THE DEGREE OF reverence accorded a subject in the nineteenth century was directly proportional to Mark Twain’s impulse to burlesque it. While many sober Christians would contend that Christ’s advent hardly seems the stuff of burlesque, popular reverent regard for Christianity’s foundational narrative demanded that Twain use the form as he had so many other genres of belief. The story of Christ’s humble nativity, teaching, crucifixion, and resurrection surpasses even the Adam and Eve mythos as a recognized and revered narrative structure. While Twain adopted and adapted the Adam and Eve story, notably in “The Tournament in 1870 A.D.” (1870), “Extracts from Adam’s Diary” (1893), “Eve Speaks” (n.d.), “Eve’s Diary” (1905), “Adam’s Soliloquy” (1905), and “Letters from the Earth” (1909), he worked tentatively and haltingly with the story of Christ, using the narrative in the Alta California letters, The Innocents Abroad (1869), and in a number of unfin-
ished sketches. The Christ narrative provides structure for many of Twain's major works, but only in “The Second Advent” (1881) does Twain use the Christ story as the central ordering force of his burlesque.²

Twain used the Christ story in two seemingly opposed ways throughout his career. On the one hand, he used the central features of the Christ story to establish an allusive structure for such works as The Prince and the Pauper (1881), Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889), The American Claimant (1892), and Pudd’nhead Wilson (1894). In these works, the story of Christ’s life undergirds the paradigmatic trading of places; just as Christ is incarnated into a lower life for the purposes of rejuvenating souls and society, characters in Twain’s cruci-fictions trade places with those lower than themselves for similar purposes, albeit of a less divine nature. Edward Tudor is “incarnated” into the lower classes when forced by circumstances to live as Tom Canty in The Prince and the Pauper. In the process, he becomes a worthy leader, and Twain creates a plot and an allusive web drawn directly from Christ’s ministry and passion. It is indeed significant that “Edward as King” is chapter 33, for Edward is a type of Christ whose ordeals and degradations result in a ritual crowning. Similarly, Tom Driscoll in Pudd’nhead Wilson is traded with the mixed race Chambers and becomes an object lesson of grace when his mother preaches on the text: “dey ain’t nobody kin save his own self—can’t do it by faith, can’t do it by works, can’t do it no way at all” (931). Roxy uses the master’s son as the Christic “ransom” for her own son, with comical and troubling results. Perhaps the incarnation is most obvious with the character of the Englishman “Lord Berkeley,” who suffers comic degradation after being mistaken for an American desperado, “one-armed Pete,” in The American Claimant (124). Through his experiences this “Lord” becomes truly “a man to worship” (223). Such uses of the Christic paradigm, while comical, are perhaps just high-minded enough to be consonant with Twain’s 1878 admonition to his brother Orion, quoted as an epigraph for this chapter, that “the savior is nonetheless a sacred Personage, and a man should have no desire or disposition to refer to him lightly, profanely, or otherwise than with the profoundest reverence” (Mark Twain’s Letters, Paine Edition, I: 323).

If Twain occasionally approached burlesque of the Christ story in his novels, in other works he burlesqued it in ways hardly in keeping with his sentiment that the “profoundest reverence” ought to mark our references to him. Most typically, one sees in Twain’s works a reverential mien toward Christ simultaneous with a will to burlesque; it is doubtless
a mistake to separate Twain’s reverential and burlesque treatment of sacred issues as James Wilson does by viewing “the esthetic dimensions of his art” as part of “his resolve to seek a reasonably orthodox faith” (155–56). Such discussion must be largely biographical, but it becomes problematic when Wilson then divorces Twain’s “credo” from his “playful irreverence” (156). The result reveals the reason an organic approach unifying attention to both form and content, and intrinsic and extrinsic concerns, is needed. To wrench the sacred from the parody in Twain’s practice of parodia sacra is impossible. The oscillation is reminiscent of Twain’s advice to himself written to Livy in 1871:

*Any* lecture of mine ought to be a running narrative-plank, with square holes in it, six inches apart, all the length of it; & then in my mental shop I ought to have plugs (half marked “serious” & the others marked “humorous”) to select from & jam into these holes according to the temper of the audience. (MTL 4:498)

