

# ***Jonathan Livingston Seagull: A Critical Review***

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In the mid-1970s, *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*, a diminutive book by Richard Bach, captivated American readers, breaking sales records in both hard back and paperback editions, and the movie version played to packed theaters.

To many, it was undoubtedly just an innocent peaceful fable about the life of one seagull. Its star, Jonathan Livingston, is indeed a remarkable bird. He outdoes his fellow gulls in every department: ambition, perseverance, sacrifice for success and several other admirable qualities. However, the perceptive reader will gradually begin to see a subtle, but certain “message” being preached by J. L. in the latter half of the book. An incisive review of the book by Charles Cook was printed in *Christian Courier* edited by my friend Wayne Jackson, in January 1974. Charles did such a good job I am lifting excerpts from his review.

A close look at the book reveals the truth of the matter: it is a book of multi-cultist philosophy. There are woven throughout it threads of Humanism, Hinduism, Scientology, Christian Science, Existentialism, and a sprig of Truth—in other words, it’s for the birds.

As the story opens, Jonathan, a young seagull with extraordinary drive, discovers within himself (Scientology) the power to overcome the limitation of the seagull. His peers tell him that a seagull cannot achieve certain aerobatic skills because of their large wingspan and the nature of their fuselage. Jonathan proves his peers wrong! They reject him and cast him out. He defies tradition and after extensive personal initiative soars the heavens where no seagull has ever flown. He makes aerobatic maneuvers heretofore impossible in seagull circles.

One night there appeared two gulls in white array to take Jonathan to another world. Here he learns that seagulls (like people) must return to their world over and over until they get it right (reincarnation—Hinduism). After his great experiences among birds who have themselves been ‘self-elevated’ to a higher plane of existence (Humanism—DM) he returns to his own group determined to teach them ‘the better way.’ Before long he has a group of admiring followers who think he must be the son of the Great Gull. Here comes the shocker—Jonathan informs them that he is no more divine than they (Humanism, Unitarianism—DM), and that all of us have the power within to become whatever we desire (Scientology). He further informs them that sickness, sin, and death (and basic law of physics—DM) are illusions (Christian Science). He insists that there is no Great Gull, only the idea of perfection (Hinduism). A bird (or man) must do his own thing (Existentialism)!

Well, as it turns out the book is a chronicle of Bach's religious treadings over the past two years. From a background of Christian Science, he took a leap into the occult. Bach's flirtations in the mystical areas are reflected in his little book. At the end of the book, he has Jonathan say, 'Don't let them spread any silly rumors about me, or make me a god, okay, Fletch? I'm a seagull...' This is a direct aspersion of Jesus Christ, suggesting that he was only a 'self-elevated' man and not the Son of God.

JLS is but another stage in what appears to be a concerted effort to completely strip Jesus Christ of his Deity in this generation. *Jesus Christ, Superstar* (which portrayed Him as a super hypocrite) was a major thrust in this conspiracy. *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* is a worthy successor to Superstar in perpetuating this emphasis! In this little book, we see the finished product of a hopelessly confused "cook" who has tossed religious "ingredients" from many philosophies into his "mixmaster," utterly ignoring God's sure recipe. Who knows? Perhaps Jonathan Livingston Seagull churches will start sprouting. As for myself, I would just as soon worship a seagull as the kind of Christ *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* represents.

[**Note:** I wrote this article for, and it was published in the March 26, 1974, edition of *Sentinel*, weekly bulletin of the Sunset Church of Christ, Carlsbad, New Mexico, of which I was editor.

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