

## Frank Morison and *Who Moved the Stone?*

### Advertiser, Novelist, Apologist, Spy

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**Abstract:** Frank Morison is the literary pseudonym of Albert Henry Ross (1881-1950), author of *Who Moved the Stone?* This essay breaks new ground with a biographical outline and briefly assesses his apologetic contributions. Reader impressions that he was a lawyer or journalist are mistaken. As an employee of S. H. Benson advertising agency he worked alongside Dorothy Sayers. He wrote seven books, the first of which was about the Congregational preacher John Henry Jowett. In the First World War he worked for MI7 and his book *War on Great Cities* (1937) foreshadowed what England later experienced in the Battle of Britain. His novel *Sunset* included alien contact, an end-of-the-world scenario and reflections on ultimate meaning. His final biblical apologetics text was *And Pilate Said*.

On September 14, 1950 Albert Henry Ross died in his home at Headley Down in the English county of Hampshire.<sup>1</sup> An obituary in *The Times* stated that he had been a long-time employee of the London advertising agency S. H. Benson.<sup>2</sup> He managed its printing department and then served as a director of advertising. His hobbies included astronomy and colour cinematography. A family secret was also divulged: he used the pseudonym of Frank Morison and wrote *Who Moved the Stone?*

*Who Moved the Stone?* is an apologetics text that has achieved publishing longevity: one hundred editions plus audio-book and e-book, as well as translations in Braille, Chinese (four editions), Danish, Dutch, French (two editions), German (seven editions), Italian, Korean (three editions), Spanish and Swahili (two editions).<sup>3</sup> Almost seventy years have elapsed since

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<sup>1</sup> The cottage “Polparran” in Carlton Road, Headley Down.

<sup>2</sup> “Mr. A. H. Ross,” *The Times* [London], September 23 1950, 8.

<sup>3</sup> Various Braille editions have been published in Australia. The earliest translation was in Swahili, *Nani aliyelivingirisha jiwe?* (Dodoma, Tanganyika [now Tanzania]: Central Tanganyika Press, 1930; republished 1992). Other versions: *Den Tomme Grav* (Copenhagen: Hasselbach, 1931); *Le Tombeau Vide* (Paris: Editions Contemporaines, 1932); *Wer Wältze den Stein?* (Hamburg: Christian Wagner Verlag, 1949); *Het Lege Graf* (Haarlam, Netherlands: N. V. Drukkerij de Spaarnestad, 1953); *La Résurrection: mythe ou réalité?* (Lausanne: Ligue pour la lecture de la Bible, 1974); *Quién Movió la Piedra* (Miami, Florida: Editorial Caribe, 1977). *Chi ha rimosso la pietra?* (Rome: Edizioni Citta Nuova, 1998). Word of Life in

Albert died and no one has written his biography. This omission seems like a strange case of “the book that refuses to be written.” As I write this essay, Albert’s personal archive of books, reviews, papers, postcards and photographs is for sale.<sup>4</sup> Even without access to his archive, a preliminary account of his life may be compiled.

## BACKGROUND

When Albert was born on January 1, 1881, his family resided at 44 Hertford Street, Kings Norton, Worcestershire, which was close to Birmingham.<sup>5</sup> His mother, Mary Ann Marshall (1851-1931), was born in Hollingbourne, Kent, the daughter of Jemima Moore and Henry Marshall.<sup>6</sup> Mary was employed as a draper’s shop-woman in Maidstone, Kent.<sup>7</sup> Albert’s father, John Charles Ross (1838-1914), was born in Kehl, Baden-Württemberg in Germany.<sup>8</sup> He was probably baptised “Johannes Ross” and arrived in Liverpool, England aged twenty-eight.

### Bankruptcy Sagas

In 1890 the Official Receiver recounted John’s career. In 1866 he started a business in Liverpool “as a commission agent in the wine trade” but “he had no capital.”<sup>9</sup> Louis Schaal agreed to become his business partner and invested £300 as capital. They traded as “Ross and Schaal” wine merchants at 9 North John Street, Liverpool. Within a year the business had failed, and the partnership was dissolved on October 12, 1867.<sup>10</sup>

After repaying liabilities, John moved to Birmingham in 1869.<sup>11</sup> He traded as “Charles Ross” selling spirits and liquor but by late December was bankrupt.<sup>12</sup> In October 1870 he was licensed to operate the Red Swan pub in West Bromwich.<sup>13</sup> By 1877 he was trading in “wines

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Seoul released Korean editions in 1982, 1997 and 2013. Chinese editions published in 1962, 2003, 2006 and 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Before she died in 1995, Albert’s daughter Margaret sold the archive to Martin’s Books, Aberystwyth, Wales (catalogue accessed via [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) 26 March 2017).

<sup>5</sup> *England & Wales Birth Index* 1881, Vol. 6c, 462. District: Kings Norton, County: Worcestershire.

<sup>6</sup> The Marshall household listed in *England and Wales Census, 1851*, Hollingbourne, Kent, Registration no. HO107, Folio 140, 23. Cf. *England and Wales Census, 1861*, Hollingbourne, Kent, RG09, Folio 128, 27.