Overall, any whole work may oscillate between serious and humorous just as one sees the shift between reverence and burlesque. If anything, Twain here understates his case, for it is often impossible to separate the humorous and serious “plugs” in his writing. Frequently Twain writes with such a humorousness of purpose that the two are blended, particularly in *parodia sacra*, where both coexist. In *The Innocents Abroad*, Twain blends the “profoudest reverence” for Christ with burlesque of the Christ story. One sees such traditional moments of reverence as when Twain imagines how “these simple, superstitious, disease-tortured creatures” must have rejoiced when the word went out that “Jesus of Nazareth is come!” (376). Most reverential is Twain’s description of his visit to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. In this lengthy passage, Twain argues that, in contrast to many other “imaginary holy places created by the monks,” the place where Christ was crucified is not in doubt (455). He describes the place of Christ’s crucifixion effusively and conventionally as “the most sacred locality on earth” (457). Twain contrasts Golgotha to the many sites manufactured for tourists, illustrating his penchant for using the material associated with religion to criticize contemporary society; he also reveals his technique of identifying some place or some thing that is “real” amid so much that is desiccated by virtue of elevation. In his notebooks kept during the *Quaker City* excursion, Twain commented on Bronzino’s *Portrait of Prince Don Garzia* and the realism of the baby.
This is a real child, with fat face without having an apple in each cheek, has a most silly, winning, chuckleheaded childlike gleeful smile, 2 little teeth just showing in lower jaw—oh, he is perfect! with his well fed body & his uncomfortable little bird grasped in his chubby hand. If he were a Jesus in a Holy Family every woman would want to bite him, & that picture would be the most famous in all the world. Where did they get all those unchildlike infants one finds in the Holy Families? (MTNJ 2: 235)

Twain also labels the usual Christ child in such depictions as “scrawny” and “sick” (MTNJ 2: 235). Artistically, Twain continually grasped at what was real in the sacred texts he burlesqued, trying to imagine what the situations described in sacred texts and depicted ad infinitum in all forms of art might really have been like. If the point of the incarnation is to take human form, why then are artistic and literary depictions of Christ so disincarnated, spiritualized at the expense of the physical reality? Calvin asserts that the Incarnation demands the “mutual union of his divinity and our nature” (I: 400). Twain seeks just such a real synthesis of physical and spiritual, the promise held forth by the Incarnation.

COWBOY CHRIST

All is not reverential, then, for even the persona of the Reverend Mark Twain suggests sacred parody. Twain includes burlesque of the Christ story when discussing the Apocryphal New Testament in The Innocents Abroad. He provides extracts based upon his Alta California letter of June 2, 1867, in which he describes “a curious book” he had seen at a New York library, William Hone’s edition of the Apocryphal New Testament (MTMB 251). Twain selectively includes extracts in his description, as Guy Cardwell suggests, “for comic emphasis” (1012). Working under the guise of simply providing information, Twain carefully places the burden for the burlesque on the “curious book” itself. All the while, Twain creates a comic interplay between the New Testament and the Apocryphal New Testament and between what he says and does not say. Parody is binary, provoking a dialogue between the original and the parodic double, and Twain’s lack of commentary only heightens the comic disjuncture between the testament readers know and the version he quotes. Twain accomplishes the burlesque in this instance while labeling the book “frivolous” in both The Innocents Abroad (428) and in the
Alta California letters (MTMB 254). In published versions, Twain essentially provided a list of curiosities drawn from the apocryphal work, but in his notebook, he began envisioning the kind of burlesque that would be even less reverential.

The home of Joseph & Mary, where Jesus spent his early life,—walked & talked & taught. The fountain of the Virgin. Church of the Annunciation. Naz is built of stone,—upon a hill,—substantial. English Mission school in wh are children whose parents were murdered recently by the Druses. . . . Staircase to Mary’s kitchen—the workshop of Joseph transformed into a chapel—here Christ worked at his trade.

“J. Christ & Son, Carpenters & Builders.”

Recall infant Christ’s pranks on his school-mates—striking boys dead—withering their hands—burning the dyer’s cloth &c. (471–72)

Indeed, it is primarily through Twain’s unpublished journals that one sees his ongoing interest in writing a burlesque of the life of Christ. One can, of course, see some of these elements in such later endeavors as The Mysterious Stranger Manuscripts, but “The Second Advent,” written in 1881, was his attempt to burlesque the central story, focusing on what would happen if Christ came again in the 1800s. Indeed, within three years after that letter to Orion, Twain had written his burlesque, “The Second Advent,” telling the story of Christ’s second coming, using it to “make strange” both the Christ story itself and contemporary society. This risus paschalis, or “Easter laughter,” degrades the elevated story, revealing its roots in gritty folk life, but ultimately, as Bakhtin suggests of such burlesque, invokes “laughter as a joyous regeneration” (RW 78).

