

AN ESSAY REFUTING THE EVIDENCE THAT JESUS LIVED.....

An interpretation of Christian history that denies that Jesus existed. The main evidence for mythicism is as follows:

The silence of historians and writers from the time. Even if he had been mentioned, they would need to give some indication of having evidence that he existed. A bald, "There was a Jesus," is nothing more than hearsay.

There is no evidence that the first century Jewish historian, Josephus, mentioned Jesus for we know that a Christian interpolator edited his work and inserted references to Jesus and could have written all Josephus' alleged references to Christ.

The gospel stories could have been invented. They could have been influenced by true stories where they ring true.

They contain huge errors like saying Jesus was publicly active while claiming to be the Messiah an act which would not have been tolerated by the Jewish leaders or Rome for even a day in those politically turbulent times. To claim to be Messiah or king was to declare war on the ruthless Roman occupiers of Palestine. The gospels cannot be trusted as evidence that Jesus lived. Maybe they are being truthful but what are we to do? The gospels are the only evidences for a historical Jesus. Even if the gospels seem fairly plausible to some, the fact remains that the earliest evidence counteracts them and denies them. The earliest evidence is what counts.

The idea that people would not say embarrassing things about Jesus in the gospels which they did so the stories must have been true and undeniable is of no hope to Christians. The stories are that he insulted pagan women with possessed daughters and was nailed to the cross as a political criminal. Now all invented gods have unflattering tales told about them. And the crucifixion was turned into an advantage for it led to the heart-warming idea that Jesus died for sinners in atonement and rose from the dead and showed himself stronger than his killers.

The first Christian writer, top Church leader and apostle, Paul of Tarsus, never placed Jesus in a historical setting or said when he lived and gives no reason for us to deny that all he said about Jesus came from his visions. He indicated that there was no evidence when he required faith in the crucifixion. You don't need faith for what is historical fact in recent times. He told the Corinthians that he decided to know and hear nothing among them but Christ crucified and this was to happen not by the wisdom of men but by the inspiration of the Spirit (1 Cor 2:1-5). When he put this faith on something so dangerous as the feeling that you are inspired that shows that it was all he could do. He had nothing but visions and communications from the Holy Spirit to tell him that Jesus was crucified meaning it was NOT something a historian could accept. He couldn't refute the Corinthian believers who denied the resurrection except to mention the visions of the risen Jesus that they scoffed at and say that Jesus must have risen because the dead would be lost if he didn't. The desperation proves that there was no real evidence – he couldn't say Jesus did miracles when alive and could have managed to return from the dead. If Jesus lived recently some of the sceptical Christians would have been saying that the resurrection was a misunderstanding for the wrong man was nailed or Jesus survived by trickery but he makes no effort to prove that Jesus was dead which he would have to do to show the resurrection happened. He can do nothing.

Paul stated that Christ did not send him to baptise but to preach the gospel and not with eloquence and wisdom so that the cross would not be emptied of its power (1 Cor 1:17). This means that wisdom and intelligence would be no good to get people to believe in the cross and in its power but the cross has power to draw people to believe in it. That would only be right if there was no evidence for the cross but visions of a man who claimed to have been crucified and raised from the dead.

In Galatians 5:11, Paul declares that if he preaches circumcision the stumbling block of the cross is removed. This is plainly saying that to accept circumcision is denying the cross happened.

Notice that he doesn't say denying the atonement or the propitiation but the cross, the historical event.

Hardcore Protestants argue that he was saying that the likes of Catholics are making the cross ineffectual. So it is necessary to deny that you can do anything to please God. Salvation is passive. Believing in Jesus doing all the work so that there is literally nothing left for you to do is a sign of being saved and justified and forgiven.

Paul did not mean anything like that. If he had meant it he would have said that the circumcision is a stumbling block to the

propitiation not the cross. That view would be pure nonsense. And Paul would have known it was for there were a lot of different views in early Christianity.

Millions have believed in the cross as a vehicle of salvation and atonement without believing that it abolished good works and religious rites as specified in the Law of Moses. Catholics follow a replacement for the Law of Moses and still believe that Jesus died in their place for their sins. You could have circumcision without denying the atonement of the cross.

Why did believers of his day go as far as to say that to accept circumcision was doing away with the cross? There is only one possible answer. Jesus revealed that he was nailed to a cross in visions to the apostles. In those visions, Jesus stated that the cross had to happen to free Christians from the Law of Moses and circumcision by taking the punishment due to sin. We know this had to have happened for the gospels never portray a Jesus who was that emphatic about doing this. To reject the revelation is to reject the cross for the revelation is the only evidence that the cross even happened. If you accept circumcision you contradict Jesus who told the Church about the cross eliminating the need for it and if you contradict Jesus you also deny that he was reliable in relation to the cross having happened. To deny one then is to deny the other.

There is nothing else that could make the cross and the abolition of the law so inseparable.

