

CHAPTER FIVE

Jesus

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It should come as no surprise that a volume on Christians requires a chapter on Jesus, called the Christ by his earliest followers in the movement that would later be labelled Christianity, and upon whom much of Christian scholarship and identity rests. However, in keeping with the Lived-Religion approach of this work, I shall be exploring the diversity of interpretations of Jesus that have impacted upon everyday Christians' lives, rather than the grand historical or theological narratives that have been preferenced in previous generations of scholarship. Jesus matters to Christians. Interpretations of his life, teachings, death and resurrection sit at the heart of many individual Christians' daily lives, and their relationship with God and each other. It is not for nothing that many Christians ask, 'What Would Jesus Do?' when making decisions in their everyday lives. But to which Jesus are we referring? Whilst this volume moves beyond the theological paradigms of previous approaches to Christianity, we may still learn from this body of scholarship. In his seminal chapter, originally published in 1972, Don Cupitt outlined the diversity of Christian responses to Jesus using the famous title 'One Jesus, Many Christs?' Intriguingly formulated as a question, Cupitt was arguing for a liberalization of theological approaches, not to the historical figure, but to the myriad interpretations of that figure through a diversity of social, political and religious contexts. In this chapter, I wish to continue in the spirit of Cupitt, not to write theology as he was doing, but to unpack the Lived Religion-in-action of numerous Christian individuals and communities that represent this broad spectrum of interpretations of Jesus – indeed, Jesuses – so as to understand the lived realities of relationships with Jesus for everyday Christians.

HISTORICAL JESUS(ES)

Jesus of Nazareth, a peripatetic religious teacher, described in the Gospels as a rabbi, lived 2,000 years ago in modern Israel and Palestine. Details of his life are scant, with the biblical record focusing upon his ministry and mission, rather than biographical details. What details are given are often contradictory, for example, when events in his ministry occurred, such as Luke 4:16–30, where the Rejection at Nazareth is placed early in Jesus' ministry, a story which both Matthew and Luke place at the end of Jesus' life. Similarly, some events are recorded in some gospels, but not in others – the most famous examples being the nativity stories, which are completely absent in Mark and John, and differ in detail in Matthew and Luke. We have no physical descriptions of Jesus, beyond poetic theological images in Revelation; his marital status is not discussed; and details of large chunks of his life are completely absent in the gospel stories. And yet, despite

the limited information on Jesus' life, the fact that he can be firmly placed within the written historical human record is of huge importance to Christianity and the identities of individual Christians.

Throughout the centuries, claims to the historicity of Jesus have underpinned the beliefs and actions of Christians. This continues to this day. For many Christians, their declarations of faith, or Creeds (from the Latin *credo* – I believe), are not simplistic listings of 'thou shalt' and 'thou shalt nots', but a declarative and performative public projection of identity. One of the most common creeds is the Nicene Creed, which includes major sections relating Jesus to a time, place and even political system and historical leader ('he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, he suffered and was buried'), which locate him in a particular historical setting. When Christians publicly declare their faith through the Creed, communally and aloud during services, they are linking back to a person in history to better understand their present. This performative and embodied ritual reaches its denouement for many Christians in the taking of the Eucharist, normally close after the reciting of the Creed, which Christians are instructed to 'do ... in remembrance of me' (Luke 22:19). In living Christian ritual, the historical Jesus and contemporary Christian identities are inextricably linked, and this can be seen throughout history.

The expansion of Christian churches and communities has often been conducted through links to the life of the historic person Jesus as well as the theological persona of the risen Christ. Throughout the history of Christian mission, interaction with other traditions has often been predicated upon discourse of religious and political imbalance. Often, this has taken the form of education and evangelism. Throughout the colonial project, Christian missionaries were careful to place Western European history in the direct lineage of the Classical world. In so doing, they were writing a history of justification for the spread of Christian ideas and powers. Often, these ideas were based on the promotion of Christian ideals to the detriment, and often denigration, of colonized peoples. For Christian missionaries, the historicity of Jesus enabled a combative form of dialogue with non-Christian communities, wherein the Christian stories were seen as historical and factual, and the stories of other religions were dismissed as myths or folktales. This had a direct influence on the ways in which missionaries lived and performed their Christian lives and duties. In colonial India, for example, narratives of denigration of the Hindu Puranas and tales of local deities were commonplace. Indeed, such criticisms were offered in formal settings as well. In a session on the eighth day of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, the Right Reverend John J. Keane, of Washington, gave a speech entitled, 'The Incarnation Idea in History and in Jesus Christ', which specifically separated human religious experience into that based on error, which for Keane was Eastern traditions, and that based on history, which for Keane was the Christian narrative, centred as it was on his historical understanding of the incarnation (Barrows 1893: 882).

