

But I thought dead-tree media was more accountable to the facts!

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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David Brooks says some silly stuff, but [his June 14 column](#) included a doozy even for him: "In Corinthians, Jesus tells the crowds..." The text was soon corrected to identify the letter as *First* Corinthians and its writer as Paul, though as of today it still has him telling crowds things. Whatever.

Michael Peppard [finds the error ironic](#):

A group of fact-checkers -- multiple people -- read over this sentence, and not one of them stopped the error. What that reveals is profound: the staff at the Times is not as secular as we think they are. They are *even more secular than we think they are*.

To *not* know that Jesus did not speak to people in Greece would be like not knowing a basic fact about the most important figures of American history. . . .

The group of fact-checkers has embodied the very absence of Judeo-Christian culture bemoaned in the column itself.

Except that it's not clear that this group of fact-checkers exists. *Times* columnists work almost entirely outside the paper's editorial structures and processes. When Gail Collins was editorial page editor, she [told then-ombudsman Daniel Okrent](#) that the policy for holding columnists accountable to the facts was that they were "expected to promptly correct" an error in the next column. More recently, Okrent's successor Margaret Sullivan [confirmed that columnists have almost complete free rein](#), subject only to basic copyediting and the editorial page editor's rarely utilized veto pen. This shouldn't surprise anyone, given that errors, serious or silly, occur in that space pretty regularly.

In short, it's Brooks's space to do his Brooks thing as he pleases. This might not mean that a staffer who noticed an error would be impotent to correct it, but it does mean that there's not exactly a rigorous process for catching errors in the first place. Perhaps [there should be](#).

At any rate, people should keep this in mind when opining about how you can't trust anything you read on the internet. The paper of record's opinion writers serve up factual errors as well, and preventing this doesn't seem to be high on the *Times's* priority list.