The impetus for such a burlesque has many sources. One is imaginative. One might view Twain’s frequent use of the Incarnation as a narrative framework for his novels as an attempt to comprehend the Incarnation of Christ, putting it in human terms, incarnating the Incarnation, as it were. In The Innocents Abroad, Twain ponders over the difficulty of imagining Christ as a real human being:

It seems curious enough to us to be standing on ground that was once actually pressed by the feet of the Saviour. The situation is suggestive of a reality and a tangibility that seem at variance with the vagueness and mystery and ghostliness that one naturally attaches to the character of a god. I can not comprehend yet that I am sitting where a god has stood, and looking upon the brook and the mountains which that god looked
upon, and am surrounded by dusky men and women whose ancestors saw him, and even talked with him, face to face, and carelessly, just as they would have done with any other stranger. I can not comprehend this; the gods of my understanding have been always hidden in clouds and very far away. (374)

Through reflective, expressive narrative, Twain does for the Christ story in this passage what he does in “The Second Advent” through burlesque: in Formalist terms, he makes strange the Christ story. Twain focuses here not on the remoteness in time that would be sufficient to inspire a sense of awe on his part, but on the mystery of the Incarnation itself: a god has walked here. Judging by his frequent use of the Incarnation in his narratives, Twain finds both difficult and artistically compelling the very idea that God became man and lived in this place and walked on a particular spot of earth.

In his journal entries, however, Twain envisions much more burlesque ways of fictionalizing Christ’s Second Advent. In an 1887 journal entry, he queried, “Who could endure a French Christ?” and in an 1888 journal entry he left the note, “Try to imagine an English Christ” (MTNJ 3: 292, 406). While the former would certainly be more difficult than the latter, Twain mulled over the idea of burlesquing the life of Christ, perhaps having Christ’s Second Advent in a location outside of the Holy Land. While Twain presumably wrote “The Second Advent” in 1881, it was never really finished, and all of his notes suggest a burlesque still in a state of evolving.1 In unpublished notebook entries from the 1890s, Twain imagined Christ in America, speaking with an African American woman who hails him as an old friend, “Good mawnin’ Massa Jesus, how’d you leave yo’ pa?” (unpublished notebook 31, 12). A few years later, Twain wrote that “In [modern] English times, at any period before Anne’s time, Christ would have been executed; in these present days, in time of war he might be executed, in time of peace he would be sent to the asylum” (unpublished notebook 37, 45). In each imaginative projection, Twain takes the familiar narrative form and burlesques it with ludicrous details, but always with details that suggest some form of social criticism. Whether it is a Christ from another nationality or a Christ in period clothing, Twain imagines burlesque details that move the Christ story to another time and place. Twain considered the issue in an 1889 journal entry: “Always (of course) Saviors have come in the costume of the time. Pictures of our Second Advent are going to lose something by

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this, unless clawhammer coats go out, meantime" (MTNJ 3: 540). In “The Second Advent,” too, Twain’s angel of the Lord “was clothed according to the fashion of our day. He wore a straw hat, a blue jeans roundabout and pants, and cowhide boots” (55). If Twain depicts a gunslinger God in *Roughing It*, he gives readers a cowboy Christ in “The Second Advent.”

Twain employs a myriad of details beyond clothing to burlesque the Christ story in “The Second Advent.” The story begins as if to say, O little town of Black Jack, Arkansas, how still we see thee lie: “Black Jack is a very small village lying far away back in the western wilds and solitudes of Arkansas” (53). On the one hand, the setting is very like Bethlehem. Twain makes the point that the place is an insignificant province, much like Bethlehem itself, and is “far removed from the busy world and the interests which animate it” (53). Yet, burlesquing details intrude. Instead of whitewashed buildings—log cabins; instead of Romans—Indians; instead of shepherds—ranchers. Twain essentially substitutes contemporary details for biblical details at every turn, following even the form of the scriptures as he creates his parody. Like Matthew, who traces Christ’s “fourteen generations” (1:17), Twain begins by providing the genealogy of the new Christ, telling us that “The Hopkineses were old residents; in fact neither they nor their forerunners for two generations had ever known any other place than Black Jack” (53). These names, too, jar us into really seeing what we have already seen a thousand times; this is the purpose of carnival defamiliarization. The Hopkines! Instead of Joseph and Mary, the parents of Jesus are, in this story, Jackson Barnes and Nancy Hopkins.

