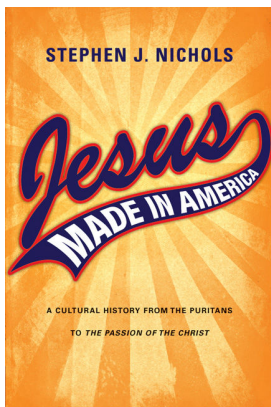


AUTHOR Q & A



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Jesus Made in America
240 pages, paper,
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Describe the contemporary significance of the title *Jesus Made in America*.

Stephen Nichols: As American evangelicals we tend to think of ourselves as immune to cultural influences in the way we read the Bible or develop our church practices or form our beliefs. We think our beliefs and practices come straight from the pages of Scripture. If only that were true! The reality is that we are children of our age, deeply impacted by cultural pressures and influences. This book uncovers those cultural pressures and influences on the way we think about Christ, influences that span the centuries of American culture. The Jesus of most Americans and even of some American evangelicals is one who has been made in America.

Why did you decide to focus on American evangelicalism?

Stephen: Mostly because I am one and because I live, work and worship among fellow American evangelicals. There is much I embrace about my identity, but there are some things that make me blush. Only in America would you have a book titled *Jesus, CEO* or its sequel, *Jesus, Inc.* *Jesus Made in America* is a critique of these embarrassing elements, but it is not only a critique. The book also points us in a different direction. We need to be aware of these cultural influences. We need to see how they have made Jesus. Finally, we can be fairly amusing with our Jesus golf balls and theme parks, which is to say the subject of American evangelicalism provides great fodder for humor.

You walk readers through various cultural epochs to show how the different cultures shaped notions of Jesus. For example, how was Jesus shaped during the early Republic?

Stephen: The founders had a lot to say about Jesus, but it's what they didn't say that matters. Jesus tended to be looked upon as a great moral teacher, perhaps the greatest moral teacher and the greatest exemplar for citizens of a civil society. But, with an exception here or there, Jesus was not deemed to be God by the founders. Thomas Jefferson is a case in point. He stripped Jesus of his miracles, of his resurrection and of his deity. All the while, Jefferson protested that he was a "real Christian." Jefferson's Jesus is the basis for the American version of Christianity as a civil religion, a version that has plenty of room for morality and civility, but little room for theology and biblical orthodoxy.

AUTHOR Q & A



Stephen J. Nichols (Ph.D., Westminster Theological Seminary) is a professor of theology and American church history at Lancaster Bible College and Graduate School. He is the author of a number of books, including *The Reformation: How a Monk and a Mallet Changed the World*, *Heaven on Earth: Capturing Jonathan Edwards's Vision of Living in Between* and *For Us and for Our Salvation: The Doctrine of Christ in the Early Church*.

What are some cultural implications of how Jesus is made in America today?

Stephen: There are two among many that stand out—commodification and politics. Jesus has been sold, from action figures to bracelets, from bobble heads to T-shirts. This commodification has the effect of sentimentalizing and trivializing Jesus, turning Christianity and Christ into a product that is marketed, bought and sold. Then there's politics. Jesus has been claimed on both the right wing and the left wing of American political ideologies. The reality is that no political party is nearly large enough to contain Christ and the full complement of his teachings. A further reality is that the gospel tends to suffer when it's identified with a political agenda. This was a lesson Christ had to teach his own disciples, who at times attempted to enlist Christ in the service of a political cause. We tend to be too easily seduced by the powers of the market and of politics. Jesus came to free us from such seductions. Ironically, we've attempted to bind him to them.

What do you hope to accomplish through *Jesus Made in America*?

Stephen: I hope to inform readers of these cultural influences so that we can have a greater self-awareness and understanding, which will hopefully lead us to a more faithful understanding of Jesus. Jesus has been made in America, many times over. Even if we develop an acute self-awareness, it is highly likely that he will continue to be remade by us and the generations to come. This self-awareness, nevertheless, should lead us to humility, and should lead us to Christ himself. Amidst all of this heaviness, however, I also don't want to take myself too seriously. The history of Jesus in American evangelicalism is not only informative, but also quite funny. I hope my readers laugh a little as they learn.