Of course, not all examples lead to negative discourse or dialogue; when Christians remember the historical Jesus, they link to a specific moral authority who lived his life in accordance with a social code which preferenced the underdog or the outcast. For many Christians, replicating Jesus' life does not just include calls to moral action, which we shall explore below, but also include the physical replication or remembrance of the physical life and landscape of the historical Jesus. Across the lands of Jesus' life, from Capernaum in Galilee to the streets of Jerusalem, Christians purposefully try to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Indeed, pilgrims can even hire large eight-foot crosses from vendors in Jerusalem to re-enact Jesus' last steps prior to his passion. Scenes of pilgrim-tourists in jeans and

sports shoes tracing the steps of the historical Jesus are a common sight. However jarring such scenes may feel to some onlookers, who perhaps have knowledge that Jerusalem's street system has changed radically since Jesus' time, the factual historical links to Jesus are of secondary importance here; for the participant pilgrim, walking in the manner and spirit of Jesus, however closely or distantly, is a performative attempt to link to the Jesus of history in the present. For those seeking a more intimate experience of sharing space with the historical Jesus, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the baptism site in the River Jordan offer opportunities for connection between individual Christians and the Jesus of the first century.

However, Christians do not need to remove themselves from their locality of everyday routines to feel links to the life of Jesus. The Christian calendar is intimately linked with claims surrounding the life events of the historical Jesus. Indeed, the calendar of the United Nations, and that of the vast majority of countries on earth, is predicated upon the traditional date of Jesus' birth. On the macroscale, the recent (in historical terms) Millennium celebrations were a crucial event for many Christian celebrations and social action campaigns across the world. The traditional date of Jesus' birth was used as a conduit for political pressure to be applied to governments to drop the debt of African nations in the Jubilee 2000 campaign. To this end, millions of Christians took to the streets of major capitals demanding an end to debt payments by developing ex-colonial nations. Similarly, on the microscale, events within each calendar year are explicitly linked to the life events of Jesus. Whilst dates may be contested, both for Jesus' birth, which was unlikely to have occurred in December, and with Easter, where not only do the Eastern and Western forms of Christianity still differ in their calculation, but which still operates under a lunar calendar to which differs in Eastern and Western traditions due to lunar calculations, key events in the liturgical year remind Christians, and often impel Christians, to think and act in remembrance of the actions of Jesus. It is perhaps noteworthy that, whilst the theological narratives about Jesus (e.g. his transfiguration and ascension) are major liturgical festivals in many modern Christian churches, it is the life events of the human Jesus (his birth, baptism and death) that are most popularly remembered, replicated and celebrated in wider Christian societies.

Intriguingly, exploring how Christians choose to relate to the historical Jesus is a fine way of encountering and engaging with the diversity of living Christianity. Indeed, the creedal statements, with which we began this section, were formulated in the early Church in direct response to 'heresies', where arguments over Jesus' incarnation in history took centre-place. This diversity of views continues to this day; for example, the fact that Jesus lived (incarnated) as a male sits at the heart of Vatican opposition to women priests, wherein it is argued that females cannot stand *in persona Christi*. This position may be understood within a theological framework of incarnation, but the central point is that the physical, historical, male, human form of the Jesus of history is required for any understanding of a hypostatic union: the central argument for much of Christianity that Jesus was fully human and fully divine. This focus on the physical body of Jesus – a body which lived in time and place in history – informs much worship and art in Christian traditions. Sometimes, even, this focus on the historical, human, Jesus has taken precedence over claims for his divine nature. In Unitarian Christian traditions, Jesus is seen as unequivocally human – a moral exemplar and social and religious saviour, but not a cosmological or divine figure. Similarly, interpretations of Christianity framed within the Deist philosophy of many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers, including many of the Founding Fathers of the United States of America, led to a focus on the

historical, human Jesus in preference to the cosmological or theological claims for his divinity. Most famously espoused in the Jefferson Bible of 1820 (never actually called a 'Bible' by its author, but popularly known thus ever since), this view saw Jesus as a moral guide, but removed all references to miracles or claims to divinity. Whilst, of course, this remains a minority view within Christian communities, it helpfully highlights a common theme across most Christian traditions, from the mainstream to the edges, which is the importance of the historical Jesus in the interpretation and projection of religious identities of everyday Christians throughout history.

GLOBAL JESUS(ES)

A section on a 'Global Jesus' must be carefully negotiated to avoid assumptions of social, political or geographical dominance in groups of Christians around the world. The term has limitations, but I am using it in this instance to describe the diversity of settings and contexts in which Jesus has been interpreted, reinterpreted and related to by everyday Christians. The historical Jesus, outlined in our preceding section, was a man who lived in a specific time, in a specific place and who, we must presume as biographical details do not exist to tell us, looked a specific way. As I regularly remind my first-year undergraduate students, Jesus was Jewish – ethnically, culturally, linguistically, politically and geographically. Bringing us back to our theme of 'One Jesus, Many Christs', however, it is clear that for many Christians, their interpretation of Jesus is not limited to any of these facets of his identity, and it is to this diversity of interpretations that I refer when I use the term 'Global Jesus'.