<sup>7</sup> *England and Wales Census, 1871*, District: Maidstone, Kent.

<sup>8</sup> “Charles Ross” in *England and Wales Census, 1911*, Registration District: Aston. Sub-district: Bordesley. Archive reference: RG 14, Folio 18221.

<sup>9</sup> “Bankruptcy Proceedings,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, July 12 1890, 10.

<sup>10</sup> “Legal Notice,” *Liverpool Mercury*, October 15 1867, 8.

<sup>11</sup> “Bankruptcy Proceedings” op.cit.

<sup>12</sup> *The London Gazette*, Issue No. 23600, March 22 1870, 1,878.

<sup>13</sup> “District News. West Bromwich,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, October 4 1870, 7.

and spirits of the finest qualities” at the Wein Keller in Edmund Street.<sup>14</sup> In early 1878 John and Mary were married in Thanet, Kent but they lived in Birmingham.<sup>15</sup> On October 24, 1878 he filed a bankruptcy petition “with liabilities amounting to £8,614. 18s. 7d., assets £4,869. 0s. 3d.”<sup>16</sup>

Their first child, Percy Charles Ross, was born in mid-1879. John was discharged from bankruptcy on January 6, 1880. In March 1880 he acquired the pub licence of the Court Tavern in Edmund Street.<sup>17</sup> By November 1880 he was trading as a wine merchant in Paradise Street.<sup>18</sup> He also established a restaurant at 4 Broad Street. The wine cellar business went into liquidation in June 1882 but the restaurant remained open.<sup>19</sup>

After Albert’s birth the family resided at 17 New Meeting Street, Birmingham. In December 1888 John sold the restaurant to repay a loan. He tried to relaunch the business at The Quadrant, 8 Worcester Street:

At that time there was very little trade attached to the place. He borrowed £200., which he paid for the licenses, fixtures, and possession. The Broad Street shop was sold for £375., and after paying the loan of £200 and rent, rates &c., there was no surplus. The removal and alterations at the Quadrant, Birmingham cost a considerable sum. In consequence of the arrangements the debtor made for dinners, &c., his trade expenses were considerably increased, and that part of the business appeared to have resulted in a heavy loss. The lease of the premises appeared to have been mortgaged by the debtor soon after he removed ... it was not until a week before the receiving order that he became aware of his insolvent position, as he had always anticipated that the goodwill of the business would be a valuable asset.<sup>20</sup>

## CAREER

Clifford states that Albert attended “Shakespeare’s old grammar school at Stratford-on-Avon.”<sup>21</sup> Albert’s love of books was probably spurred on by his father who was “a voracious

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<sup>14</sup> “Public Notices,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, September 27 1877, 4. *Kelly’s Post Office Directory of Birmingham*, 1878, 57, lists Charles Ross as a beer retailer in Edmund St.

<sup>15</sup> *England & Wales Marriage Index 1837-2005*, 1878, Vol. 2A, 1028, District: Thanet, County: Kent.

<sup>16</sup> “Bankruptcy Proceedings” op.cit.

<sup>17</sup> “Transfer of Licences,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, March 8 1880, 6.

<sup>18</sup> “Tradesmen’s Addresses,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, November 29 1880, 10.

<sup>19</sup> “Birmingham County Court,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, June 17 1882, 11.

<sup>20</sup> “Bankruptcy Proceedings” op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> Clifford, op.cit, 120. The March 1891 Census lists him as “scholar” (i.e. pupil) see *England and Wales Census, 1891*, District: Aston, County: Warwickshire.

student” of books about life on other worlds.<sup>22</sup> The 1901 census lists the family as residing at 149 Moor Street, Birmingham which was one block from the Congregational Church in Carrs Lane. The importance of that fact will become apparent later. Albert was employed as a printer compositor. He used the nickname “Harry” which is based on his middle name Henry.<sup>23</sup>

## Lever Brothers

Sometime before 1910 Albert was an employee of Lever Brothers perhaps in advertising.<sup>24</sup> William Hesketh Lever (Lord Leverhulme) and James D’Arcy Lever were soap manufacturers who created the “Sunlight” brand. They built Port Sunlight next to the Mersey River which included a factory, chapel, gardens, plus a village to house their employees.<sup>25</sup> Lord Leverhulme was an eccentric pious member of the Congregational Church. In 1899 a department was created at Port Sunlight known as LINTAS (Lever International Advertising Services).<sup>26</sup>

## Advertiser and marriage

In 1910 Albert became an employee of the advertising agency S. H. Benson located in Kingsway, London. He is credited with creating and managing the firm’s printing department.<sup>27</sup> From 1936 until he retired in 1947 he was a director of advertising. Aside from his military service (1916-ca.1919), Albert worked at Benson’s for more than thirty years. As an advertiser he took an interest in human behaviour and wrote on the psychology of public speaking.<sup>28</sup>

In 1911 his parents and brother were boarders in Aston, Warwickshire. His father died in 1914.<sup>29</sup> Albert returned to Birmingham in 1915 to marry Annie Elizabeth Mills.<sup>30</sup> She was

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<sup>22</sup> Frank Morison, *And Pilate Said: — A New Study of the Roman Procurator* (London: Rich & Cowan, 1939; New York: Scribner’s, 1940), 264.

