

CHAPTER 16

The pear

I was sitting in a traffic jam, in a filthy cab, in the smog-filled middle of Mexico City. I couldn't take it anymore. I paid the driver, stepped out, and started walking. Jesús had extended an invitation for me to visit him in his Church, which also served as an orphanage for street children.

The air was oven hot. A strong wind had picked up. Mexico City is one of the few places in the world where the air quality is so bad you can actually inhale a gastrointestinal disease like hepatitis or dysentery—normally diseases contracted in contaminated water.¹ Keeping a handkerchief over my face, I had been walking for about 30 minutes, keeping to whatever shade I could find. I rounded a corner and there it was, looming up out of the smog like an ancient stucco Castle. The doors were huge and made of solid oak. I grabbed one of the oversized doorknockers and let rip.

In the middle of my second attempt the door swung open. Half expecting to see a hunchback, I was relieved to find instead, an attractive, well dressed, young woman.

"Hello. I'm here to see Jesús," I said.

There was an uncomfortable moment while she stared at me with her mouth open.

"He should be expecting me." I reiterated.

Finally she spoke. "You are the one? You are Sarann?"

"That's me," I replied, not knowing what else to say.

She gestured for me to follow. The interior was even more castle-like than the exterior. We wound our way up some narrow, dimly lit stairs. They ended at a single door. The young

¹ http://healthandenergy.com/mexico_city_air_hurting_kids.htm

woman knocked. The door opened and a silhouette appeared. The bright light from the room contrasted starkly with the dark stairway.

"Sarann, good to see you again. Come in," Jesús declared. "Maria, could you please turn the air conditioning down a little? It's colder than hell out here. Turn the lights up a notch while you're at it. Thank you so much."

I walked into a cool, brightly-lit room lined with bookshelves.

"Welcome to my office. Can I get you something to drink while we blast dung?"

"I think you mean, 'shoot the shit,' and yes, anything would be fine to drink," I replied.

As he busied himself in the small kitchenette, I began my usual litany of questions. I like asking questions and listening to the answers. It's a propensity that has served me well through the years.

"Maria practically went into shock when she realized who I was. What's with that?"

"I've told her a few things, that's all," he said.

"What kinds of things?" I asked as he handed me a glass of juice.

"Just things, Sarann," he continued.

He pressed a button on the intercom. "Maria, two for dinner tonight."

"Yes, my lord."

I almost choked on my drink. "Yes, my lord?"

With a look of bored resignation, Jesús rolled his eyes and said, "Maria is convinced that I am the Second Coming."

"Are you?" I asked in jest.

"I wish," he said flatly and immediately changed the subject. "Maria is an absolutely awesome cook. You are in for a treat tonight. Come, let me show you my sanctuary."

"Lead the way," I said as I stood up.

We wound our way back down the stairs. Although it was dark, I could tell that we had entered a large chamber.

"Lights on!" Jesús suddenly called out.

Revealed before us was a huge amphitheater designed along the lines of traditional Catholic Churches. It was beautiful.

Behind the podium were several glass display cases containing various holy relics. Among them, the blue raincoat that had been the subject of a sermon I had listened to.

"How does an object qualify as a holy relic?" I asked as I squatted down to get a closer look at a pair of ancient wrist shackles.

"The main criteria is authenticity. The story behind the relic must be backed up with solid, verifiable evidence," Jesús said.

"What's the story behind these?" I asked, looking up.

"They once bound the hands of a victim of the Spanish Inquisition."

"Well?" I prompted.

He continued. "A graduate student of mine had stumbled upon some interesting information while doing research on the Inquisition. In 1600, the same year a Dominican friar by the name of Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake for insisting that the Earth circled the Sun², a woman by the name of Mercedes had been bound to a stake atop a pile of firewood. The fire had been set, and as was customary, she had been given one last chance to convert. She didn't do so until the fire was almost upon her. As was also customary, she was then strangled by the executioner before the fire reached her as a reward for conversion."³

I was appalled. "I had no idea the Church had such a brutal history."