Historical narratives are dominated by certain power groups, and it is clear that the global spread of Christianity, away from its Judean and Galilean heartland, has been driven by the imbalance of colonial power. From the Roman Empire to Dutch and Portuguese expansionism in the seventeenth century to the might of the British Empire in the nineteenth century, colonialism and Christianity have often gone hand in hand. Unsurprisingly, this has caused depictions of Jesus, the most significant religious symbol and persona of these colonizing powers, to take on attributes of the dominant groups. From the Roman Statesman depicted in full ceremonial toga in the Hinton St Mary mosaic of early fourth-century Roman Britain to Cranach the Younger's *The Crucifixion (Allegory of Redemption)* of 1555, Jesus is clearly depicted as 'Western', with pale skin, and either wearing or surrounded by people wearing 'Western' styles of clothing. This Western Christ – the Caucasian Jesus of so much Christian art and imagery – is perhaps the clearest example of the Globalised Jesus. Whilst, on the one hand, this can be explained by the power of colonial rulers and patrons to shape the world in their image, a more everyday explanation is also required. Quite simply, Christians relate to Jesus through a lens of their own making. It is to be expected that artists, film-makers and religious leaders will imagine and describe Jesus in terms that are relatable for their given society. As much of the 'story' of Christianity has been dominated by Western Europe, from the Celtic saints of the early middle ages, through the Reformation, to the height of the colonial model in the nineteenth century, it is to be expected that many of these stories of Jesus will be 'Western'. Of course, it is also the case that interpretations of a 'Western' Jesus have often led to 'White Jesus' imagery being used to perpetuate a colonial, nationalistic or outright racist view of 'others', wherein salvation came to be seen as being linked to notions of ethnicity and nationality. Indeed, some recent scholarship suggests this

underpins recent political forms of Christian Nationalism in the United States (Jun et al. 2018). Normally, however, such understandings of Jesus have more benign origins, in the appropriation of the historical Semitic Jesus into contexts more relatable for worshippers. Examples of this from Central America include the Christo Negro and Black Nazarene statues of Jesus. From Panama and Mexico, respectively, although with the latter having moved to the Philippines in the seventeenth century, the statues are depictions of dark-skinned Jesus figures, far removed from the Semitic historical Jesus. Reflecting the populations in which they were created, the statues have both become major centres of pilgrimage and veneration for Christians, and the Black Nazarene has received approval from both Innocent X and Pius VII. Diverse interpretations of Jesus go far beyond physical appearance, however. In his sculpture *Tortured Christ*, Brazilian artist Guido Rocha has created a work which almost literally cries out for our attention: a black-skinned Jesus with a large Afro hairstyle. It is the tension of the body and pain of the face which is the centre of the viewer's attention. Leaning out from the cross, Jesus is here depicted screaming in agony, straining his body to escape the trauma of the crucifixion, a figure who you genuinely believe will be screaming in panicked fear, 'Eloi Eloi lama sabachthani?' ('My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Mark 15:34). This is a human Christ, a Brazilian Christ. He brings together history, theology and the lived religio-political experience of Christians in South America for Rocha, who himself was tortured by the secret police in Chile and subsequently fled to Switzerland (Weber 1979). Sometimes, such localized depictions of Jesus are the result of segregation, oppression or disenfranchisement of groups of people who formulate their own depictions of and paths to Jesus through social and political necessity. This phenomenon can be seen in the development of black-led churches. In the West Midlands of England, the New Testament Church of God was founded in 1962 by migrants from the Caribbean, many of whom had arrived in the famous 'Windrush' generation, named after the first ship to dock in London carrying Commonwealth migrants who had been invited to help rebuild post-War Britain and who were memorably celebrated in the opening ceremony of the 2012 London Olympics. It is ironic, therefore, that the New Testament Church of God was opened 'for West Indians' (*Express and Star* 1962) when they did not find a welcome in the Churches attended by the majority-white population. In other contexts, Jesus has been reformulated and related to as direct responses to colonialism – this is a central argument of Rastafari views of Dread Jesus (Spencer 1999) – and such responses not just lead to new church structures, movements and organizations but deeply affect public projections of Christian faith. As Barack Obama gave a eulogy on 26 June 2015 for nine black Christians murdered in their church in Charleston, South Carolina, by a white supremacist nine days earlier, he broke into hesitant and understated song when he read the words of the hymn 'Amazing Grace'. It is hard to imagine George W. Bush or Bill Clinton having projected their religious beliefs in the same way.