Such defamiliarization of the very familiar story brings it alive in a new way. Visiting the Holy Land, Twain had found it difficult to imagine Christ in the world, and one may consider “The Second Advent” as an imaginative incarnational narrative. While the work burlesques the narrative, it refreshes it, offering something very real with elements left out of the traditional biblical account, such as the courtship prior to Christ’s conception and how the inhabitants of the village react when it becomes apparent that Nancy Hopkins is expecting a child—before her marriage. The burlesque of the text begins the burlesque of contemporary society.

But by and by a change came; suddenly all tongues were busy again.
Busier, too, than they had ever been at any time before, within any one’s
memory; for never before had they been furnished with anything like so prodigious a topic as now offered itself: Nancy Hopkins, the sweet young-bride elect, was—

The news flew from lip to lip with almost telegraphic swiftness; wives told it to their husbands; husbands to bachelors; servants got hold of it and told it to the young misses; it was gossiped over in every corner; rude gross pioneers coarsely joked about it over their whisky in the village grocery, accompanying their witticisms with profane and obscene words and mighty explosions of horse laughter. (54)

With details of pioneer life and words like “telegraphic,” Twain asserts at every point the strangeness of the Christ story in this environment, but he also asserts the strangeness of the Christ story per se. That is, he makes the story strange so that we actually consider it as a literary fact, and further, he develops the material dramatically to suggest what the event might have been like in a real village, all the while burlesquing the theological concept of the Virgin Birth. The inhabitants of Black Jack, Arkansas, clearly have no doubt as to what happened. The Hopkins girl went astray and devised a story to excuse her misbehavior.

Twain’s burlesque stylistics inevitably influence thematics, and one effect of the burlesque is to provoke questioning of the ancient story’s viability in the modern age. If it is difficult to imagine that Christ could come again in Arkansas, is it not as difficult to imagine the story is at all true? “The Second Advent” places Christ’s nativity in a place that, for all its strangeness, does bear some generic similarity to Bethlehem as an out-of-the-way place; the strangeness comes primarily from the contrast between the story and the modern setting, not in Arkansas, but in the world at large. The star over Black Jack, Arkansas, is argued over in the story by astronomers who offer conflicting evidence about whether or not it is Venus, about whether one could actually follow a star, about how close a star could be to Earth, and similar issues. The discussions are unimportant in their content, but very important in the way they are framed. The disagreements are scientific disagreements involving hypotheses and proofs; these disputes burlesque attempts by some scientists, particularly in the late-nineteenth century, to justify science and theology. In “The Second Advent,” whether the arguments reject faith in favor of science is debatable, for the narrative makes both appear ridiculous. Consider just two examples of Twain’s parody of verses from Matthew:
Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east and are come to worship him. (Matthew 2:1-2).

So at last came certain wise men from the far east, to inquire concerning the matter, and to learn for themselves whether the tale was true or false. These were editors from New York and other great cities, and presidents of Yale and Princeton and Andover and other great colleges. They saw a star shining in the east—it was Venus—and this they resolved to follow. ("The Second Advent" 60)

While the language cadences of Twain's parody come right from the sacred text, the whole attitude is not reverential, but rather polemical. In the parody of Matthew 2:1–2, Twain depicts these modern-day wise men as skeptics who, before they worship Christ, must ascertain whether “the tale was true or false” (58). While Twain begins burlesquing these “wise men from the east” here, he burlesques the nativity as well even by referring to it as a “tale.” Identifying the star in the east matter-of-factly as Venus also undermines the validity of the story.

And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh. (Matthew 2:11).