<sup>23</sup> My first edition copy of his novel *Sunset* is inscribed “To Mary from Harry” 20/2/32.

<sup>24</sup> See *The Times*, op. cit.

<sup>25</sup> Adam Macqueen, *The King of Sunlight: How William Lever Cleaned Up the World* (London: Bantam/Transworld, 2004).

<sup>26</sup> J. D. Keeler, “Lever Brothers Company/Unilever,” in *The Advertising Age Encyclopedia of Advertising*, Ed. John McDonough & Karen Egolf (Chicago; London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2002), 934.

<sup>27</sup> *The Times*, op.cit.

<sup>28</sup> *The Psychology of Public Speaking: introductory manual to the Study Bureau course in public speaking* (West Croydon: The Study Bureau, 1927). His second book was *A Method of Study for Preachers* (London: Study Bureau, 1919).

<sup>29</sup> *England and Wales Census, 1911*, records them residing at 68 Gladstone Rd, Sparkbrook, Birmingham. *England & Wales Death Index, 1914*, Vol.6d, 504, District: Aston, County: Warwickshire. He was buried in Key Hill Cemetery (KH: K751, burial no. 49535).

<sup>30</sup> *England & Wales Marriage Index, 1915*, Vol. 6d, 792, District: Birmingham, County: Warwickshire.

born on 4 July 1885 in Aston.<sup>31</sup> Her family resided for several decades at 9 Thomas Street.<sup>32</sup> Annie worked as a “Layon at Printers” (i.e. using a layon roller to print).<sup>33</sup> Presumably she and Albert met as fellow employees in a printer’s business. As a First World War bride Annie seems to have lived in Aston, and their only child Margaret Lilian Ross was born there on June 16 1917.<sup>34</sup> Margaret never married. She lived with her mother until Annie died.<sup>35</sup>

## Spy

In 1916 Albert enlisted in the Royal Flying Corps. He was an instructor in aerial bombing and was also employed in the Air Ministry’s Directorate of Intelligence.<sup>36</sup> He received a temporary commission as a second lieutenant in June 1918.<sup>37</sup> In 1916 the Air Ministry created MI7, which was situated in Adastral House, Kingsway (near S. H. Benson Ltd). MI7 comprised four sub-sections that produced war-time propaganda. MI7b involved a team of twenty writers (including *Winnie the Pooh* author A. A. Milne) led by the novelist-journalist Captain Alec John Dawson (1872-1951).<sup>38</sup> Dawson wrote a tribute to Albert.<sup>39</sup>

In the First World War the Germans bombed Paris and London using Zeppelins and bi-planes. When Nazi Germany was developing its armed forces, Albert spent four years analysing the air raids of the First World War. He interviewed German ex-pilots. His book, *War on Great Cities*, discussed the aerial warfare of 1914-1918. He also foreshadowed the impact of concentrated incendiary bombing which became a reality in the Battle of Britain.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> *England & Wales Birth Index*, 1885, Vol. 6d, 363, District: Aston, County: Warwickshire.

<sup>32</sup> See census records 1881-1911. The Library of Birmingham holds records for the Upper Thomas Street County Primary School Aston 1876-1972.

<sup>33</sup> *England and Wales Census, 1901*, District: Aston, County: Warwickshire and *England and Wales Census, 1911*, District: Aston, County: Warwickshire.

<sup>34</sup> *England & Wales Birth Index*, 1917, Vol. 6d, 925, District: Aston, County: Warwickshire. Margaret was a shorthand typist, see 1939 Register, “Ross Household” 284 Norbury Avenue, Croydon C.B., Surrey, which is accessible via findmypast.co.uk.

<sup>35</sup> The 1957 electoral roll lists Annie, her sister Lily Mills, and Margaret at “Polperran” Carlton Rd Headley Down see [www.johnowensmith.co.uk/headley/1957reg.htm](http://www.johnowensmith.co.uk/headley/1957reg.htm). Cf. note 4 above.

<sup>36</sup> Hew Strachan, “Strategic Bombing and the Question of Civilian Casualties up to 1945,” in *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden 1945*, Ed. Paul Addison & Jeremy A. Craig (London: Pimlico, 2006), 13-14. Cf. UK National Archives military service record catalogue reference: AIR/76/436. A different record, AIR 79/636, service number 68883 is accessible via findmypast.co.uk.

<sup>37</sup> *The London Gazette*, Issue 30747, June 14 1918, 7072.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Nicholas Rankin, *A Genius For Deception: How Cunning Helped the British Win Two World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> Albert’s archive includes Dawson’s tribute.

<sup>40</sup> *War on Great Cities: A Study of the Facts* (London: Faber & Faber, 1937), 181-183 and 194-206. Reviews include “When Planes Come With Gas & Fire Bombs,” *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, February 4 1937, 3. Dr. A. L. Rawlings, “Air Raids of the Future,” *The Spectator*, February 5 1937, 22. Edwin Colston Shepherd, “The Terror from the Air,” *Times Literary Supplement*, February 13 1937, 101. “Death from the air,” *The Glasgow Herald*, May 13 1937, 3.