A further note to consider on Global Jesus(es) is that it is not just Christians who tell stories of Jesus. Now, this is a volume on studying Christians, so it is not the place to consider non-Christian interpretations of Jesus for their own sake. This is a wide area of scholarship, and it is of course noteworthy that Jesus is considered a prophet within Muslim traditions, hence the focus of much work in this area (Khalidi 2003; Barker and Gregg 2010; Leirvik 2010). However, this area of research is still important for Christians because, even if it is not Christian voices telling stories about Jesus, those stories impact upon how Jesus is understood, and Christians have, in many periods of history, responded to these stories with their own narratives, which in turn inform their

own communal and individual identities. In India, Rammohun Roy wrote *The Precepts of Jesus*, coincidentally in the same year (1820) as Jefferson's similar text, which understood Jesus within an ethical framework, without recourse to his divinity. This controversial act not only highlighted Hindu views of Jesus in opposition to the narratives of the colonial powers but also informed, indeed dominated, Christian responses for many years to come, particularly with regard to the writings of the Serampore Trio of Missionaries, William Carey, Joshua Marshman and William Ward, who would fall out with Roy, having previously worked with him on social campaigns for women's rights in India. Similarly, later in the century, Swami Vivekananda would subsume his understanding of Jesus into his own Hindu worldview, most famously at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, which drew ire from attending Christian missionaries, and culminating in his noting in a January 1900 lecture in Los Angeles that 'the Nazarene himself was an Oriental ... with all your attempts to paint him with blue eyes and yellow hair, the Nazarene was still an Oriental' (Vivekananda 1900). Such a standpoint not only emboldened Hindu voices but also strengthened the cultural capital of Christians seeking universal understandings of their religion, such as George Candlin and Emile Hirsch (Gregg 2019). Sugirtharajah similarly argues that, in Japan, India and China in the last few hundred years, Jesus needed to be understood by local Christians 'in relation to [their own] region's spiritual sages' for local Christians to write their own culturally relevant stories of Jesus (Sugirtharajah 2018: 249).

Indeed, right up to the modern day, Muslim scholars and leaders have sought to use Jesus as a bridge between Muslims and Christians in interfaith dialogue; the 'Common Word' project, based upon a document with over 100 signatories from Muslim communities, uses the teachings of Jesus and the words of the Qur'an as a basis for shared experience between Christians and Muslims. Instead of focusing on the many differences, which it does acknowledge, it preferences the teachings and role of Jesus as a significant figure for both Christians and Muslims in an effort to garner closer cooperative dialogue between communities (see Barker and Gregg 2010: 130–35 and also www.acommonword.com).

Such discussions over the person and persona of Jesus, which remind us that there are many stories of Jesus, ensure that Christians' own stories of Jesus need to be remembered as fluid and relational renegotiations, often in discourse and dialogue with non-Christian voices, from first-century Jewish and Roman authorities to modern-day Muslim interfaith practitioners, to better frame their own understandings of Jesus.

PERSONAL JESUS(ES)

However a Christian interprets and identifies Jesus in his or her cultural and social context, it is the case that relationships with Jesus are particular and personal. Theological understandings of Jesus are predicated upon personal theism; Jesus is the second person of the Trinity, within which the first person is the Father in Heaven – Jesus' 'abba', or Father, with whom he spoke in Gethsemane (Mark 14:36). This understanding of God is relational, interactive and personal. For Christians, interaction with Jesus on this personal level is a key facet of worship and religious identity. Crucially, however, just because a relationship is intensely personal does not mean that it is enacted in solitude – for the vast majority of Christians, their personal relationship with Jesus is embodied and performed in public and communal settings.

One way in which Christians relate to Jesus is through prayer. The fundamental prayer of much Christian liturgy and worship – the Lord’s Prayer – was taught by Jesus to his followers (Matthew 6:9–13) and is spoken by Christians, often together in churches, in remembrance of that teaching to reaffirm their relationship with God. Similarly, Jesus is often the focal point of prayer for Christians. The ancient Celtic prayer – traditionally attributed to Saint Patrick of Ireland, and therefore sometimes called Saint Patrick’s Breastplate, but more properly called a Lorica – petitions for the protection and presence of Jesus in a Christian’s life when it invokes, ‘Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me’ (Trans. C. F. Alexander). Other prayers are directed specifically at the understanding of Jesus as not only bodily protector but salvific redeemer – for example, with the *Anima Christi*, a medieval prayer popularized by Ignatius of Loyola in his 1548 *Spiritual Exercises*, which relates specifically to Jesus’ body and its role in our salvation: ‘Soul of Christ, be my sanctification, Body of Christ, be my salvation, Blood of Christ, fill my veins, Water from the side of Christ, wash out my stains. May Christ’s Passion strengthen me’ (English translation by John Henry Newman, popularly used in contemporary Catholic prayer). Such prayers, for Christians, bring the physical, historical, Jesus and the cosmological Christ into their everyday lives to assert and affirm their place in the world: their creation as children of God, their lives in communion with the body of Christ (understood theologically and socially) and their future salvation in the hope of eternal life. Very often, such prayers and declarations of the importance of the relationship with Jesus are declared in public and in communion with other Christians.