"Oh, yes. A detailed ledger of each execution was kept, recording the names of the victims, whether or not they recanted, and any other details of interest."

"Is there more to the story?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. This is where things get interesting. According to the records, a rainstorm swept in that day extinguishing the fire that was meant to consume Mercedes. Some of the executions had to be rescheduled. Mercedes, having already been strangled by the executioner, was given a proper Christian burial thanks to her last minute conversion. Coincidentally, another student of mine was doing research on yet another woman by the name of

² See *Galileo's Daughter* by Dava Sobel, page 4

³ <http://www.tyndale.org/TSJ/6/daniell.html>

Mercedes who resided in Paris in about the same timeframe. She was the founder of an international orphanage for abandoned infants that exists to this day. I thought this an interesting coincidence and asked my students to try to find more information. Further research turned up portraits of both women. Although one painting had preceded the other by ten years, it was obvious that they depicted the same person. The portraits were nearly identical except in one, the woman was a decade older and had badly disfigured hands and forearms."

"Where did you get the shackles?"

"We made a field trip to Madrid. After a week of searching, we finally found Mercedes' tombstone. Her name and the date of her death were still barely legible. I successfully petitioned the State to exhume the grave. Aside from these shackles, the coffin was empty. Because of Mercedes' hesitancy to recant, and with the fire closing in, the executioner had done a hasty job. She had been asphyxiated only to the point of unconsciousness and inadvertently buried alive."

A chill spread down my spine. "How did she escape?"

"Look closely at the shackles. Part of the locking mechanism was made of lead, which has a very low melting point. The fire had melted those parts allowing the shackles to fall open. Ruined by the fire, they were probably thrown in the casket along with her body."

I could just make out the shape of melted metal extruded from the keyholes.

"That would explain the burned hands and forearms." I speculated.

Jesús continued. "There is no question that she escaped from her coffin. It may have been left unburied until the rains abated, giving her time to flee into the darkness. We'll never know. Mercedes is our first Saint by the way."

In the next display case, another object caught my attention. It was made of brass and roughly the size and shape of a stage microphone. The figure of Satan was cast at one end.

"What's this?" I asked, pointing to the strange object.

"That, Sarann, is a torture device called the pear.⁴ It was used during the Inquisition to force heretics to confess that they were not of the Catholic faith."

"How does it work?" I made the mistake of asking.

Hesitating slightly, he continued. "It was forced into the victim's mouth, anus, or vagina by the Church-appointed torturer and expanded with a screw mechanism until the body cavity was ripped asunder. Come, dinner should be ready."

Food was the last thing on my mind at that moment.

As we entered the dining room, the aroma of Maria's cooking soon chased my nausea away. We sat down to a meal of pan-fried Chilean sea bass with chipotle butter, asparagus shoots, Mexican rice, and the best Chardonnay I've ever tasted.

Maria hovered in the kitchen, stealing glimpses as we dined.

The conversation soon fell into the standard pattern, me asking my host questions while I sat back and savored the responses for their intellectual content.

I started. "Isn't Chilean sea bass on the endangered species list?"⁵

"Are you serious?" Jesús said, flabbergasted.

"Actually, no. Just thought I'd jerk your chain. Some zealous environmentalist group inadvertently started an urban legend that they are on the endangered species list when they used the word endangered in a press release. This group was just trying to stop the collapse of yet another fishing industry primarily due to illegal harvesting. These fish aren't on the endangered list—at least not yet—and they also aren't related to bass. The name sea bass is purely a marketing scheme to make them sound more appealing. Their common name is toothfish. They can live up to half a century and can weigh two hundred pounds. Ironic choice for our meal wasn't it? We may as well enjoy, it being cooked and all that."

"I was unaware," he said. "I apologize."

"Stop worrying about it. The problem isn't so much what we eat, the problem is that there are too many of us eating."