## Dorothy Sayers

After World War One, Albert resumed work at S.H. Benson and settled in Croydon. Dorothy L. Sayers (1893-1957) was employed by the agency as an advertising copywriter from 1922-1931.<sup>41</sup> A biographer described her first day there:

She was socially introduced to everybody from typists to errand boys and then taken to a tiny office with a table, a couple of chairs and a battered desk where she was to work.<sup>42</sup>

At night she wrote her detective novels featuring Lord Peter Wimsey. *Murder Must Advertise* was set in a fictitious advertising agency and her characters were based on Benson employees.<sup>43</sup> John Curran remarks:

*Murder Must Advertise* draws heavily on Sayer's experience at Benson as Lord Peter, working incognito, joins Pym Publicity to investigate the death, some time earlier, of a copywriter. Apart from the ramifications of a clever plot, the reader learns more about office life between the wars than could be garnered from a dozen social histories.<sup>44</sup>

*Who Moved the Stone?* was released while Sayers worked at the agency. She based the trial scenes in her play *The Man Born To Be King* on *Who Moved the Stone?* She praised it as “an inspired little work which clears up as though by magic everything which may appear puzzling in that curiously legal piece of illegality [i.e. the trials of Jesus].”<sup>45</sup>

### **WHO MOVED THE STONE?**

The story behind Albert's famous book has never been told in full. He was ambivalent toward Christianity admitting that as a “young student” in his “early formative years” he revered Jesus and took offence when people profaned Christ's name.<sup>46</sup> Some curiously

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<sup>41</sup> Barbara Reynolds, *Dorothy L. Sayers: Her Life and Soul* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1993).

<sup>42</sup> Alzine Stone Dale, *Maker and Craftsman: The Story of Dorothy L. Sayers* (Lincoln, New England: iUniverse, 2003), 59.

<sup>43</sup> M. C. Rintoul, *Dictionary of Real People and Places in Fiction* (London; New York: Routledge, 1993), 107.

<sup>44</sup> John Curran, “Afterword,” in *Murder Must Advertise* (New York: Bourbon Street Books, 2014), 345.

<sup>45</sup> Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Man Born To Be King: A Play-Cycle on the Life of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990 [1943]), 29.

<sup>46</sup> Frank Morison, *Who Moved the Stone?* (London: Faber & Faber, 1978), 10-11. All references (unless otherwise stated) are drawn from this edition.

reimagine Albert being “not the sort of person you would find in church on Sunday.”<sup>47</sup> However, Albert recited the Creed in church *except* for those words that confess Jesus’ resurrection.<sup>48</sup> He had intended to write a paper that would debunk the resurrection because he believed that a puff of rational scientific air could blow it away. Yet he deferred the project until an opportunity arose during the first decade of the twentieth century. When Albert studied the gospels and read around the topic he was persuaded that the resurrection had happened.<sup>49</sup>

More than two decades later, married with one child, a steady job, three books under his belt, plus war experiences, it was time to write *the* book. The world around him was kicking up its heels in those late Roaring Twenties. It was now the age of jazz, art deco, motorised vehicles and “talkie” films. People were divided over Christianity, capitalism, communism, new cults and fascist political messiahs.<sup>50</sup> It was Albert’s spiritual confession but unlike St. Augustine’s *Confession* he retained the Morison pseudonym.<sup>51</sup> He may have preferred anonymity but may have originally used a pseudonym to avoid guilt-by-association with his father’s bankruptcies.

His rhetorical style resembled the golden age of the detective “who-done-it” genre. The clue is the book’s title, *Who Moved the Stone?* He imagined alternative scenarios, sifted clues and tested the characters’ psychological motives just as did Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers and G. K. Chesterton. Here and there was a well-placed turn of phrase that built-up reader anticipation as he grappled with the mystery of what happened after Jesus was buried.

He submitted the manuscript to the newly formed publisher Faber & Faber. T. S. Eliot (1888-1965) was a literary consultant and editorial board member. Eliot stated in a reader’s report:

It is well written, and as absorbing as a detective story. I am impressed by the author’s sincerity.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 317.

<sup>48</sup> *Who Moved the Stone?* op.cit., 67.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 5, 9-12.

<sup>50</sup> Karla Poewe, *New Religions and Nazis* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2006). Philip Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* (New York: Oxford, 2000).

<sup>51</sup> “It is essentially a confession, the inner story of a man ...” ibid, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Eliot’s report, dated 18 December 1929, in *The Letters of T. S. Eliot: Volume 5: 1930-1931*, Ed. Valerie Eliot and John Haffenden (London: Faber, 2014/New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 38.

