

Institution: University of Edinburgh		
Unit of Assessment: UoA 31 Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: Uncovering the Historical Jesus		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2004–2016		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Helen Bond	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor of Christian Origins	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2000–present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 1 August 2014–31 December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Bond's research has repositioned Jesus within his political, social and archaeological context while also shedding light on the crucial role women played within the early church. Her research has generated, influenced, and informed major television documentaries and radio programmes, reaching audiences worldwide. Through media and other forms of outreach, Bond has increased public awareness of, and interest in, the first-century historical context of the gospels, the life of Jesus, and early Christian communities. The extensive reach of Bond's work is apparent from viewing figures of almost 2m, international reviews, website hits, and supportive testimonies.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>Following doctoral research on Pontius Pilate and the Roman trial of Jesus, Professor Helen Bond (Lecturer since 2000; Professor since 2015) has widened her interest in the historical and political factors that shaped the life and death of Jesus. Her monograph <i>Caiaphas: Friend of Rome and Judge of Jesus?</i> (2004) (3.1) offered a more nuanced account of the crucifixion narrative that challenged a set of tired and stereotypical portraits shared by both scholars and the wider public. Following analysis of the socio-cultural and religious contexts of first-century Jerusalem, Bond proposed several new theories. These related primarily to the importance of maintaining the sanctity of the Passover feast, a genuine effort to preserve the Temple's holiness, and a desire to maintain the fragile priestly power base in pre-war Jerusalem. Although far from exonerating Caiaphas, Bond's research highlighted the intensely complex and precarious situation he faced. In doing so, Bond successfully uncovered a more relatable and human character.</p> <p>This investigation has been broadened to provide new insights about the role of Jesus himself, together with his opponents and followers in these events. In a monograph commissioned for Bloomsbury, <i>The Historical Jesus: A Guide for the Perplexed</i> (2012) (3.2), Bond expanded her interest in the historical Jesus to cover the entirety of his life. Once again, her interest was in situating Jesus within a credible first-century environment. Drawing on a thorough knowledge of ancient Judaism rather than later Christian hagiography, the book explores a number of contested topics: it argues for Jesus' birth in Nazareth; presents a more nuanced view of Jesus' relation to female followers which sees him operating within a more egalitarian stream of Judaism rather than promoting him as a 'proto-feminist'; it draws on social memory theory to</p>		

explain why the Markan and Johannine traditions ‘remember’ Jesus’ death on different days; and it presents a clear case for a shameful, trench-style burial, the location of which might easily have been lost by followers. The section on the possible motives underpinning Judas’s betrayal was informed by Bond’s discussions with Gerry Adams, the former leader of Sinn Féin. Adams’s reading of Judas’s betrayal as the defection of a ‘gang member’ illuminated the possible duress that has been overlooked in scholarship until this point (3.3).

In addition to her books, Bond has published 23 articles and chapters on the life of Jesus. Much of her work has focused on specific characters associated with the Jesus tradition; alongside those mentioned above, she has also produced studies of Barabbas, who she argues was wrongly imprisoned at the time of Jesus (3.4), Simon of Cyrene, who she argues was originally a further object of the soldiers’ mockery of Jesus (3.5), and the understated role of influential women in his movement (3.2, 3.6).

The quality of this body of work is readily attested *inter alia* by the commissioning of her 2012 monograph and acceptance of articles in high-quality peer-reviewed locations.

3. References to the research

3.1 Helen Bond, *Caiaphas: Friend of Rome and Judge of Jesus?* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2004). ISBN 9780664223328, (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.2 Helen Bond, *The Historical Jesus: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum/Bloomsbury, 2012) ISBN 9780567033178. (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.3 Blog post on Bond’s discussions with Gerry Adams. Helen Bond, ‘Jesus through the eyes of an Irish Republican’, *Bible and Interpretation Blog*, January 2010.
<http://www.bibleinterp.com/opeds/irish357904.shtml>

3.4. Helen Bond, ‘Barabbas Remembered’ in B. J. Oropeza, C. K. Robertson and D Mohrmann (eds.), *Jesus and Paul: Global Perspectives in Honour of James Dunn’ for his 70th Birthday* (London: SCM, 2009), 59–71. (Can be supplied by HEI on request)

3.5. Helen Bond, ‘Paragon of Discipleship? Simon of Cyrene in the Markan Passion Narrative’, in Kristian A. Bendoraitis and Nijay K. Gupta (eds.), *Matthew and Mark Across Perspectives; Essays in Honour of Stephen C. Barton and William R. Telford* (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 18–35. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567662132.ch-002> (Submitted as REF2)

3.6 Helen Bond, ‘Josephus on Herod’s Domestic Intrigue in the Jewish War’, *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43 (2012), 295–314. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006312X644128>

4. Details of the impact

Bond’s research has shaped documentaries and dramas, while generating strong national and local interest through public talks. Her approach and ideas have stimulated discussion about the historical Jesus, providing greater awareness of his first-century context and often deconstructing some of the standard assumptions surrounding his followers and the political and religious circumstances of his death. The large audiences and extensive media discussion of Bond’s research suggests a significant impact in relation to public awareness, with a heightened

sense of the critical historical work being undertaken on Christian origins. Her 2012 book has also been adopted as a coursebook in several universities, including Duke and Cambridge.