⁴ <http://members.fortunecity.com/babygurl1385/#The%20Pear>

⁵ <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/trade/chile.pdf>

Changing the subject, I asked, "What exactly was an Inquisition?"

"Heretics were regarded as enemies by the Roman Church. The first in a series of Inquisitions began when Pope Gregory IX instituted the Papal Inquisition in 1231 for the apprehension and trial of heretics. Suspects were tortured to make them confess to heresy and eventually handed over to civil authorities for punishments like burning at the stake. The Church preferred burning because it did not shed blood. They had a thing about shedding blood. It is rather comical to search the Internet on the subject. Many authors try to distance the Church, claiming that the Church had very little if anything at all to do with the Inquisitions. This is ludicrous. Coincidentally, these authors are most always members of the Catholic religious hierarchy. In their estimates, only a few thousand people were burned at the stake—tops. It was no big deal. Everything was the government's fault. I'm sure the same attempts to revise history will be applied to the current sex scandals.

"On the other extreme, there are some fundamentalist Christians who claim that up to thirty thousand were burned at the stake during the Spanish Inquisition alone. The truth is often bracketed by the extremes. There is no question that tens of thousands were tortured by the Church in front of Church appointed Inquisitors and that many thousands were relaxed."

"Relaxed?" I asked.

"The term "relaxed" is the ultimate euphemism. It meant that the victim was turned over to civil authorities for burning at the stake."

Sipping my wine, I reflected. "As I recall, Christians were persecuted, crucified and fed to lions in their early history. The Inquisitions were created by their descendants?"

"Ignorance knows no bounds, Sarann. The Inquisition sought out Jews, Moslems, any budding sect of Christianity or virtually any other unofficial faith or lack of faith. There is no question in my mind that many of the fundamentalist sects that have budded off of the original faith would repeat the Inquisitions in every detail if they ever held enough power to do so."

"*NOBODY expects the Spanish Inquisition!*" a voice in my head suddenly blurted out. I ignored it. Too much wine brings them on sometimes.

"It must have cost a fortune to prosecute all of this on such a grand scale," I suggested.

"Actually, the Inquisitions generated a great deal of wealth for both the Church and the Crown. The possessions of the convicted were confiscated. After a few hundred years of Inquisitions, the Church and the governments of different nations within the sphere of the Vatican's influence ended up owning virtually everything of value."

"What finally brought it all to an end?" I asked.

"They petered out from a lack of financial incentive in the early 1800's. There was almost nothing left to plunder."

"I don't quite understand why anyone would admit to not being of the proper faith considering the ramifications of doing so."

"Well, some members of the Church eventually asked that question themselves. They realized that some people might make false admissions just to stop the torturer from crushing more of their toes, or ripping out their fingernails, or breaking their bones, or burning especially sensitive body parts. The best solution the Church could come up with was to ask the victim to confirm their admission after being tortured. Of course, if they changed their mind at this point they risked being tortured all over again."

"Not what you would call foolproof, eh?"

"Not hardly," Jesús said as he stood, signaling that it was time to retire to his study for further conversation.

Jesús poured us some coffee. I sat back and prepared to listen.

He began. "The words of the Bible were written many centuries ago. Mankind has learned a lot since then. We have learned that we are animals, animals with a capacity for deep thought, love, and empathy. What is it that sets humankind apart from the rest of God's creatures? It certainly isn't our physical appearance. All primates have fingers and toes, two eyes and a nose. We all eat and defecate. There is only one thing, just one thing. We are unique in our capacity for love and empathy. Not just for one

another, but for God, and all of the other creatures we share this planet with. There is your answer.

"How could a book written in an ancient language thousands of years ago give us guidance on things like birth control, the Internet, amniocentesis, genetic engineering, abortion, paranoid delusional schizophrenia, ecology preservation, biodiversity, or extinction?"

Taking my cue, I asked. "I don't know... how?"