Faber & Faber published ten thousand copies to coincide with Lent in 1930.<sup>53</sup> In correspondence Eliot was enthusiastic:

By the way, my firm, is publishing early in the spring, on my recommendation, a very remarkable book on the Trial and the Resurrection. The author is a man, unknown to me, who was convinced by an ingenious examination of the records, to believe in the Resurrection.<sup>54</sup>

I know almost nothing about the author, but the manuscript was first submitted to me for a reading and I recommended it enthusiastically.<sup>55</sup>

I was very much excited by my reading of the book.<sup>56</sup>

M. C. D'Arcy wrote to Eliot telling him that he "could not put it down and like you think it an extremely valuable study ... The reconstruction seems to me on the whole masterly."<sup>57</sup>

## **LAWYER OR JOURNALIST?**

Eliot sent a complimentary copy to G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) and explained in a covering letter:

It is a study of the Passion and the Resurrection by a man personally unknown to me, who started from a frankly modernist or free thinking position and ended by conviction of the essential authenticity of the Gospel story.<sup>58</sup>

Chesterton loved the book. He informed his readers that he picked it up "under the impression that it was a detective story" and found that the case for the resurrection was "treated in such a logical and even legal manner."<sup>59</sup>

Edward Shillito in *The Sunday Times* described the author's reasoning "as though a skilled advocate, entirely convinced of the truth of his case, were unravelling the threads of some mystery ... the method followed is that of the barrister."<sup>60</sup> James Douglas used a jural

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<sup>53</sup> Released in the US in March 1930 by The Century Co.

<sup>54</sup> Letter to E. Gordon Selwyn dated January 17, 1930, *ibid*, 38.

<sup>55</sup> Letter to George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, dated February 19, 1930, *ibid*, 106.

<sup>56</sup> Letter to John Middleton Murray, dated February 19, 1930, *ibid*, 107.

<sup>57</sup> Undated letter, *ibid*, 105.

<sup>58</sup> Letter to G. K. Chesterton, dated February 19 1930, *ibid*, 107.

<sup>59</sup> G. K. Chesterton, "Our Note Book," *The Illustrated London News*, April 5 1930, 554.

<sup>60</sup> Edward Shillito, "Jesus—The Last Phase," *The Sunday Times* [London], March 16 1930, 11.



analogy, “Mr Morison has put his witnesses in the box and cross-examined them and built his case for supernatural Christianity upon their evidence.”<sup>61</sup> Chesterton, Shillito and Douglas *never explicitly said he was a lawyer*.

A New Zealand cleric felt sure that Albert was not a theologian or a parson but inferred “from the relentless logic of the book and its close woven texture” that “he is more likely to be a lawyer.”<sup>62</sup> Two Australian clerics said that he used “legal skill” and “his legally-trained mind” to examine the resurrection accounts.<sup>63</sup> In 1949 an English cleric referred to him as “a young lawyer.”<sup>64</sup> Various US apologists and preachers repeated the claim, while someone in 1956 claimed he was a barrister.<sup>65</sup>

### **Case against the lawyer rumour**

*Time* magazine noted in April 1930 that Morison was a pseudonym and “his publishers call him ‘a fairly well-known British writer’.”<sup>66</sup> There was no book blurb stating that he was a lawyer. In the mid-1980s Ross Clifford made inquiries to confirm if Albert became either a solicitor or barrister and was advised that there is no official record.<sup>67</sup>

Clifford remarked on the lawyer rumour, “Morison used investigative skills so well that readers and scholars alike wrongly assumed he was a lawyer.”<sup>68</sup> The rumour developed from reader impressions which were reinforced by book reviewers using legal metaphors. Over the

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<sup>61</sup> James Douglas, “Has He Appeared Since Then?” reproduced in *Dandenong Journal* [Australia], March 12 1931, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Rev. D. Gardner Miller, “Who Moved The Stone?” *Otago Daily Times*, August 9 1930, 27.

<sup>63</sup> “Talks With Young Men,” *Australian Christian Commonwealth*, April 27 1934, 10; “The Triumph of Easter,” *Queensland Times*, April 16, 1938, 11.

<sup>64</sup> “The Glorious Message of Easter: He Is Alive,” *Derby Evening Telegraph*, Saturday, April 16 1949, 3.

<sup>65</sup> R. Larry Moyer, *Show Me How To Illustrate Evangelistic Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 183. Fritz Ridenour Ed. *Who Says* (Glendale, California: G/L Publications, 1968), 34; Josh McDowell, *More Than a Carpenter* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House, 1977), 97. He now refers to Morison as “an English freelance writer” see Josh McDowell with Cristóbal Krusen, *Undaunted* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2012), 115. On being a barrister see *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, March 29 1956, 2.

<sup>66</sup> “Reconstructed Mystery,” *Time*, Vol. 15, Issue 17, April 28 1930, 78, also available at <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,752480,00.html>. His real name was registered with his pseudonym in 1937 see Library of Congress Copyright Office, *Catalog of Copyright Entries, Part 1, New Series Volume 34 for the year 1937*, (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1938), 467.