Upon the recommendation of the documentary's historical consultant, Bond featured as a 'talking head' on *Son of God*, a three-part BBC documentary broadcast Easter 2000. This generated further invitations: *Jesus Mysteries*; *Treasures Decoded – Spear of Destiny*; and *The Last Days of Jesus* are a select few of the many programmes to which Bond has contributed nuanced insights about the historical roles of Jesus and his contemporaries in supposedly well-known narratives. These continue to be available by download (5.1). Through these projects, Bond has accumulated a wealth of media experience and forged a reputation as a go-to figure for producers making films about Jesus.

In 2016, Ray Bruce first pitched *Jesus: Countdown to Calvary* (CTC) to RTE, citing Bond as a major contributor. Involved from CTC's inception, Bond reviewed the script, discussed content regularly with Bruce, and engaged in consultancy work in Israel. CTC aired in the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and across Europe over Easter 2018. It was 'Pick of the Day' in all leading Australian newspapers, while viewing figures in Ireland numbered c.235,000 on Easter Sunday (over 15% of the available audience) with a further c.40,000 watching a late-night repeat. It was aired by 40 PBS stations; according to RTE's Head of Religion, 'To have 40 stations on board ... is very high take-up. The most I've ever achieved for a doc was 52 for a film about Pope Francis'. He stressed the value of Bond's input, writing: 'you should be proud of yourself for ... [bringing] an original, imaginative and high-quality exploration of the Easter story to audiences worldwide' (5.2). The production company stated: 'Exploring questions that have provided more than 2000 years of debate, the documentary offers fascinating insight from both religious and historical angles, filmed with the dynamic pacing of a political thriller' (5.3).

Together with King's College London's Professor Joan Taylor, Bond successfully proposed *Jesus's Female Disciples* (JFD) to Channel 4 (aired UK Easter 2018). Drawing on Bond's analysis of gendered motifs in the Herodian court (3.7), the show highlighted the existence of Jesus's female disciples using archaeological and textual sources. Co-presented by Bond and Taylor, it attracted a UK audience of 1,425,000 (5.4, p. 3). JFD received more press coverage than any other religious programme since the BBC's *Son of God* in 2001 (5.4, p. 45). It received extensive exposure prior to its release, featuring in the *Independent*, *The Times*, and the *Guardian*; six national newspapers cited it as 'Pick of the Day' (5.4 p.3; 5.5). The *Sunday Times* named it 'Critics' Choice', stating: 'it is worth hoping that this engaging and intrepid presenting duo are given more films to present together' (5.6). *Black Christian News*, *Christianity Today*, *Church News*, and the international Catholic magazine, the *Tablet*, aided uptake amongst Christians on both sides of the Atlantic. The *Church Times* described it as 'provocative... well worth showing to your Bible-study group – if you dare' (5.7). A *Guardian* reviewer remarked that the programme had arrived at 'an important moment at a time when we need to keep the discussion about equality going' (5.6), while the *Independent* stated that 'the evidence that women held senior roles in the Church... could mean that millions will have to rethink the origins of their faith' (5.5).

Email exchanges further testify to JFD's impact and novelty. One correspondent remarked on how JFD – together with a public talk Bond delivered in 2018 – had affected a local faith group: 'we hoped that your experience with finding women hiding in plain sight would help us to a more careful reading. Indeed, it certainly did' (5.8). The documentary's novelty was praised by a BBC

producer who wrote to Bond: 'to get such rich, thought-provoking, challenging and intelligent content on C4 (or any other TV channel) in a peak slot is an amazing achievement [...] [JDF] will have reached so many people (1.2 million I believe, more than can fit into the average university lecture theatre!)' (5.8).

Public understanding of Bond's research has also been facilitated via a succession of popular lectures. In February 2018 Bond featured as part of St Paul's Adult Learning Programme; with only 78 places available, it sold out 3 months in advance. The event's organiser called this level of demand 'unprecedented' and invited Bond and Taylor to return to St Paul's to discuss JFD, this time in a larger venue. With 500 tickets sold, the space was filled to capacity (5.9).