"It can't. The original authors were almost unimaginably ignorant by today's standards. The author's didn't know that a heart pumps blood or that the brain creates thought. They had no idea that plagues were caused by tiny creatures too small to see. Plagues became the wrath of God. The mentally ill were possessed by demons. They didn't know of the past existence of dinosaurs and mastodons. They did not know that the sun is a nearby star, one of billions in a galaxy that today is called 'the Milky Way' which is itself just one of billions of other galaxies each filled with billions of stars. They lived in a very small world. They were unaware of most other civilizations coexisting on other parts of the planet.

I interjected. "So, are you saying that in the context of modern societies, the words of the Bible are inadequate?"

"No. What I am saying is that the Bible is complete bullshit."

"Bullshit?" I said, not sure if he was joking. "What brought you to this conclusion?"

"A few moments of honest critical thought."

Here I was, sitting in the study of a brilliant theologian, being told that the Bible is bullshit. I wasn't sure how to come back to that. I decided to stall, "I have to confess, I really don't know any of the history of how the Bible came to be. Maybe you should give me a brief synopsis."

"Very well. The Bible is a translated composite of thousands of Hebrew and Greek manuscripts that were written hundreds of years after the death of Christ in the case of the New Testament and hundreds of years before the birth of Christ in the case of the Old Testament. None of these original manuscripts exist—only copies of copies of copies, passed along for hundreds of years and all copied by hand. Even though most scholars agree that the spoken language of Jesus was Aramaic, his words and deeds first

came to us as ancient copies written in two different languages not his own."

"What are you getting at?" I asked.

"I have found irrefutable evidence that the Bible has an accumulated linguistic error rate that approaches 100 percent."

"I think you lost me there somewhere, Jesús. What does that mean?"

"Over time, the Bible has degenerated into pure nonsensical gibberish. I have suspected that something was wrong for quite a while. 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.' No one talks like this. It isn't old English; it isn't a dialect of English at all. No one has ever talked like that. Even the name of Jesus has been completely twisted with time.⁶

He stood up and walked over to a blackboard. "Yah-sh-ua (Hebrew) was translated to Le-s-ous (Greek) to le-so-us (Latin) and finally Je-s-us (English). The Hebrew alphabet doesn't even have a "J" sound in it. Look at the original name and the last one. They bear no resemblance to one another. This twisting has happened to every word in the Bible. What does it mean to have been created in God's image? Literally, it means that God looks like a naked, tailless, male primate. Is that what they meant to say?"

Caught slightly off guard, I stammered. "Uh, come to think of it, probably not."

He continued, "Actually, that is exactly what they meant to say. Those who were making copies of copies, actually thought that God looked like a human being, more specifically, a male human being. They had no idea that there were apes in Africa that look and act very much like us. Certainly, the concept of us being primates was lost to them. When they made their copies and translations, they interpreted what they saw as best they could."

"Many believe that the various translations and copies of the Bible are guided by the hand of God and are therefore immune to error," I said, just for the hell of it.

⁶ <http://www.plim.org/JesusOrigin.htm>

Jesús gestured toward a wall lined with hundreds of Bibles. "Every Bible in this collection has multiple typos, misspellings and omissions. Collecting Bibles that vary from one another has become a hobby of mine. God is definitely not guiding any hands in this instance. The vagueness of the Bible leaves it open to interpretation. These interpretations vary from decade to decade and from sect to sect. This is an indisputable fact. Galileo spent his old age in house arrest because of a phrase in the Bible that said that the Earth does not move. He was lucky, one mis-step and he would have been burned at the stake."

"Where is all this leading?" I asked, trying to get to the meat of it.

"It came to me as a revelation while doing a simple linguistic experiment in a language class that I was teaching. Using a child's game sometimes called 'operator,' or the 'whisper game,' I was trying to demonstrate how easily communication could be distorted. I asked my students to form a semi-circle. I whispered two short sentences into the ear of the first student who in-turn whispered them to the next student and so it went around the circle. The results of this exercise vary a great deal depending on how long or complex the initial phrases are and how many people participate."