Then the jury and their faction fell upon their knees and worshiped the child, and laid at its feet costly presents: namely, a History of the Church's Dominion During the First Fourteen Centuries; a History of the Presbyterian Dominion in Scotland; a History of Catholic Dominion in England; a History of the Salem Witchcraft; a History of the
Likewise, the parody of Matthew 2:11 follows the original closely, but burlesques a number of targets, beginning of course with the sacred text itself. In both cases, the wise men fall down and worship the child, but Twain substitutes a library of the abuses perpetrated by Christian churches rather than the traditional gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Twain introduces both lists the same way, but he parodies the original for religious and social commentary.

Among the “wise men” were newspaper editors not convinced by the earlier debates, and the ensuing legal disputes over intercessory prayer, “hearsay evidence,” and “special providences” make the matter of Christ’s advent look ridiculous by subjecting their discussion to standards of legal proof (61). Twain then essentially inverts the logical argumentation. Rather than argue that there is no such thing as special providence, and having people state that they offered intercessory prayers that were met, he imagines what it would be like if all intercessory prayers were answered. Like the “real” baby that Twain wants as part of the Holy Family, one can view this as Twain’s attempt to attack a false theology that emanates from false depictions of Christ. One should point out that large portions of “The Second Advent” were originally part of “The Holy Children” (1870s–81), the protagonists of which were “pale and fragile little creatures” much like the emaciated depictions of the baby Jesus Twain criticized (71). Christ’s apostles first pray for rain, but when the rain causes massive flooding and hardship, they then pray for it to stop. People react positively to the lesson they have witnessed.

There was rejoicing in all religious hearts, because the unbelieving had always scoffed at prayer and said the pulpit had claimed that it could accomplish everything, whereas none could prove that it was able to accomplish anything at all. Unbelievers had scoffed when prayers were
offered up for better weather, and for the healing of the sick, and the stay-
ing of epidemics, and the averting of war—prayers which no living man
had ever seen answered, they said. (63)

Disaster results, as one might expect, for “[e]very blessing they brought
down upon an individual was sure to fetch curses in its train for other
people” (66). If one person prays for rain, another person suffers a flood;
if one person prays for relief from the heat, others freeze. Twain even
burlesques Christ’s most important miracles involving healing and rais-
ing from the dead by imagining the disputes that would arise among
prospective heirs or even enemies of the temporarily deceased. One
lawyer in court cites the resurrection of Lazarus as a form of case law,
arguing that “if Lazarus left any property behind him he most certainly
found himself penniless when he was raised from the dead” (65–66). The
Lazarus text is one that Twain burlesques very specifically, for of all the
miracles, resurrecting the dead is central to Christ’s Incarnation. It is in
this context that Christ states, “I am the resurrection, and the life” (John
11:25), and it is also the resurrection of Lazarus that prompts Caiaphas,
the high priest, and the others to take “counsel together for to put him
to death” (John 11:53). In Twain’s parodic account, it is the “raising of
the dead and restoring the dying to health” that prompts the citizens to
pass resolutions forbidding Christ and “the holy Twelve” from perform-
ing any miracles; when they do, “they were hunted down, one after the
other, by the maddened populace, and crucified” (68).

“OUR LORD & SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST
THE FORGOTTEN SON OF GOD” (MTNJ 2: 571)

Burlesque is its own reward; one of the most charming attributes of
Mark Twain as a writer is his inclination to burlesque any literary form
that is either sacred, well established, or even momentarily popular. An
existing form thus suggests its own burlesque, but particular situations
in society often motivated burlesque as well. Throughout the 1870s,
Twain used the idea of the Second Advent to make political points. In a
letter to Whitelaw Reid in 1873, Twain wrote about the murderer
William Foster, suggesting he might be “the Second Advent,” offering
the further opinion that “Judas Iscariot was nothing but a low, mean,
premature Congressman” (MTL 5: 311–12). In 1872, Twain likewise crit-
icized Mayor Hall, the Tammany politico who had survived numerous
prosecutions but still greeted visiting dignitaries on behalf of the city: "Is there no keeping this piece of animated putridity in the background? If the Second Advent shall transpire in our times, will he step forward, hat in hand, &—. But of course the man is equal to anything" (MTL 5: 245). Most notable is Twain's 1901 parody "Battle Hymn of the Republic (Brought Down to Date)." In this parody, Twain substitutes a "bandit gospel" for the real one, suggesting that the example of Christ is all but forgotten in an age when "Greed is marching on" (474). Twain wrote that parody to criticize the actions of the United States government in the Philippines, labeling the military actions unwarranted adventurism undertaken for business interests. In "The Second Advent," Twain similarly creates a "bandit gospel" in parody that uses the Christ story to satirize his own culture. Many prominent personages appear in the work, including Horace Greeley, the presidents of Princeton and Andover, and the Reverend De Witt Talmadge. Louis J. Budd suggests that Twain was even singling out Arkansas for criticism "because it acted like the other ex-Rebel states while lacking their traditional glamour" (101). The locale for the Nativity certainly suggests gambling and has a backwoods connotation, and Twain may be toying with the idea of the game of blackjack, wherein one card is face up and the other face down; with the first advent already revealed, now we are witnessing the revealing of the second "card," so to speak. Christ was born in "Bethlehem of Judea," and Twain may also have been playing with the names (Matthew 2:1).