In 2012, The Religion Today website hosted a blog by Bond on 'Ten things I have learned about Jesus by writing a book about him'. By February 2020, the editor judged that the number of visits had exceeded 50,000 and that it remained a 'favourite on the site' (5.10). The posts on the blog are further indication of the scope and intensity of discussion generated by Bond's research and broadcasting.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1 *Son of God* (BBC, 2001) <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0281485/>

Jesus Mysteries (National Geographic, 2014) <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2la03n>

Treasures Decoded (Canada Channel 4/Smithsonian; UK, Channel 4, Oct 2014)

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt4194618/>

The Last Days of Jesus (PBS, US; Vision TV, Canada; UK, Channel 5, April 2017)

<https://www.pbssocal.org/programs/last-days-jesus/final-hours-bwhjmn/>

<https://uk.video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=mcafee&p=last+days+of+jesus+channel+5#id=1&vid=e9c0c775131bb47654177dd1eae8395a&action=click>

Jesus: Countdown to Calvary (KPBS, 2018, Amazon Prime Video)

<https://www.amazon.com/Jesus-Countdown-Calvary-Hugh-Bonneville/dp/B07CVJ31V9>

5.2 Emails from Senior Production Executive & Genre Head of Religious Programmes, dated 11 Aug 2017 and 29 June 2018.

5.3 *Jesus: Countdown To Calvary* article

<https://www.kpbs.org/news/2018/apr/05/jesus-countdown-calvary/>

5.4 'Impact Report: Jesus's Female Disciples' by Anna Cox, Director, Minerva Pictures;

<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/apr/08/jesus-female-disciples-the-new-evidence-a-timely-new-take-on-the-ultimate-boys-club>

5.5 Select newspaper promotion:

'Women Bishops Were Active in Fifth Century', *Independent*, 1 April 2018

<https://www.independent.ie/world-news/europe/women-bishops-were-active-in-fifth-century-36763044.html>

'Half of Jesus' Disciples Were Women', *The Times*, 31 March 2018 (circulation: 440,558)

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/half-of-jesus-s-disciples-were-women-66dtwhdmw> ;

'Early Church Found Place for Female Bishops, Experts Claim', *Telegraph*, 31 March 2018 (circulation: 385,346)

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/03/31/early-church-found-place-female-bishops-experts-claim/>

'Sunday's Best TV: The Heart Guy; Jesus' Female Disciples', *Guardian*, 8 April 2018 (circulation: 152,714)

<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/apr/08/sundays-best-tv-the-heart-guy-jesus-female-disciples>

5.6 Select newspaper coverage:

'Critics' Choice: Jesus' Female Disciples – The New Evidence', *Sunday Times*, 8 April 2018

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/what-s-on-tv-sunday-april-8-lk9m6wqtm> ;

'Jesus' Female Disciples: The New Evidence – A Timely New Take on the Ultimate Boys' Club', *Guardian*, 8 April 2018

<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/apr/08/jesus-female-disciples-the-new-evidence-a-timely-new-take-on-the-ultimate-boys-club>

5.7 Ecclesiastical coverage:

'Image of Woman Bishop Who Spread the Gospel in the Fifth Century is Revealed by Researchers', *Black Christian News*, 1 April 2018

<https://blackchristiannews.com/2018/04/image-of-woman-bishop-who-spread-the-gospel-in-the-fifth-century-is-revealed-by-researchers-who-say-jesus-had-many-more-female-disciples-than-previously-thought/>;

'Restored Biblical Art Sheds More Light on Jesus's Female Disciples', *Christianity Today*, 3 April 2018 (circulation: c.130,000)

<https://www.christiantoday.com/article/restored-biblical-art-sheds-more-light-on-jesus-female-disciples/128031.htm>;

'TV Review: Jesus's Female Disciples and Bacchus Uncovered', *Church Times*, 20 April 2018

<https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2018/20-april/books-arts/tv/tv-review-jesus-female-disciples-and-bacchus-uncovered>

'The Women the Gospels Forgot: Jesus' Female Followers', *Tablet*, 12 April 2018

<https://www.thetablet.co.uk/arts/11/13049/the-women-the-gospels-forgot-jesus-female-followers>

5.8 Emails from local faith group member, 7 May 2019 and BBC producer, 9 April 2018.

5.9 Email from event organiser, St Paul's Adult Learning Programme, 13 August 2018;

<https://www.ed.ac.uk/divinity/news-events/latest-news/archive/2018/speaking-from-st-pauls>

5.10 Email to Helen Bond, 8 February 2020. See also

<http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/bon368024.shtml>