"So what happened?" I prompted.

"Coincidentally, the resulting phrase whispered into my ear by the last student in the semi-circle was an exact quote from the Old Testament."

"And...?"

"The thought suddenly occurred to me to repeat the experiment starting with this quote. Would I get my two original sentences back?"

"Did you?" I asked with an air of expectancy.

"Well, no, but it was an interesting idea."

The raspberry sound signaling disappointment came unexpectedly from my lips.

"Sorry to disappoint you, but the science of linguistics just isn't that simple," Jesús declared defensively.

"So what did you do next?"

"Realizing that the Bible might just be the result of thousands of years of people inadvertently playing the operator game

I developed a computer program that could take the results of a game of operator as input and produce a list of probable phrases that had been used at the start of the game. The program uses a combination of sophisticated linguistics techniques, probability algorithms, and information theory to generate a list of possible solutions. I then began using quotes from the Bible as input, tracing it back through time from modern day English to ancient dialects of English to Latin to Koine Greek and on through to ancient Hebrew and from there to Aramaic."

"What did you find out?"

"I told you already."

"Oh, right, the Bible is bullshit—a lot of good that does you. So, no Heaven, no Hell, no disciples of Satan."

Smiling, he said, "Televangelists come as close as you'll get to being disciples of Satan."

I didn't know what to say at that point.

Jesús continued, "Armageddon is upon us. It will not take the form of a fiery battle with the destruction of the Earth in the balance. The battle has already been joined with the end of nature in the balance. You could say that we are in a struggle with Satan and his disciples and all of the millions of unfortunate souls who have succumbed to their false prophecies. Armageddon is the battle to save the biodiversity of our planet."

I wasn't sure what to make of all this. When in doubt, ask more questions, I always say. "So you're saying that the destruction of the planet's ecosystem is a kind of Armageddon in slow motion. You're rather isolated in the religious sector with this idea aren't you?"

"Actually not. One of the fastest growing sects of Christianity in the U.S. is Evangelical Environmentalism. I have tentative plans to join forces.⁷"

"So what are you planning to do with the output from your program?"

⁷ Evangelicals are coming to the (earth's) rescue" by Dan'l C. Markham dated April 28, 1997 in the High Country News, <http://www.hcn.org/servlets/hcn.Search?keywords=evangelicals&search=search>

"I have condensed all that is worth saying into a handbook that is small enough to fit in your back pocket. It will be published as the 'Recovered Testament.' It is my hope that it will someday replace the Old and the New Testament versions of the Bible."

"You're publishing a new version of the Holy Bible?" I said, taken aback.

"That's correct. No vagaries, no misinterpretation."

"Whew, I'd love to take a look at this thing."

"I'll give you a copy before you leave. The computer code used to generate it, however, is sacred text," he said with a wink.

"Why are you compelled to start yet another religion? Couldn't you just pick one and run with it?" I asked feeling somewhat overwhelmed.

He turned to a file cabinet and pulled out a thick folder. "Here is an A-Z list of religions. Which one would *you* suggest?"

I looked at the first few pages, which just covered religions that begin with the letter A:⁸

Aaronic Order, Abecedarians, Abelites, Abenaki, Abenaki, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot, Abipon, Abkhazian, Aboriginal Evangelical Missions, Abyssinian Frontiers Mission, Acharya's Yoga and Meditation Centre, Acheh, Acholi, Achomawi, Acolapissa and Tangipahoa, Acts Full Gospel Church, Adai, Adamites, Adja, Adonis, Aduma, Advent Christian Church, Adventist Aetherius Society Afar affiliated, affiliated - black, affiliated - full communicant, Africa Evangelical Church, Africa Evangelical Fellowship, Africa Inland Church, African Baptist Assembly, Malawi, African indigenous churches, African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, African Orthodox Church African Orthodox Church of the West, African People's Socialist Party, African Protestant Church, African Reformed (NGK-South Africa), African Traditional Religion, African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church, African Universal Church, African Zion Church, Afro-American Army, Afro-Brazilian religions, Afro-

⁸ The list of religions was obtained from <http://www.adherents.com> compliments of Reginald Finley (no relation).