Relationships with Jesus are often cited as markers of success with gratitude and devotion expressed to those listening. Recent examples of this phenomenon are the 2012 victory speech of US Masters Golf Champion Bubba Watson, who thanked ‘my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’, and the actor Chris Pratt, who used the same phrasing when acknowledging his relationship with Jesus upon accepting a Teen Choice Award on behalf of his 2017 film *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2*. Such public declarations of relationships with Jesus are not limited to entertainment, but are also common in political discourse. At the time of writing, the current presidents of the United States (Donald J. Trump) and Brazil (Jair Bolsonaro) have made public declarations of their Christianity central planks of their outreach to sections of the electorate, and cross-country voting groups within the European Parliament are often convened along socio-religious lines, with the most notable example being the European People’s Party, more commonly known as Christian Democrats, which is based upon a Roman Catholic-influenced social and economic worldview emergent in the mid-twentieth century. Examples are often much more personal (but affecting the public) as well – in Britain, Prime Minister Tony Blair famously spoke of praying when making his decision to invade Iraq in the second Gulf War.

Whilst public declarations of relationships with Jesus are found throughout Christian traditions, it is perhaps most common for evangelical Christians to make these public proclamations. Such Christians often use the phrase of being ‘born again’, when they enter into a new relationship with Jesus as their personal saviour, causing often dramatic changes in their lives and conduct. In so doing, the two themes that are most commonly referred to by born-again Christians are ethical living and salvation. Whilst all Christians ask questions about how to live a good life, and how to live morally, one particular movement has become popular within evangelical forms of Christianity in particular, which is the WWJD movement. Standing for ‘What Would Jesus Do?’,

the term originates in an 1896 text by Charles M. Sheldon, fully titled *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* It is this subtitle, posed as a question, which forces Christians to confront a key moral and ethical dilemma: If Jesus were in my shoes, how would he respond to this situation? Of course, this reminds us again of how important not just the theological Christ but the historical Jesus is for modern Christian identities. In the Gospels, there are numerous stories of Jesus' compassion, kindness and help. From the healing of the bleeding woman (Mark 5:25–34) to the eating with sinners (Mark 2:13–17), Jesus often gives the example of care for the outcast. Importantly, Jesus was also angry at times (Matthew 7:5; Mark 3:5) and each occasion led to action. Many Christians have taken up this challenge to action, including Jim Wallis and his Sojourners movement, which seeks to create a world based on social justice, as understood by Jesus' example. Named after the sojourners of the Old Testament – 'You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt' (Exodus 22:21, ESV) – they seek to work on behalf of the oppressed, marginalized or under-represented in campaigns such as anti-racism programmes, action on violence against women and climate change lobbying for future generations. Large-scale movements such as Wallis' have also operated spontaneously in recent years, as Christians have called for social action responses to global crises. One particular event was the Occupy movement, which took over large parts of Wall Street in New York in 2011 in direct response to the fall-out from the 2007–8 financial crisis, which affected so many people on low incomes, and where the blame was popularly laid at the door of rich workers in the finance sector. Also targeted in 2011 until early 2012 was the City of London, the square-mile centre of the capital famous for its banking quarter, where protests centred upon St Paul's Cathedral after an injunction banned protestors' tents from the London Stock Exchange. Clearly visible in the huge crowds were banners asking, 'WWJD?' and the Rev. Jesse Jackson told the crowd in a speech, 'You represent Jesus standing outside the temple' (Walker 2011). Often, however, Christians act independently when using their own consciences to make moral actions. Indeed, in Sheldon's original novel, the story follows individuals attempting to ask, 'WWJD?' throughout their everyday lives, a theme echoed when the stories were turned into films (Makowski 2010; Sabloff 2015). From voting preferences, career routes, to sexual activity and celibacy, Christians often remind themselves to ask WWJD through popular cultural material items such as badges (pins) and wristbands adorned with WWJD, which have been popular since the 1990s in particular.

Personal relationships with Jesus are, of course, also understood within a soteriological framework as well as a moral one. For Christians, Jesus died a salvific death, was resurrected and reigns eternal with the Father in the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus matters, not just for this life but for the future life to come for Christians. This link between Jesus and an individual's personal salvation is clear in many forms of Christianity. From the Vatican's teaching of '*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*' (no salvation outside the Church), wherein we must remember that the Church is considered the Body of Christ, and the Pope as the Vicar (meaning representative) of Christ, to advertisements on London buses which quoted Matthew 25:41, warning that anyone who turned against Jesus would face punishment after death. This latter so perturbed the journalist Ariane Sherine that she wrote a newspaper column which gave rise to the global phenomenon of the Atheist Bus Campaign, which paid for counter-adverts attacking belief in God (Sherine 2008). The links between Jesus and individual salvation were a central point of discussion in the early Church, and teachings predicated upon this are focal to modern Christian expressions of worship and festivity. Whilst Christmas may be the highest-profile annual event in the