<sup>67</sup> Ross Clifford, *Leading Lawyers’ Case for the Resurrection* (Edmonton, Alberta, Canada: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology and Public Policy, 1996), 120-123, and re-issued in 2015 by New Reformation Press. Cf. Ross Clifford, “The Case of Eight Legal Apologists for the Defense of Scripture and the Christ Event,” MA Thesis, Simon Greenleaf School of Law, Anaheim, 1987, 129-134.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 121.

past twenty-six years Clifford's push-back against the rumour has had some impact. Nevertheless, the Internet is a platform where the rumour persists.<sup>69</sup>

### **Case against being a journalist**

In 1940 Basil Yeaxlee who lectured in education theory at Oxford University briefly discussed Albert's books *And Pilate Said* and *Who Moved the Stone?* He said "Mr Frank Morison is an unusual and refreshing compound of the journalist, the traveller and the serious student."<sup>70</sup> The narrative in *And Pilate Said* did partly resemble a journal travelogue of a visit to Palestine. Yeaxlee probably meant the word journalist in that sense rather than referring to a newspaper reporter. In 1950 Australian evangelical cleric S. Barton Babbage described Albert as a journalist.<sup>71</sup> D. James Kennedy claimed he was "a British journalist who was also a trial lawyer."<sup>72</sup> Lee Strobel describes Albert as an investigative journalist.<sup>73</sup> This statement is not strongly supported by a search of the British Newspaper Archives from 1900-1950. There are only four articles listed under Morison's by-line which were contributed to a religious column at the behest of the editor of *The Sphere* after the release of *Who Moved the Stone?*<sup>74</sup>

### **Anachronistic Novel**

Steven Propp's novel *And With All Your Mind* features evangelicals on a campus in April 1973 chatting about their favourite apologists. Edward and Glen believe that Frank Morison was a lawyer which impressed Desmond who had not read the book. Silas Baker, however, said that his lecturer, Professor Warrin, *was not impressed* by the book. He explained that Morison was a pseudonym, that he was not a lawyer but was an "English journalist and novelist." Silas adds that Morison "doesn't seem to have written any other Christian books after that one; which kind of diminishes his own 'testimony'." They are disappointed as "a sudden, uncomfortable silence came over the group."<sup>75</sup> Once the rhetorical prestige of

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<sup>69</sup> For example <http://bnugent.org/famous-lawyers-prove-the-resurrection-of-christ/> (February 29 2016). Another claims he was "a lawyer and engineer" see <http://www.eagleflight.org/ministryresources/hard-questions/385-resurrection-vicious-hoax-or-fantastic-fact>

<sup>70</sup> Basil A. Yeaxlee, "The Bible," *The Journal of Education* 72 (September 1940): 428.

<sup>71</sup> S. Barton Babbage, "The Resurrection: Is It Illusion or Reality?" *Sunday Herald*, April 16 1950, 12.

<sup>72</sup> D. James Kennedy, *The Gates of Hell Shall Not Prevail* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 55. Kennedy previously claimed that he was a lawyer see *Spiritual Renewal!* (Glendale, California: G/L Publications, 1973), 2.

<sup>73</sup> Lee Strobel, "Foreword," *Who Moved the Stone?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 7-8.

<sup>74</sup> Frank Morison, "I Was Crucified," *The Sphere*, October 25, 1930, 162. "The Lord Gave the Land to the People?" *The Sphere*, June 27 1931, 586. "The Pope's Decree: The Date of the Crucifixion," *The Sphere*, January 21 1933, 76. "The Origin of Twelfth Night," *The Sphere*, January 13 1934, 64.

<sup>75</sup> Steven H. Propp, *And With All Your Mind: A Novel About Evangelical Theology* (New York; Bloomington: iUniverse, 2010), 84.

‘sceptical lawyer converts’ had evaporated they lost interest in Albert’s book. They then chat about legal apologists such as John Warwick Montgomery.<sup>76</sup>

This dialogue is anachronistic because by 1973 no apologist had discredited the lawyer rumour and Montgomery had not yet commenced study for the LLB.<sup>77</sup> Silas’ friends fail to detect the *non sequitur* in the claim that Albert’s testimony is diminished on the grounds that he did not write any other apologetics text. The cogency of Albert’s argument plus the integrity of his testimony in *Who Moved the Stone?* stands or falls on its own merits. His testimony does not logically depend on if he wrote another book. Presumably if the same criterion is applied to the apostles then the only strong testimonies would be from those who contributed two or more books to the New Testament! Anyone perusing the campus library’s reference works available in 1973 would have discovered his other apologetics books.<sup>78</sup>

## CONVERSION

A critical question concerns when Albert was converted. Some writers seem to have misunderstood the clues in *Who Moved the Stone?* John Ankerberg and John Weldon state “in the 1930s a rationalist journalist named Frank Morison” set out to debunk the resurrection.<sup>79</sup> This confuses the date of the book’s release with the timing of his conversion. Rev. Miller in New Zealand construed Albert’s allusion to “ten years” to mean he converted in 1920 because the book was published in 1930.<sup>80</sup>

Albert’s “formative years” must refer to the 1880s and 1890s when he was a school pupil.<sup>81</sup> He invited readers to cast their minds back “to the late ’nineties” to recall “the prevailing intellectual attitude of that period” as comprising “the key to much of my thought.”<sup>82</sup> His plan for an anti-resurrection essay must refer to late adolescence which he delayed:

I need not stay to describe here how, fully ten years later, the opportunity came to study the life of Christ as I had long wanted to study it, to investigate the origins of its

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 84-85.