In evaluating the import of "The Second Advent," one must consider whom Christ causes trouble for in the burlesque. On the one hand, this Christ does cause trouble for those who embrace the doctrine of special providences, for in answering all of their prayers, Christ blesses them with too much of a good thing. Twain's satiric point is obvious. Christ causes trouble for others in the fictional account, too, and here Twain's burlesque of the story more obviously serves the ends of the original. Christ meets with trouble in "The Second Advent" and is crucified, just as he is in the original text, but Christ essentially serves the same social, if not spiritual, function as in the original. That is, the real Christ, son of a carpenter, causes trouble for the scribes and Pharisees, just as Christ, son of the blacksmith, causes trouble for the scribes and Pharisees of the 1870s and 1880s. For them, Christ was, as Twain wrote in his journal, "Our Lord & Savior Jesus Christ the forgotten Son of God" (MTNJ 2: 571). Among these contemporary scribes are some of Twain's favorite targets.

One of these targets is the Reverend Dr. T. De Witt Talmage, pastor of
Brooklyn's Central Presbyterian Church. Twain was incensed at an article Talmage had written suggesting, seemingly with poorly written satiric purpose, that working men had no place in church if they could not bathe properly before attending. Twain responded with all the satiric power of which he was such an able practitioner. In “About Smells” (1870), Twain imagines Talmage as one of the twelve apostles, but one who would have complained about having to preach to “people of villainous odor every day” (49). Most pointedly, Twain suggests that Talmage “could not have stood the fishy smell of some of his comrades who came from around the Sea of Galilee” (49). “Master,” Twain’s Talmage informs Christ, “if thou art going to kill the church thus with bad smells, I will have nothing to do with this work of evangelization” (49).

Twain casts Talmage in precisely the same role in “The Second Advent.” Notable in the story for his enthusiastic endorsement of Christ, he seems more like one of the raftsmen from Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885) than a disciple when he first appears.

Then a young man of the other party, named Talmage, rose in a fury of generous enthusiasm, and denounced the last speaker as a reprobate and infidel, and said he had earned and would receive his right reward in the fullness of time in that everlasting hell created and appointed for his kind by this holy child, the God of the heavens and the earth and all that in them is. Then he sprang high in the air three times, cracking his heels together and praising God. (61)

Talmage has just consigned Horace Greeley to hell, for Twain uses the editor of the New York Tribune as an exemplar of the newsman after facts, not faith. Ironically, Talmage turns out to be correct in this fictional account of the second coming of Christ, and Twain criticizes him more for his religious enthusiasm than for his stand on whether this child born in Black Jack is truly the son of God. Twain’s Talmage is somewhat startling as a holy roller who “flung himself down, with many contortions, and wallowed in the dirt before the child, singing praises and glorifying God” (62). Attacking Talmage for his overly refined olfactory sense, Twain burlesques him still further by depicting the staid Presbyterian divine as a Bible-pounding holy roller. One thinks of the many works in which Twain satirizes such “wildcat” religious enthusiasm, notably the camp meeting episode in Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.