secular-Christian calendar, it is Easter which is the most important celebration in the Christian story. The eternal importance of Jesus' role in salvation should be considered much like Pascal's famous wager, wherein he argued that either God does or does not exist, and so therefore the sensible option is to wager that he does, for the payoff is eternal happiness or eternal damnation, compared to time-limited stricture in this life on earth. Similarly, the expectation of eternal reward or punishment (whilst not taught literally by the mainstream churches since the Victorian period) compels many Christians and Christian groups to proactively evangelize. Often, examples which reach the public consciousness, and that appear in the media, are combative forms of evangelism. Whilst not representing the views of majority Christians, the Westboro Baptist Church, from Topeka, Kansas, has successfully managed a media profile based upon their unapologetic damnation of 'fags' and 'fag-enablers'. Such actions are aimed at not just shaming their targets (who have included Swedish vacuum cleaner manufacturers, Elton John and Princess Diana) but in causing repentance for worldviews or actions that, the Westboro community believe, anger God. Examples need not be so extreme – across Australia, Western Europe and America, schools based on socially conservative forms of Christianity, often self-identifying as evangelical, link their approaches to ethical living and personal conduct in their teaching curricula to the need for a personal relationship with Jesus to gain salvation. Indeed, whilst it is easy to highlight fringe groups such as Westboro in linking views of Jesus and ethical behaviour to salvation, it is important to note that examples also come from the centre of Christian life as well; Karen Pence, wife of current US vice president Mike Pence, works for a school with a clear code of conduct for staff, parents and pupils, which links personal conduct, and relationship with Jesus, with future salvation (Immanuel Christian School 2018). Personal relationships with Jesus, interpreted whether compassionately or combatively (if indeed they are mutually exclusive), sit at the heart of lived Christianity and the performative and public declaration of Christian identity and life for many Christians.

POPULAR JESUS(ES)

Several chapters in this volume cover aspects of popular culture and Christianity. In this short section, I want to highlight how these contexts often centre upon the person of Jesus in particular, rather than Christianity in general. Examples must be necessarily limited, so I will restrict myself to reference to film, theatre and sport, but my intention is to show personal Christian responses to Jesus in popular cultural events within society.

Since the dawn of cinema, visual depictions of Jesus have been common, from Guy-Blaché's *La Vie Du Christ* (1906), through Stevens' *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (1965) and Scorsese's *Last Temptation of Christ* (1988) to Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004). Furthermore, there has been much scholarship on Christ motifs in films, from Scorsese dramas to Star Wars, and Alien to Rocky (Martin 1995; Deacy 2001). My focus, however, is not on these theological redemption or salvific motifs that filmmakers may have used, which were inspired or influenced by Christian thought, but on how Christians have used these films as ways of relating to Jesus in their lived expression of Christianity in their personal lives. Much of the time, this presents itself in the collective response of Christian communities to these depictions of Jesus. After the release of Gibson's film, research has shown that many Christians were visiting theatres to see the film multiple times (Brown et al. 2007). It was also not uncommon for church groups to organize outings to see the film – but they were not going to be entertained, but to enhance their

relationship with Jesus. In their research, Brown et al. interviewed 1,800 moviegoers and found that respondents who identified as Christians (91.8 per cent of the respondents) found that watching the film enhanced their faith; 46.2 per cent stated they watched the film for ‘personal spiritual growth’ and ‘the majority of respondents believed that their “knowledge of Jesus Christ was increased” through their viewing of the film’ (Brown et al. 2007: 102). For Christians, therefore, watching the film was not a passive act, but an active participation in their relationship with Jesus; an on-going, dynamic relationship which could be enhanced by a film as well as participation in formal rituals and community activities. Such interactions have been common throughout history for Christians; from the Middle Ages onwards across Europe, Mystery plays were common public events on high days and holidays – none perhaps more famous than those of the city of York in northern England, where a whole host of plays (with early records suggesting as many as fifty-one) were performed by local Guilds on the Feast of Corpus Christi, enacting events in the life of Jesus. At these events, Guild members would undertake roles relevant to their profession: vintners for the Wedding at Cana, carpenters for the Crucifixion and so on. Such was the emotion engendered by this participation in, and remembrance of, the life of Jesus, that in 1419, members of the public rioted against members of the carpenter’s Guild for their part in the death of Jesus (York Museums Trust 2019). Whilst such events are clearly extreme, they remind us of the embodied participation that Christians perform when they engage with the person and persona of Jesus in popular cultural events. Indeed, these traditions have been kept alive within modern societies, including in 2006, when the Manchester Passion was performed as a live-broadcast event using actors, musicians and songs from local Manchester bands (including The Smiths, Oasis, James and Joy Division). As a part of the event, local people participated in crowd scenes, including the trial and judgement of Jesus, processions with crosses and even direct-to-camera interviews with actors discussing their understanding of their faith, including a Scottish punk character and born-again Christian, who argued that were Jesus to be around today, ‘he would be a punk ... as he hung around with the freaks and the weirdos’ (King-Dabbs and Powell 2006).