<sup>77</sup> John Warwick Montgomery, *Fighting the Good Fight: A Life in Defense of the Faith* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 71-87.

<sup>78</sup> Library of Congress Copyright Office, *Catalog of Copyright Entries for the year 1940; Books in Print; British Books in Print; Book Review Digest*, etc.

<sup>79</sup> John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Handbook of Biblical Evidences* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House, 1997), 88.

<sup>80</sup> *Otago Daily Times* op. cit.

<sup>81</sup> *Who Moved the Stone?*, 11.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 9-10.

literature, to sift some of the evidence first hand, and to form my own judgment on the problem which it presents.<sup>83</sup>

Albert's study of the gospels coincided with the ministry of John Henry Jowett (1863-1923) who served at Birmingham's Congregational Church in Carrs Lane from 1895-1911.<sup>84</sup> Albert lived one block away from this church. Albert's first book (1908) was about Jowett and he jotted down his impressions "as they have occurred to one who has, perhaps, heard him preach with sufficient frequency to form a judgment."<sup>85</sup> Albert also indicated that a turn-of-the-century book on the resurrection which has "an honoured place in my library" is Henry Latham's *The Risen Master*.<sup>86</sup> The cumulative evidence indicates that *1908 is the latest possible date for Albert's conversion*.

## CONTRIBUTION TO APOLOGETICS

*Who Moved the Stone?* has overshadowed his other apologetic writings.

### **Sunset as literary apologetic**

*Sunset's* dustjacket describes the novel as a scientific romance.<sup>87</sup> The plot centres on the radio astronomy experiments of John Byford an English physicist who spent eight years in an observatory on the Swiss slopes of the Matterhorn beaming messages into outer space. He began broadcasts using gramophone discs of bird sounds, lion roars and small verbal phrases but stopped this because someone was monitoring his wireless messages. Frank Sillow was the eavesdropper who caught fragmented excerpts from Psalm 23 in French. Byford then used a photo-electric cell gadget that surpassed Logie Baird's proto-type television to transmit word-pictures of basic vocabulary in both French and English. Eventually he received a reply in French (!) from Nerina who lives on a planet three light years away. Her planet was perishing from exposure to cosmic radiation.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 11-12.

<sup>84</sup> *J. H. Jowett, M.A. of Birmingham: A Critical Appreciation* (Birmingham: Allday, 1908) 57 pages, and updated as *J. H. Jowett M.A., D.D.: A Character Study* (London: James Clarke, 1911), 64 pages. All references are to the 1911 edition.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>86</sup> *And Pilate Said*, op. cit, 267. Henry Latham, *The Risen Master: A Sequel to Pastor Pastorum* (Cambridge: Deighton Bell, 1901).

<sup>87</sup> *Sunset* (London: Faber & Faber, 1932; New York: The Century Co, 1932). Cf. Ralph Straus' book review in *The Sunday Times*, March 6 1932, 9.

Byford is murdered by men of Slavonic background and his research notes are stolen. A Russian newspaper announces that Byford has made contact with an alien civilisation and that cosmic radiation will soon engulf the earth. Nefarious characters exploit the ensuing global panic for financial profit.

The British reaction to this alarming message is described in several chapters that feature its impact on an advertising agency in Kingsway (a subtle hint about where Albert worked), on major newspapers and upon the poor as violence erupts when food prices soar. A large crowd gathers to hear the Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral preach a sermon based on the Book of Job. His punch-line of trusting in God is reinforced by an uplifting recital from Handel's Messiah, "king of kings ... He shall reign forever." England's Prime Minister convened a meeting at Chequers where the Archbishop of Canterbury claimed on the basis of text-critical analysis that the message of doom was a spurious addition to Byford's manuscript.

The final part is based on Byford's diary where he pondered belief in God's existence in a cosmos of apparent order alongside phenomena of suffering and cruelty. Is life on earth just a cosmic accident? He felt drawn to the Oxyrhynchus papyri that contain extra-biblical sayings attributed to Jesus. Byford copied three passages: One pointed to God's omnipresence ("Lift up the stone, and there shalt thou find me"); another to the incarnation ("I stood in the midst of the world and in flesh appeared I unto them ... they are blind in their heart and see not"); the last is where birds and creatures of the earth draw us toward heaven.

*Sunset* began with an epigraph quote from 1 Kings 19:11-12 disclosing God's palpable presence when Elijah ascended to heaven. It presents a literary apologetic pointing to God's presence in the cosmos as well as hinting at the incarnation while also illustrating our need for divine redemption. It indirectly hints that the New Testament manuscripts may be tested for accurate copying. The Oxyrhynchus material is a stepping-stone to the Bible which teaches that the cosmos points to God (Ps. 19); there is divine providential care for birds (Matt. 6:26; Luke 12:24; Ps. 104); all creatures praise God (Ps. 148; Rev. 5:13) and bear witness (Job 12:7-10; Num. 22:22-30).

*Sunset* was published when literary apologetic stories appeared in the mythic fiction of J. R. R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and C. S. Lewis as well as the detective mysteries of Sayers

and Chesterton.<sup>88</sup> Albert's literary style differs from Williams' supernatural thrillers, Lewis' Dr Ransom trilogy and Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey novels. However, just like their stories, he wove into the drama ultimate questions for reflection.