In “The Second Advent,” Twain actually refers to his earlier attack on Talmage when the disciple cites as evidence of the child’s godhead “the
odors of Eternal Land upon his raiment” (62). Twain’s point might seem obscure, but throughout the story the “wise men from the far east,” that is to say, New England, argue about the question of the Virgin Birth (58). Talmage’s assertion in the story connects his enthusiasm for the idea of the Virgin Birth with his desire to banish the odors of workingmen from the church. Thus, Twain’s point is that such divines are a bit too divine, and that there was a real world with real life and real odors at Christ’s nativity just as there was in his own world: weren’t there real animals in that stable? Twain’s burlesque of the Virgin Birth is simply part of his criticism of organized religion’s attempt to deny Christ’s human qualities—just as in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer he burlesques religion’s attempt to deny the human qualities of humans. Twain tries to imagine in this work what the “real Christ” was like, as opposed to the prissy examples offered by the church. The idea of a Christ child so real “every woman would want to bite him” motivates the story (MTNJ 2: 235). Twain’s “Second Advent” is a literary incarnation of the Christ story, returning the human side to Christ he saw as edited out by gospels, preachers, and artists.

Twain’s criticism of Talmage extended even further, for he identifies him as the Judas figure in “The Second Advent.” In the end, when the second Christ and the disciples are all crucified, St. Talmage alone escapes. Clearly, Talmage is for Twain the Judas of contemporary American society who betrays Christ’s message. Talmage becomes the second Judas for the Second Advent, betraying Jesus Barnes for “thirty pieces of silver” (68). Religious enthusiasm is always suspect in Twain, for one suspects it must be either hypocritical or a “wildcat” religion, and Talmage’s betrayal of Christ shows both Twain’s suspicion of emotional religion and his anger at genteel religion. Both are somewhat uncomfortably combined in the character Talmage.

Perhaps Twain’s greatest burlesque of his own era in “The Second Advent” is his parody of the second chapter of Luke, in which the angel appears to the shepherds. The wonderful line from the King James Version, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (2:14), is lost in Twain’s version. Twain preserves the music, having angels join the “choir of drovers who were ranching in the vicinity,” but destroys the harmony of the original (59). The angels and drovers sing the same words, but to different tunes, producing an effect not unlike the congregational singing Twain mocks in “A Sunday in Carson” (1863) and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876). After the singing, there is no peace, only disagreement, with the various factions of “wise men”
arguing about the divinity of the child (59). From the “special provi-
dences” that cause so much trouble in Black Jack, Arkansas, to the
nascent theological disputes prompted by the Second Advent, people in
Twain’s story seem incapable of self-government and unworthy of the
blessings granted them.

“LORD, THY WILL, NOT MINE, BE DONE”

Clearly, Twain’s story burlesques both the Christ story itself and con-
temporary society. Like such burlesques as “Barnum’s First Speech in
Congress” (1867), the work mocks a religiously inflected literary form,
but fulfills some part of the original’s intent. In the case of “The Second
Advent,” Twain dabbles in the writing of apocrypha to create a text that
mocks both the original text, questioning whether it remains applicable
in the modern era, even as he uses the text to call the modern era to
account. Burlesque has indeed a “double vision,” as Cox says (44). The
structure of “The Second Advent” resembles in this regard the epochal
switch of A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court (1889) that affords
Twain the opportunity to criticize the contemporary world and the
largely literary world of the Arthurian past. In “The Second Advent,”
Twain brings the story of the past (with the additional complication that
the story told in the past predicts that its central character will return to
complete the story) into the present to see whether the ancient narrative
has a place in the nineteenth century.

Orthodoxy and burlesque are not necessarily inimical, and Twain
concludes with a traditional Christian message—with a Calvinist spin—
directed at contemporary readers. This is the lesson of Christ’s crucifi-

Resolved. That since no one can improve the Creator’s plans by procuring
their alteration, there shall be but one form of prayer allowed in Arkansas
henceforth, and that form shall begin and end with the words, “Lord, Thy
will, not mine, be done;” and whosoever shall add to or take from this
prayer, shall perish at the stake. (68)