The rise of organized team sports in the Victorian era has clear links to Christianity. Rugby developed as a unique code of football in the English public schools as a direct response to calls for a muscular form of Christianity, where pupils were expected to be healthy in body and healthy of soul. Similarly, some of the oldest football clubs in the world were founded specifically by church communities. These include famous English teams such as Everton, Manchester City and Tottenham Hotspur. Although these are largely related to the social work of Christian groups in general, rather than explicit links to the Jesus person and persona in particular, when we explore the lives and actions of individual athletes, we often find performative and very public links to the importance of Jesus in the lives of everyday Christians. Whilst there are innumerable Christian athletes and sports persons in different sports across the world, two of the highest-profile examples in recent years have been the Brazilian footballer Kaká and the British triple jumper Jonathan Edwards. Ricardo Izecson dos Santos Leite, better known as Kaká, was FIFA World Footballer of the Year in 2007 and has won every major club honour, in addition to the FIFA World Cup, with his native Brazil, in 2002. As one of the highest-profile sportsmen in the world, he had unique access to millions of devoted fans and followers and was the first major star from any sport to amass 10 million twitter followers (Sporting Intelligence 2012). Like many footballers of his privileged generation, he could have chosen to follow the cult of personality so prevalent in many major sports stars. For

Kaká, however, his relationship with Jesus over-rode this. The off-spring of middle-class parents from Gama, in Western Brazil, Kaká was raised in an evangelical Christian family, but his life changed forever when, at the age of 18, and with his promising football career burgeoning, he had an accident jumping into a swimming pool, which broke vertebrae in his back. His subsequent recovery to full fitness and to a career at the highest echelons of his sport was attributed by Kaká not to medical science, but to his relationship with Jesus. Kaká saw a miracle in his recovery and has afterwards dedicated his life to public worship of, and subjugation to, Jesus. In addition to numerous interviews telling his story, Kaká consistently celebrated goals by pointing to heaven and had his personalized (and expensively sponsored) boots hand-stitched with the phrase 'Jesus in First Place'. Perhaps most famously of all, he often wore a T-shirt underneath his team jersey, which he would remove at the end of high-profile matches, to reveal the slogan 'I Belong to Jesus'.

Similarly, the British Triple Jumper Jonathan Edwards, a former European, Commonwealth, World and Olympic Champion, and still world record holder for his event, had a career dominated by his personal relationship with Jesus. The son of a Church of England vicar, Edwards famously refused to jump on Sundays during the early part of his career – a decision which cost him the chance to compete at the 1991 World Championships. Changing his mind in 1993, following conversation with his father, Edwards went on to compete on Sundays and become the most decorated jumper in athletics history. Interestingly, Edwards renounced his Christian faith in 2007, exemplifying the fluid and complex nature of negotiated religious identities both within and without religious communities. In both Kaká and Edwards, therefore, we can see examples of performative and publicly declarative forms of embodied worship – quite literally, where their relationship with Jesus influenced how they used their bodies, in the same way as Christians performing Eucharist in formal settings. Christians have relationships with Jesus at all times of their lives, at work and at play, in formal and informal worship settings.

ALTERNATIVE JESUS(ES)

Lastly, but certainly not least, I wish to briefly address 'alternative' Jesus(es). By alternative, I mean that which is not a part of the mainstream teachings of most Christian churches. Importantly, this does not make them any less relevant for the lives of individual Christians. If, as scholars, we explore Christianity as a living religion, preferencing embodied and performative lives of everyday Christians, we must engage with diversity to understand the full spectrum of Christian experience.

The first alternative Jesus I wish to highlight is the female Christ, or Christa as she is sometimes known. Popularized by feminist theologians in the last few decades, the term 'Christa' comes from a sculpture made by the British artist Edwina Sandys in 1974, and which was hung briefly in St John the Divine in New York in 1984 before being removed due to controversy. The sculpture is a simple, and very traditional, crucifixion scene with Jesus on a cross and little else, with the exception being that Jesus is depicted as having a female body, including breasts. Sandys, who is not religious, has previously noted that the sculpture was designed to highlight the suffering of women around the world – much like our earlier example of Rocha's *Tortured Christ*, it is designed to highlight suffering of those relating to Jesus in the body and form of Jesus himself (Ballen 2011). In her recent work *Seeking the Risen Christa*, Slee notes that '[whilst] some see any attempt to image Christ in female form as outrageous, even blasphemous ... Christa is not some

minority, off-beam idiosyncratic preoccupation of a group of specialist academics or extreme feminists ... the Christa is one among many symbols of a re-emergence of the (divine) feminine' (Slee 2011: 3, 6). In Slee's approach, Christa can act in the same way as queer, black and post-colonial approaches, which each, in their own way, undermine the traditional narratives of Jesus, Christ and Christianity without doing damage – they refocus on the experiences of everyday Christians in ways relevant to them, and from which we may all learn, whatever our gender or sexuality.