Paul talked as if the risen Christ was a mystical supernatural being who somehow was one person with the Church which was his body so in a sense he and his cult were Jesus Christ (Galatians 2:20; 1 Corinthians 6:15-17; 1 Corinthians 12) which may explain the reference to Jesus testifying to Pontius Pilate in one of his letters which most scholars however think is not really his work. Perhaps Jesus was thought to have had appeared to Pilate after his resurrection. There were many Christian legends from early times to that effect.

The Christianity of the apostles and Paul had nothing to do with a Jesus who provably lived but a visionary one – an entity that appeared to some people claiming to have been a man that was never known before who was crucified and raised from the dead. This was the testimony of the first Christian writer so it supersedes any evidence that allegedly shows that Christ lived especially when the other apostles of Jesus, Peter, James and John, accepted him as sufficiently Christian. So they must have agreed on that much.

1 Peter 3 says that Roman governors and officials must be obeyed for God uses them to punish and reward people (1 Peter 2:13, 14). Most of these punishments were unduly harsh and pagan and punishment is really vengeance if you administer it in a spirit of hatred and spite like they did so it is ridiculous to say that Peter means we should just approve of their punishments when they do right. He is saying we must approve of what they do just because it is God that lets them rule. This is a denial that Jesus suffered death under Pontius Pilate, a Roman governor.

2 Peter 1 says that the apostles believe that seeing Jesus glorified and transfigured (this seems to be referring to a resurrection vision) and God telling them that he was his beloved son is not as sure a word from God as the word of God in the Old Testament. So you should not look for evidence that Jesus lived or what he did except by looking at the Old Testament prophecies about Jesus. This admits that there is no evidence but the Old Testament. It therefore dismisses traditions about Jesus and gospels as fables.

The secular references to Jesus, which are very flimsy, could have come from hearsay that was understandably taken as fact just like some people believe that Joseph Smith of the Mormons really had golden plates even though that is part of the Mormon myth though without accepting any of the other Mormon legends. They take the plates as history and the rest as nonsense.

If Jesus is a rumour that is the same as calling him a near-myth if not a myth. Trypho called him a rumour.

About 150 AD, Justin wrote his Dialogue with Trypho the Jew. Trypho said that nobody from Jesus' time knew him and that Jesus was invented. "If the Messiah has been born and exists somewhere, he is incognito and does not even recognise himself. He will have no power until Elijah will come and anoint him and tell all who he is. You [Christians] have listened to an unfounded rumour and have invented some kind of a Christ for yourselves" (Chapter VIII, Dialogue With Trypho). Trypho was an informed and worthy opponent when Justin had to write a book to challenge him. Justin, like Irenaeus much later, believed that Jesus lived to be an old man (page 40, St Peter and Rome) which conflicts with the gospels. This conflict is not surprising for Justin never knew the gospels in full. They were hidden. We know from the context of the entire Dialogue that the bits it contains that spell out gospel stories such as the massacre of the innocents and a couple of other gospel tales, are later insertions. We know this because not only did Justin have no need to bring them up where he did but they would have appeared earlier in the work when they were needed. They were needed earlier to shut Trypho up for saying Jesus was a total enigma. Justin gives many clues that he did not acknowledge anything the gospels are saying which shows that he either didn't regard them as always correct or that he didn't know them that well. Justin

himself then inadvertently gives support to Trypho for Justin himself clearly knew nothing about Jesus. Thus we have a valuable witness to Jesus being a legend.

It is possible that Justin thought the gospels were useful but did not take them very seriously. That would mean that Justin rejected the largest body of evidence for the existence of Jesus.

In Chapter XXXIX we read, “Trypho said, ‘prove to us that the man who according to you was crucified and rose into Heaven is the Messiah of God. For you have proved by the scriptures you have recited before that the scriptures say the Christ must suffer and return to rule all nations. Show us that your Christ is the Christ’. Justin replies, “It has been proved sirs. It has been proven to those who hear and who have heard what you have heard and accepted by you. But I return to what I was discussing and will give the other proof later to you in case you say I cannot prove”.

Trypho says that the Christians are SAYING Jesus was nailed to the cross indicating that there was no evidence for it but their word. Justin, in reply, tells the Jews that the prophecies are proof enough. In other words, the prophecies must have been fulfilled so even if there is no evidence for Christ we know from the prophecies that the Christ story is true and can work out the details of the story from them. In other words, the prophecies are the only real record of Christ. In other words, if the interpretation is wrong then Jesus Christ never existed. The Gospels did the same thing, they used Old Testament verses out of context to show that the Jesus story was in the Old Testament. Christians forget that the New Testament teaches that the Old Testament contains the gospel and is superior. Jesus said it was better than anyone rising from the dead (Luke 16:30,31).

It is a mistake for those who oppose mythicism to disparage it. Even if it simply shows that the evidence for Jesus is not great or very weak or that nobody can know if Jesus existed or not or that it is one of the matters on which competent scholars can choose to disagree it still manages to destroy Christianity. If Christians would accept weak evidence, then they have no right to object if somebody invents a new creed on slender evidence and yet they intolerantly claim to follow Jesus who called himself “the Truth”.

St Peter and Rome, JBS, Irish Church Missions, Dublin, undated

The Historical Evidence for Jesus, G A Wells, Prometheus Books, New York, 1988