Cuban religions, Agapemonites, Aggressive Christianity Missionary Training Corps, Aglipayan Church, Agni, Agnostic, Agon-shu, Agudat Israel World Organization, Agul, Ahanta, Ahirs, Ahl-I Haqq, Ahmadiyya, Ahmadiyya – mosques, Ainu, Ais, Aiyetoro Community, Aizo, Ajivikas, Aka, Akan, Akposo, Alacaluf, Alamo Christian Foundation, Alar, Alaska Yearly Meeting, Alaskan Athabaskans, Alawi, Albakourat al-Durzeyat, Albani-Sinai Orthodox, Albanian, Albanian Orthodox, Albanian Orthodox Archdiocese in America, Albanian Orthodox Church in America, Albanian Orthodox Diocese of America, Albigenianism, Aleut, Alevis, Alexandrian Wicca, Algard Wicca, Algemene Doopsgezinde Societeit, Algonquin, Alianza Evangelica Menonita, All Africa Conference of Churches, Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection, Alliklik, Alpha and Omega Pentecostal Church of God of America, Alsacian Churches, Alesia, Altays, Alternative Religions, Altkolonier Mennonitengemeinde, Altkolonier Mennonitengemeinde (Colonia Manitoba), Altkolonier Mennonitengemeinde (Colonia Nueva Durango), Altkolonier Mennonitengemeinde (Colonia Rio Verde), Aluk To Dolo, Amahuacas, Amal, Amalgamated Flying Saucers Club, Amana Church Society, amaNazaretha, Ambo, Ambonese, American Association of Atheists, American Association of Lutheran Churches, American Baptist Association, American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A., American Bible Society - volunteers, American Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church, American Catholic Church, American Catholic Church (Syro-Antiochean), American Council of Christian Churches, American Eastern Orthodox Church, American Episcopal Church, American Ethical Union, American Evangelical Christian Churches, American Evangelistic Association, American Family Association, American Gospel Band, American Holy Orthodox Catholic Eastern Church, American Independent Orthodox Church (Bridges), American Indian Evangelical Church, American Lutheran Church, American Lutheran Conference, American Muslim Mission, American Muslim Society, American National Baptist Convention, American Nazi Party, American Orthodox Catholic Church (Irene), American Orthodox Catholic Church (Propheta), American Orthodox Catholic Church, Archdiocese of Ohio, American

Orthodox Catholic Church, Western Rite Mission, Diocese of New York, American Orthodox Church, American Prelature, American Rescue Workers, American Unitarian Association, American World Patriarchs, Americanism, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Amhara, Amidism, Amish, Amish - other, Amway, Ana, Anaak, Anabaptist, Ananaikyo, Ananda Community, Ananda Marga, Ananites, ancestor veneration, Anchor Bay Evangelistic Association, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis, Ancient Church of the East, Ancient Tridentine Catholic Church, Andamanese, Andes Evangelical Mission, Andhra Evangelical Lutheran Church, Andhras, Angkola and Mandailing, Anglican, Anglican - active, Anglican - attend at least yearly, Anglican - confirmed, Anglican Catholic Church, Anglican Church of Canada, Anglican Church of North America, Anglican Communion, Anglican Episcopal Church of North America, Anglican Mission in America, Anglican Orthodox Church, Anglican Rite Jurisdiction of the Americas, animism, Anthroposophical Society, Anthroposophical Society - full-time, Anti-cult movement, anti-missionary movement, anti-Semitism, Antigua Barbuda Baptist Association, Antiochian Orthodox, Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, Apa Tanis, Apache, Apalachee, Apayao, Apinaye, Apostelamt Jesu Christi, Apostolic, Apostolic - historic Apostolic succession, Apostolic - independent, Apostolic - other, Apostolic Assemblies of Christ, Apostolic Catholic Church of the Americas, Apostolic Christian Church, Apostolic Christian Church (Nazarean), Apostolic Christian Churches of America, Apostolic Church, Apostolic Church (Australia), Apostolic Church of Christ, Apostolic Church of Christ in God, Apostolic Church of Jesus, Apostolic Church of Jesus Christ, Apostolic Church of Pentecost of Canada, Apostolic Church of Queensland, Apostolic Faith, Apostolic Faith (Hawaii), Apostolic Faith (Kansas), Apostolic Faith Mission, Apostolic Faith Mission Church of God, Apostolic Faith Mission of Portland, Oregon, Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa, Apostolic Gospel Church of Jesus Christ, Apostolic Lutheran Church of America, Apostolic Lutheran Churches, Apostolic Lutherans (Church of the First Born), Apostolic Lutherans (Evangelicals No.), Apostolic Lutherans