Similarly, depictions of Jesus as queer have acted in recent years as counter-points to dominant heteronormative narratives within Christian imagery and practice. These have ranged from characters in protest and Pride marches (Farrell 2017) to subjects of poetry or literature. Indeed, so controversial have depictions of queer Jesus been that the last ever successful prosecution under English blasphemy laws (now rescinded) was for a poem by James Kirkup titled 'The Love that Dares to Speak Its Name', printed in *Gay News* in 1979, and for which the editor received a jail sentence (suspended) and fine, which described a physical homosexual relationship between Jesus on the cross and the centurion at his feet (Pink News 2008). Yet it is important to note that depictions of Jesus as queer or gay are not usually intended to shock; they may well be juxtaposed against heteronormative depictions, but they should not be reduced to simple protests or reactions; queering Jesus, for many Christians, represents a loving and spiritual way of connecting with their saviour, in ways that traditional forms of Christian imagery or theology have not always allowed. In his article 'How to Be Fashionably Queer: Reminding the Church of the Importance of Sexual Stories', Hamilton Simpson notes that 'A valuable starting point for reclaiming the importance of sexual stories can be found in recognizing that the biblical texts, including the story of Jesus, are themselves sexual stories. By identifying sexual possibilities in Scripture and by relating to Jesus as a sexual being people will be liberated to connect their own sexual stories with God's story' (Hamilton Simpson 2005: 102). Indeed, in his work, Hamilton Simpson compares the acceptance that queer Christians received in fashion boutiques, where conversations on sexuality and sexual relations were commonplace, with the unwillingness of churches to engage in the sexual stories of their congregants, ironically noting that the former has often provided a more pastoral, spiritual space for queer Christians. Linking conceptions of Queer Jesus to our earlier comments on the importance of individual Christians' relationships with Jesus as an influence on their life choices and public expressions of their faith, Hamilton Simpson helpfully notes, 'Opening the closet and discovering that Jesus can be dressed in a sexual outfit different from the naked and bloodied body that has become his characteristic fashion label enables an understanding of his life that is connected with sexual liberation and justice' (Hamilton Simpson 2003: 107).

Much of this chapter has purposefully linked to the human, historical and embodied Jesus with whom Christians relate in their lived expressions of Christianity. This is also true for transgender and intersex Christians. In 'Sex Otherwise: Intersex, Theology and the Maleness of Jesus', Susannah Cornwall argues that 'sex is a human rather than a divine attribute and that maleness is not a necessary carrier of Jesus' soteriological capacity. Human sex does not in itself image God, but is a channel for other divine characteristics, such as generativity and relationality, imaged in humans' (Cornwall 2014). Such a viewpoint does not argue against the male body of the historical Jesus, but instead urges Christians to engage with the Christ-nature of Jesus, to replicate his divine characteristics beyond physical, gendered identities. One performer who has undertaken this task is Jo Clifford. A playwright born in England and raised as a boy (John), Jo transitioned

in the late 2000s and is most famous for her self-acted performances of her character 'Jesus, Queen of Heaven'. Jo's relationship with Christianity is fluid, and she returned to a reading of the Gospels after receiving threats and abuse on the street. Inspired by the 'wisdom and love' of the narrative, Clifford performs an embodied and relational understanding of Jesus relevant to her life experience (Clifford 2018). Whilst such voices are often muted in Christian dialogue, it is a certainty that they will become a larger part of the Christian conversation in years and decades to come.

Finally in this section, and indeed chapter, I wish to raise the issue of 'alternative Jesus(es)' in a more general way. *Every* interpretation of Jesus is an alternative. There is no one story of Jesus. Throughout this chapter, I have linked to events in the life of Jesus by using references to the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And yet, these are not the only stories of Jesus, even from the early Church. *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, probably dating from the early- to mid-second century, shows us a very different story of Jesus – one in which he even kills children he is playing with as a youngster, before raising some back to life (Ehrman 1999: 256–57). This document, along with others such as *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ*, *The Gospel of Philip* and *The Gospel of Peter*, tells alternative stories of Jesus which did not enter the Canon but were produced by writers negotiating and projecting their own understandings of Jesus, relevant to their own worldview, time and place. Christians have always done this, and they will continue to do so. Christianity's stories of Jesus, and the impact of these on the lived realities of individual Christians, are ongoing narratives.