

REVIEW OF JESUS NEITHER GOD OR MAN THE CASE FOR A MYTHICAL CHRIST

Jesus Neither God or Man The Case for a Mythical Christ by Earl Doherty is not a bad book but a bit too fond of arguments from silence and claims of interpolation when Jesus is mentioned in ancient times by writers who were not invested in Christianity. It is too many books in one which makes you wish for it to end. It needs to be shorter and to the point.

Arguments from silence are helpful but only up to a point. If Jesus is nothing special then maybe the silence does not mean much. But if Jesus was God and was able to get a reaction and attention by inspiring unbelievers to think about him and maybe following him then the silence would be very loud indeed! We would expect a lot of critical attention and content from unbelievers in his time. We would see huge determination in them to eradicate faith in him.

It is true that believers were in the business of faking evidence and testimonies and tampered where possible. So you cannot believe or disbelieve any independent testimony for as Christians passed it down to us it is not truly independent.

The main step to show Jesus was probably a myth is to get statements from that time to that effect. Earl Doherty feels that the Jesus of the gospels is a more like a character in a morality play than a real person. In that sense, Jesus is a complete myth.

Paul was the first Christian writer about Jesus though he said shockingly little and avoided anything concrete historically. If he made it all up or imagined it then that could explain why through legend we ended up with the gospels. He gave the skeleton. The later believers or claimed believers put flesh on the bones.

Doherty notes how in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul says he learned of Jesus' death and resurrection according to the scriptures. That can be interpreted as saying that was the only way he heard of them which would make him the first Christian and the true founder of Christianity. According to the scriptures in the Greek is kata tas graphas. Jeremias when asking if the text which seems worded like an old creed actually is said you would expect the creed to start in Aramaic - the language of Jesus' stock and his disciples. He said that nothing in the Aramaic or even the Hebrew is a perfect match for that expression or even egerthe which means he was raised. The best authorities conclude, "Due to the above arguments, it does not seem likely that the creedal material Paul cites took final shape in a Jewish milieu. In the present form it seems not to have definite signs of a Semitic original." <https://carm.org/analysis-pre-pauline-creed-1-corinthians-151-11>. If so, that bolsters the argument that the doctrines may have started with Paul.

Colossians 2:15 has Paul or somebody who knew his teaching writing that Christ in the cross got rid of the bad angels of the universe who ruled it and maybe the authorities on earth by stripping himself of them. This is an allusion to how he would have been nude on the cross and he deliberately makes a public show of them and leads them along like captives. This is a rejection of a soft liberal Jesus. It is very poetic language. But what it is trying to say? Doherty tries to use it as evidence for a mythical crucifixion but it is really only saying what meaning you can find in the crucifixion.

Earl Doherty says to think according to the scriptures means in fulfilment of the scriptures is off the track. He is right. Paul does not allude to fulfilment so much as the scriptures preaching the gospel. That can mean either they can tell you Jesus died and was risen as in history or that Jesus died and rose

He notes that references to Jesus siblings in the Bible are hard to interpret for even wives are called sisters in 1 Corinthians 9:5. The wording is adelphen gunaika. In 1 Corinthians 6 brother must not go to law against brother - meaning not real brothers but brothers in the Church. Tychicus is called brother in Ephesians 6:21 though he is not. Hebrews 2 is clear that every human being connected to God is literally family with Jesus (verses 11, 12). A psalm verse about literal brothers is even applied to them by Jesus.

The gospels say Jesus raised people from the dead. Doherty thinks Paul could have used these as examples to answer the Corinthians who were saying there is no resurrection from the dead. An Old Testament example seemed to be his style. It is surprising that he never mentioned when Elisha raised a boy. Why did he not say that Jesus preached people would rise again and was too good and holy to lie? That is what is really startling. Doherty missed a decent argument from silence here. Not all such arguments are bad.

Doherty points to Collins who told Lee Strobel that demons exist for the gospels say so. He says that the attitude of people like that is, "We do not need to understand or support with evidence, we need simply to have faith." That is good psychology. When you write something you are trying to communicate and if so you want your writing to be tested and questioned. In a sense, Collins does not really respect the gospels. Its about the religion he has in his head not the truth.

Doherty quotes the research in *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* by Everett Ferguson which says that in the worship of Dionysus "the flesh from a living animal and drinking wine could be considered as incorporating the god and his power within". This is important for the Eucharist had to be interpreted in the light of the surrounding culture. If John 6 where eating the living flesh of Jesus and drinking his blood is inspired by that then if the text is eucharistic it is a cannibalistic Eucharist.

Doherty quotes Paul writing that whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup without recognising the body becomes guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. If Jesus is a myth or mystical force or god then is the bread and cup the only body and blood he has? Seeing bread and drink as a person is no different from the times where people saw the world or the tree up the hill as a person, God.

Doherty points to how Psalm 8 which refers to the son of man is treated by Jesus in Hebrews. Jesus says it is about him though it is simply about humanity. Are the two meanings possible? If so then is Jesus some kind of pantheistic creature who is all humankind? Anyway though Hebrews says Jesus had no sin unlike it does not say it meant it literally as similar talk was used of others figures who were simply very good but who were not totally sinless. Many people do feel they have no sin in them. Jesus by using the psalm is claiming to be totally ordinary. That is there are no miracles.