(Evangelicals No.), Apostolic Lutherans (Heidmans), Apostolic Lutherans (New Awakening), Apostolic Methodist Church, Apostolic Overcoming Holy Church of God, Apostolic Spiritual Baptists, Apostolic United Brethren, Aquarian, Aquarian Foundation, Aquarian School of Yoga, Aquarian Spiritualist Centre, Aquarian Tabernacle Church, Ar nDraiocht Fein, Arab, Arab & Muslim combined, Arab Liberation Front, Arachne, Arapaho, Arapaho and Atsina, Arapesh, Araucanians, Arawak, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Brudergemeinden in Deutschland, Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Deutschland, Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur geistlichen Unterstutzung in Mennonitengemeinden, Arcane School, Arianism, Arica, Arikara, Aristotelian, Armenian, Armenian Apostolic Church, Armenian Apostolic Church of America, Armenian Apostolic Church of America - Eastern Prelacy, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church of America, Armenian Church of America, Armenian Church of America, Diocese of the, Armenian Evangelical Church, Armenian Orthodox Church, Arminianism, Armitage Baptist Church, Arya Samaj, Aryan, Aryan Brotherhood, Aryan Nations, Aryan Warriors, Asatru, Asbury Bible Churches, Ashaninka, Ashanti, Ashkenazi Judaism, Ashurism, Asmat, Asociacion Bautista de El Salvador, Asociacion Convencion Bautista de Costa Rica, Asociacion Convencion de Iglesias Menonitas de Costa Rica, Asociacion de Iglesias Hermanos Menonitas de Colombia, Assam Baptist Convention, Assassins, Assembleias de Deus, Assemblies of God, Assemblies of the Lord Jesus Christ, Assembly of Brothers, Assiniboine, Associacao das Igrejas Menonitas do Brasil, Associacao dos Irmaos Menonitas de Portugal, Associacao Evangelica Menonita, Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (General Synod), Associated Brotherhood of Christians, Associated Churches of Christ, Associated Gospel Churches of Canada, Association des Eglises Evangeliques Mennonites de France, Association for Research and Enlightenment, Association Mennonite Luxembourgeoise, Association of Baptist Churches, Association of Baptist Churches in Israel, Assyrian, Assyrian Church of the East, Assyrian Church of the East (Chaldean-Syrian/Daly), Assyrian Evangelical, Assyrian Orthodox, astrology, astrology - astrologers, astrology - full-time astrologers, astrology - part-time

astrologers, Atakapa, Athanasianism, Athapaskans, Atheism, Athiopisch-Orthodoxe Kirche, Atlantean, Augsburgian Confession, Augustana Evangelical Lutheran Church, Auldearne Witches, Aum Shinrikyo, Aum Shinrikyo Auroville, Australasian Conference of Seventh Day Baptists, Australian Aboriginal religion, Australian Aborigines, Australian Conference of Evangelical Mennonites, Australian School of Yoga, Australian Transmission Meditation Network, Autocephalous Slavonic Orthodox Catholic Church (In Exile), Autocephalous Syro-Chaldean Church of North America, Avar, Avoyel, Aymara, Azali Babis, Azande, Azerbaijani, Aztec.

