

## THE ELLEGARD BOOK SHOWS HOW WEAK THE EVIDENCE THAT JESUS LIVED IS

The book by Professor Alvar Ellegard, *Jesus - One Hundred Years before Christ*, is a study of how the Jesus story could have been put together if Jesus was a myth. The theory is that Ignatius of Antioch, in the second century, was the first person to turn Jesus into a historical person and the gospels hobbled along later to give him more solidity. Let us put it under the microscope.

The letters of Paul never speak of Jesus coming again or returning (page 26) which is open to the possibility that Jesus never lived on earth meaning this future coming would be his first coming. James is called the brother of Jesus in Paul's letters (Galatians 1:19). There is too much evidence in Paul that this was not meant literally for his Jesus was an obscure person who nobody knew about and who had started appearing to people. Jesus may have adopted James as a brother in a vision.

The reason the book gives for a Christ faction in the Greek Church in Paul's time, is that a pre-Christian Essene form of Jesus worship was in existence (page 23). Perhaps. It would mean Jesus was known and worshipped long before the time the gospels say he lived. The faction must have believed in direct communication with Christ because anything else would involve accepting a man like the way it was with Peter or Paul or Apollos as the emissary of Christ so you wouldn't say any of them were a Christ faction. The Christ faction were perhaps Gnostic in inclination for they believed that they could not sin so they lived immorally and had supernatural abilities and knowledge. Paul never attacks their rejection of the Jesus story – Gnostics were so radical that they believed that everybody rejecting the Jesus story and inventing their own story was a sign of spiritual insight for truth differed from person to person an attitude that the vast majority of Gnostics have and always have had - so he had no Jesus story. He did not say they must stop telling lies about Jesus on the basis that the evidence says it is lies because he could not.

When answering Marcion's followers who contended that Paul was the sole witness to Jesus having been resurrected, Irenaeus replied that Paul said that the same God was inspiring him and Peter. Irenaeus should have used the text, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, which says that Peter and some others saw the Jesus of the resurrection besides Paul. Irenaeus would have used it if it had been in his text of Paul. Irenaeus needed to back up what he said for his mere opinion would not have washed with the Marcionites. Page 19 says it is weak to argue, "Irenaeus would have used the text for it gave him better support". There is good reason to hold that 1 Corinthians 15 has been tampered with as the followers of Marcion believed. Marcion and his followers had no problem holding that Jesus appeared to the other apostles for they were said to be apostates and liars anyway. The more apparitions the better. When they refused to believe that Jesus did appear to anybody but Paul clearly then they had historical grounds for saying that.

Because there is no evidence of the buildings called synagogues in Palestine in the first century and since they are mentioned a lot in the gospels and Acts and not in the first century texts it makes it likely that the gospels and Acts were either written or altered in the second century when there were such places. Sometimes the word was used to refer to gatherings before the second century but that is different (page 33).

He disagrees with Thiede's claim that fragments of Mark were found at Qumran dating Mark to 50 AD because the fragments are too small and unclear to be sure that they are from Mark (page 185). Moreover, the Cave 7 where they were found may not have had the same history as the rest and could have been used by Christians for hiding texts in (page 186). I would add that it is possible that somebody put the fragments there in order for them to be "discovered" for the evidence for the lateness of the Gospels is conclusive. It was the location they were found in that led to them being dated so early. Plenty of ancient material for planting is available on the black market and even at some legitimate markets in the East. But in any case, the fragments could be from anything for they are so small and the excuse was made that they are earlier editions of New Testament material to excuse their differences with our current text.

It is possible that the parallels between the Shepherd of Hermas and the Gospels mean that the Shepherd was used to create the gospels (page 46). Or it could be that they have the same source. The wording is not the same. Strong evidence that Hermas helped originate the gospels comes from the fact that it avoids seeing the Son of God as a historical figure who people met and touched and laughed and cried with. The author dates Hermas to the sixties of the first century.

All that is wrong with this is that he does not look to see if Hermas would have used the gospels or the source that the gospels used. Also, when a simple verse gets more complicated wording in a parallel text it is most likely that the harder one is the later version. Things tend to get fancier the longer time goes on and Hermas is the least fancy version of the Christian gospel.

However, Ellegard notes that a gospel parable of Jesus inspired by Isaiah 5 is more complicated than the Hermas version

which is closer to Isaiah meaning that Hermas inspired the Gospel version (page 48). When Hermas ignored Paul and his writings (page 48) it is astonishing if he would have plagiarised the gospels or used the source of the gospels. This may be only an indication that the gospels were edited and elements from other books were implanted in the second century.

The book claims that Jesus was transmuted into a historical person by the lies of St Ignatius of Antioch, a bishop of the early second century.

The textual parallels between Ignatius's writings and the sayings ascribed to Jesus in the gospels are distinguished by the fact that Ignatius never attributes them to Jesus while the gospels do (page 204). I have argued elsewhere that these parallels could have arisen by chance and tradition and are very few.

Ignatius wrote that the Spirit of God knows where it comes from and goes to. In John this becomes the wind representing the spirit blowing where it goes and nobody knows where it comes from. It gets more complicated and poetic in John so Ignatius seems to have been reworked to create what is in John.

Ignatius said that we must receive the bishop as the one who sent him and regard him as the Lord. This corresponds with Jesus saying that whoever receives the person he sends receives him (John 13:20). Ignatius' version is simpler than Jesus' because he commands accepting the bishop as the Lord instead of everybody Jesus sends.

The author is right to argue that since Ignatius said that the Jewish prophets preached the gospel (Philippians 5:2) his reference to the need for gospels does not mean the books of the gospels we have (page 206). Philippians 8:2 has him protesting against people who said they would not believe in the gospels if what the gospels said was not in the ancient prophets. This does not mean books for few would have got the books and since they were so expensive and delicate they were only available to a few. He then said that the records were the cross, death and resurrection proving that he did not mean books. He said that Jesus drank after the resurrection which is not in the gospels (page 210) and shows he did not have them. If he had he would have regurgitated the account of Jesus eating fish in the gospel of Luke which was far more impressive and persuasive. If there had been gospels then the fish story being better known would naturally have been selected.

Some of the parallels in the book can be traced back to coincidence. A doctrine like, "The Son does all the Father wants", could be mistaken as a parallel text to, "Whatever the Father does the Son does". Times wording will be similar for the doctrine cannot be stated just in any old words but in much the same wording.

The evidence for the whole structure of Ellegard's argument is not terribly convincing but it is convincing enough. There are coincidences that give it strength.