Twain turns the line to parody, for it is now a “resolution” rather than a
prayer, but still it does remember its origins. The line is a quotation from
Christ’s heartfelt address to God while praying in the garden of Gethse-
mane: “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless
This *risus paschalis* occurs often in Twain’s work. In the attributed piece, “The Stock Broker’s Prayer” (1863), Twain parodies “The Lord’s Prayer”: “Our father Mammon who are in the Comstock, bully is thy name; let thy dividends come, and stocks group, in California as in Washoe” (93). Similarly, in “Our Stock Remarks” (1862), Twain reported that “‘[t]here seems to be some depression in this stock. We mentioned yesterday that our Father which are in heaven. Quotations of lost reference, and now I lay me down to sleep,’ &c., &c., &c.” (176). Such *parodia sacra* has a social function, for Twain obviously targets a culture that has elevated money over God. Twain might also be called the writer who corrupted “The Lord’s Prayer” in “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg” (1899). Hadleyburg’s motto on the official seal had been “LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION,” but Twain parodies the Lord’s Prayer by having it changed to, “LEAD US INTO TEMPTATION” (438). The parody ironically asserts that to be honest one must recognize the vast gulf separating Christ and Christians. Through these burlesques, Twain focuses less on the grace of Christ, on his salvific power, and more on the extent to which people fail to reach his standard. In this sense alone are Twain’s burlesques antiorthodox, for they often focus on man’s depravity rather than Christ’s power to redeem. Arguably, these parodies that seem to violate Twain’s earlier suggestion that one should not refer to Christ “lighty, profanely, or otherwise than with the profoundest reverence” fulfill the text rather than destroy it (Mark Twain’s Letters, Paine Edition, I: 323). What is the effect of elevating “Lord, Thy will, not mine, be done” as the essential truth of the Christian faith? With the burlesque, Twain reinstates the Christic mythos. In effect, Twain gives the example of Christ’s prayer to God, suggesting that all believers should pray that his will, not ours, be done.

Twain’s conclusions in “The Second Advent” resemble his assertions in his parody of “The Apostle’s Creed,” probably written during the 1880s around the same time as his burlesque of Christ.

I BELIEVE in God the Almighty.

I do not believe He has ever sent a message to man by anybody, or delivered one to him by word of mouth, or made Himself visible to mortal eyes at any time or in any place.

I believe that the Old and New Testaments were imagined and writ-
ten by man, and that no line in them was authorized by God, much less inspired by Him.

I think the goodness, the justice, and the mercy of God are manifested in His works; I perceive that they are manifested toward me in this life; the logical conclusion is that they will be manifested toward me in the life to come, if there should be one.

I do not believe in special providences. ("Three Statements" 56)

Twain's parody of "The Apostles' Creed" is notable both in what formally remains the same and what is burlesqued. His first line is the only line that remains essentially unchanged from the original, "I believe in God the Father Almighty." Other lines begin with more uncertainty, contrasting to the origin of the word "creed," from the first line "ego credo," I believe: "I do not believe," "I believe," "I think," "I do not believe," "I cannot see how," "There may be," "I believe," and "If I break" (56–57).

As one can sense even from the beginnings of the sentences in Twain's creed, after the first line one gets a long list of qualifications. These qualifications refer to Christian doctrine generally, and also to the doctrine embodied in the creed specifically. Twain's parodic version of "The Apostle's Creed" rejects much Christian doctrine, and it is truly antigenre, for the original was spoken by the apostles to voice their belief in Christ's life and ministry as part of God's plan. Twain's creed leaves only the sovereign God intact. His creed praises God, not Christ. Even his slight change to the initial line of the creed by removing the word "Father" from his version strips God of the paternal role asserted by the original, just as, in effect, it removes the son both in form and content. God is defined simply as "God the Almighty."

Similarly, it is ironic that Twain burlesques the story of Christ to reinforce the Sovereignty of God in "The Second Advent." Yet this degradation offers up a text drawn from that story that has all the greater moral force. One of the resolutions made in the story is that "the Supreme Being is able to conduct the affairs of this world without the assistance of any person in Arkansas" (68). Similar sentiments appear in such works as What Is Man? in which Twain takes as the text for his dialogue the sovereignty of God and the depravity of humankind. In an 1886 notebook entry Twain fulminated, "Special providence! That phrase nauseates me—with its implied importance of mankind & triviality of God" (MTNJ 3: 246). Twain's burlesque of Christ's life is truly a parodic double of the original, for it follows the form closely only to invert its
central point—God’s grace visible in the Incarnation of Christ. Instead, Twain’s burlesque life of Christ reinstates the importance of God and the relative triviality of man; indeed, one must propose that Twain asserts the relative triviality of Christ. Christ, defined by Calvin as the mediator, provides neither a means of grace in Twain’s burlesque nor an exemplum fidei in his life and ministry; only in his supreme moment of submission to the sovereign God does Christ provide a lesson for Christians to follow.