Doherty compares the heavenly place of sacrifice with that of earth. The forever is not not made by human hands according to 9:11. Where Jesus is sacrificed as Doherty says, is incidental to where he was sacrificed. Was Jesus sacrificed there as in crucified? Or did he go there with his blood after being crucified on earth to do the offering?

Hebrews 10 says, "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said:

“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;

6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.

7 Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll—
I have come to do your will, my God.’”

Jesus then alters a Psalm that does not mention a body being prepared in the original. The notion is either Jesus came into existence as a man to serve God or if he existed beforehand as a spirit that was no good. He had to serve God in a body as a sacrifice. So we are to believe that God wanted Jesus to have a body so much that he no longer wanted offerings and sacrifices though he asked for them in the law! The desperation says it all.

The most important thing that Doherty overlooked is that a Christian altering a psalm to make out that Jesus had a body is admitting there is no evidence that this man ever lived. What has having a body to do with doing God's will anyway?

Doherty notes how Melchizedek simply because Genesis does not take time to mention a father and mother is supposed to mean in Hebrews that he didn't have them! Melchizedek is used to tell us things about Jesus so the idea is that he is a representation of Jesus so Jesus had no parents either. That is implied. The author knows as we do that Genesis says nothing about Melchizedek's background so his saying that the father and mother being unmentioned means he had none is strange and illogical and obviously so. So why does he say it?

Doherty mentions how Paul writes that Jesus was made of heavenly stuff unlike Adam who was made of earthly (1 Corinthians 15:47). This does not fit Jesus having lived as an ordinary man on earth. Paul wrote that Jesus was born of woman. She must have been a host mother.

Doherty says that 2 Corinthians 5:15 were Paul writes that we know nobody, particularly Jesus, according to the flesh - ie in an nonspiritual way any more. That may hint that Jesus is known sort of psychically which does not render much hope that any living person knew him the empirical way.

Doherty says Hebrews talks of priests on earth and yet that only one priest is real. Jesus is that priest. Hebrews teases rivalry which is why it keeps contrasting the Jewish priesthood with Jesus'. Hebrews says he is different from others who claim to be priests in how he has no sin or need to sacrifice all the time and will not die again and that is why he is the real deal. But it says Melchizedek is the only priest too and is a picture of this only priest. The solution is that Melchizedek is the only real priest ever on earth and a parallel to Jesus alone being priest. Jesus is not a rival for he is in Heaven! Jesus then did not sacrifice his life on earth but in Heaven - in the real temple, the one in Heaven. Hebrews never says Jesus died or rose in this world.

Doherty certainly proves that the non-existence of Jesus is a possibility. Christians invented things as big as Jesus as got away with it. For example, claiming to be a very prevalent religion soon after Jesus died. That is totally false.

The religion is based on Jesus but Jesus is basically a hero who was victimised by the Jews. It makes for a good story but the Jewish Holocaust is the ultimate fruit. So the antisemitism of Christianity is inherent. This is not truly a religion of love but selective love. Here is one text that demonises the Jews as being hateful to everybody. And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. 14 For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God's churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews 15 who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out. They displease God and are hostile to everyone 16 in their effort to keep us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. In this way they always heap up their sins to the limit. The wrath of God has come upon them at last. See 1 Thessalonians 2.

That is a lot of very big lies. They are big enough to make you question everything about them.

Nothing changes the fact that Hebrews chapter 8 says Jesus did not suffer the crucifixion sacrifice on earth.

3 Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer.

4 **If he were on earth**, he would not be a priest, for there are already priests who offer the gifts prescribed by the law.

My comment on that is that if they are not real priests anyway as the letter says that should not matter. The lapse in logic shows that the author is just desperate to argue AGAINST those who say Jesus was on earth.

That is the last word.

APPENDIX

NOTE ON HEBREWS 8:4

Here is what Paul Ellingworth has to say about this passage in his commentary [Hebrews, p. 405]: The second difficulty concerns the meaning of the two occurrences of $\epsilon\acute{\nu}\nu$. The imperfect in unreal [contrafactual] conditions is temporally ambiguous (BD § 360 [3]), so that NEB 'Now if he had been on earth, he would not even have been a priest' (so Attridge) is grammatically possible. However, it goes against the context, in at least apparently excluding Christ's present ministry, and it could also be misunderstood as meaning that Jesus had never 'been on earth.' Most versions accordingly render: 'If he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all' (REB, NJB; similarly RSV, TEV, NIV...). 87 Thus, if the imperfect in contrafactual conditions is indeed "temporally ambiguous," we cannot appeal to the general grammatical rule to place verse 4 in the present. (We should also note in passing how preconception can govern scholarly decision-making, in that a past sense is being ruled out, even though "grammatically possible," because it contravenes Gospel-based assumptions.) The choice, then, lies between an understanding in the present and an understanding in the past. But this is a choice which is absolutely critical. Since the statement is contrafactual, a past understanding would make it a clear denial that Jesus had been on earth in the past.