"I see your point." I said.

Jesús continued, "Robert and I have been corresponding. I have taken some of his advice to heart and have designed this religion to provide my followers with what they need. Is there anything I've told you tonight that rings false?"

"No. This doozy is airtight all right."

I called Bob shortly after returning home from my visit with Jesús.

"Bob, I just got back from Mexico City. Were you aware that Jesús is publishing a new version of the Bible?"

"Well, no, I haven't been privy to that information. It doesn't surprise me though."

"I'm a little concerned about his sanity," I added.

"I wouldn't worry about Jesús. His definition of God is the absence of evil. When you find goodness, you've found God. His definition of Satan is the polar opposite. Satan is the absence of goodness. You have found Satan when you find evil. All you have to do now is define good and evil."

"But, isn't that the hard part?" I asked.

"True. Just the same, I believe he's saner than the two of us put together."

I couldn't argue with that one.

After talking with Bob, I had a vague remembrance of an E-mail he had sent me a few years ago. I dug through my computer files and found it in a folder labeled miscellaneous. It was a

transcript of an Internet chat conversation between himself and Jesús:

Dear Sarann

I have sent you this Internet transcript with Jesús' permission. You asked us to keep you informed. I suspected from the start that his religion needed some spice. If he accepts my advice, he will have a distinct advantage over his competitors. They have buried the truth in their subconscious minds. Jesús will have the truth at the conscious level. He also won't be limited to ancient, dated dogma that contradicts itself at every turn. He can make up his own.

Sincerely,
Bob

Jesús: "Robert, I am seeking advice."

Bob: "Shoot."

Jesús: "My ratings are not what they should be. I cannot put my finger on it."

Bob: "Well, Jesús I was afraid this was coming. What your followers need is consolation that they will never die—that there is an afterlife waiting for them—and that your God is willing to physically intervene on behalf of the group who prays the hardest."

Jesús: "But that's not the truth."

Bob: "No shit."

Jesús: "Are you suggesting that my religion is flawed?"

Bob: "No. I'm suggesting that you stretch the truth just a little."

Jesús: "You can't be serious."

Bob: "Oh but I am."

Jesús: "I do not feel comfortable with that statement."

Bob: "Imagine that its 1942, you are in Amsterdam, and a little girl by the name of Anne Frank lives in the attic above you. A squad of Nazi storm troopers just asked you if you know the whereabouts of a girl by that same name. What would you have done?"

Jesús: "I would have lied."

Bob: "To save the life of one little girl?"

Jesús: "Yes. I wasn't really expecting this."

Bob: "Get on with it, Jesús. The planet needs you. We all need you. Clear, rational, logical, defensible thought has very little to do with organized religion. You're gonna have to shine 'em on, boy. Do you really think that any televangelist completely believes the crap they spout? They don't. On a certain level of consciousness, they have their nagging doubts. They have to work very hard to keep the truth hidden from themselves and by extension, from their followers. That is why they go to such extremes to reinforce their beliefs through ritual and conversion. That is why they surround themselves with others who all want to believe the same thing, never questioning, never accepting debate, preaching to the choir, attacking non-believers as though they were the enemy. Envision rows and rows of big-headed primates with their hands clamped firmly over their ears and eyes but not their mouths. Fight fire with fire, Jesús."

Jesús: "This comes as a shock to me."

Bob: "I'll tell you something else. You have to come up with an equivalent for the Koran, Torah, or Bible. If you don't get your dogma down in print you aren't going to get anywhere. Mark my words."

Jesús: "I have to think about what you have said."

Bob: "I wouldn't expect anything less. Good luck to you."

Personally, I was relieved that Jesús had not taken all of Bob's advice... or had he?