### ***The Sphere***

George Moore's *The Brook Kerith* imagined Jesus surviving the cross and living as an old shepherd by the brook. *The Sphere* was a weekly newspaper and the editor invited Albert to respond to Moore. Albert argued that the gospel accounts refer to Jesus' corpse so he did not slumber, revive and retire. Albert applied a *reductio ad absurdum* argument: if Jesus had survived crucifixion, why did he allow his disciples to preach the resurrection?<sup>89</sup>

The Pope declared that 1933-1934 as a commemorative year for the first Easter. It was his spring-board for using astronomical data to pinpoint a calendar date for Jesus' crucifixion.<sup>90</sup>

### ***And Pilate Said***

Albert's final book on Pilate was commissioned by the publisher and is dedicated to the Swedish photographer Gastgifvar Eric Matson (1888-1977) and his wife Edith who supplied more than fifty photographs for the book.<sup>91</sup> He used the travelogue genre to describe a month long excursion in Palestine examining archaeological sites that illustrate Pilate's time. He imaginatively probed Pilate's psychological motives when he met Jesus and concluded that the gospels' portrait of Pilate was genuine. He briefly revisited the apologetic question of Jesus' resurrection. *And Pilate Said* elicited different reactions. Some welcomed it filling a gap because Pilate was not often the subject of book-length study.<sup>92</sup> Others appreciated the archaeological evidence but disliked the travelogue style.<sup>93</sup>

### **Place in Apologetics History**

Brian Harrison described the intellectual mood of Britain at the start of the 1950s:

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<sup>88</sup> John Warwick Montgomery Ed., *Myth, Allegory and Gospel: An Interpretation of J. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, Charles Williams* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974). Idem, *The Transcendent Holmes* (Ashcroft, British Columbia: Calabash, 2000).

<sup>89</sup> "I Was Crucified," op. cit., 162.

<sup>90</sup> "The Pope's Decree," op. cit., 76.

<sup>91</sup> Rich & Cowan commissioned it in a series on biblical characters, see "Literary Notes from Home and Abroad," *The Australasian*, April 24, 1937, 6. The Library of Congress holds over 23,000 photographic negatives donated by Matson see <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/matpc/>

<sup>92</sup> Bishop Stewart of Chicago, "Books: On the Resurrection of Our Lord," *The Layman's Magazine of the Living Church*, 3 (April 1940): 29. Charles H. Pickar, *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 2:3 (1940): 277-278.

<sup>93</sup> Donald W. Riddle, *Journal of Religion* 21 (April 1941): 229.

Christian apologetics attracted many readers. C. S. Lewis and Dorothy L. Sayers were prominent in popular theology, and there was a market for the paperback versions of Lewis' *Screwtape Letters* (1942) and Albert Henry Ross' *Who Moved the Stone?* (published under the pseudonym Frank Morison in 1930).<sup>94</sup>

These apologists suited their times but Harrison also noted that post-war British attitudes toward religion were changing. Harrison's point reminds us that an apologist's contributions are best appreciated in their historical context. Sceptical understandings of the resurrection arise in each generation. Some of Albert's points remain very pertinent but the views of his contemporaries (e.g. Kirsopp Lake) have faded away. There are other objections that we must address today.<sup>95</sup> Albert wrote for the mass market using genres that flourished between the two world wars. He appealed to the reader's imagination to solve puzzles. The style and tone was suitable for the period of the Great Depression and Second World War. Before he died there were fourteen editions of *Who Moved the Stone?*<sup>96</sup>

Today his popularity may wane among individuals who do not appreciate past prose styles, nuanced arguments or the joy of learning new vocabulary (e.g. the sentiments "It's boring; too much vocabulary; it could all be said in forty pages").<sup>97</sup> The discredited lawyer rumour is an object lesson about inventing literary ghosts and rhetorically exaggerating an apologist's prestige. Internet-arenas may supply oxygen that keeps discredited rumours alive.<sup>98</sup> Lastly, the resurrection narratives invite us, as they did for Albert, to come to grips with the person of Jesus.

Philip Johnson has co-written *Taboo or To Do* (DLT), *The Cross is not Enough* (Baker) and *Jesus and the gods of the new age* (Lion). He contributed "To Every Occultist an Answer" in *Tough-Minded Christianity* ed. W. Dembski & T. Schirrmacher (Broadman & Holman), as well as "Juridical Apologists 1600-2000AD: A Bio-Bibliographical Essay" in *Global Journal of Classical Theology* 3, no.1 (04/2002) available at <http://www.globaljournalct.com/508/>.

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<sup>94</sup> Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom 1951-1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 340.

<sup>95</sup> Ross Clifford and Philip Johnson, *The Cross is not Enough: Living as Witness to the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).

<sup>96</sup> *The Times*, op. cit.

<sup>97</sup> These sentiments are based on readers' comments about the book at amazon.com.

<sup>98</sup> I have edited the Wikipedia entry on Frank Morison (April 20 2017).