The Lord taught multitudes on a mountain (Mt 5:1-8:1), at the sea (Mk 3:7-12), in the temple (Jn 8:2), and for two days in Samaria (Jn 4: 40-43).
- Christ also spoke to individuals in crowds, including to the blind man at the pool (Jn 5:1-9), to the man with palsy (Mk 2:1-12), to Lazarus in the grave (Jn 11:41-44), and to the adulterous woman about to be stoned (Jn 8:3-11).

Given these examples, Christ might prefer us instead to hold meetings and conferences in person, and webcasts and conference calls rather than any form of publishing or impersonal podcasts. All of the recordings and transcripts could be saved in our institutional repositories and author websites that are harvestable by web searches and OA archives.

So, Where Would Jesus Publish?

As with most every question rhetorically posed to Jesus to which He is not recorded to have already answered, there is no pat

answer, only extrapolation and interpretation guided by prayer through the Holy Spirit. What is clear is that Jesus relied upon personal communication, related His message in a way that the listener could both understand and remember, and lived His teachings unto death and resurrection. We would do well to remember to do likewise.

The best answer I have is not original to me. The writer of 1 Corinthians reminds us, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient” and that not all lawful things “edify” us (6:12, 10:23). When it comes to choosing a publisher or other method to disseminate our professional musings and scholarly research, it seems to me that verily, verily, “all things are of God” (2 Cor 5:18). As such, I think Christ would have us disseminate our thoughts and findings in any journal (print or electronic, corporate or non-profit), newsletter, website, blog, podcast, or lecture that is useful to the profession.

Lest we take this freedom as a license to sin, we of course should be knowledgeable of the various issues in scholarly communication (copyright, licenses, greater-than-inflation annual increases, etc.). Although we obviously cannot expect all publishers to be evangelists for Christ, we can voice our concerns as authors and consumers for appropriate corporate policies regarding publishers’ treatment of workers (Mt 20:1-16; Lk 10:7), the poor and needy (Mt 25:34-46), its profits (1 Cor 10:24), and our shared environment (Gn 1:28-31).

We must remember that our actions do have consequences – even those decisions we make that are related to our careers. In all things, we should practice good stewardship of our libraries’ and personal resources, and glorify God in all that we do (1 Cor 10:31).

Now, the next question for those of us approaching the publish or perish deadline of tenure is “WWJR: What Would Jesus Research?” †