

Response to JP Holding's criticism of Scott Bidstrup's Critique of The Case for Christ

JP Holding tried to challenge Bidstrup who successfully refuted Lee Strobel' amateurish book in defence of Jesus Christ, The Case for Christ.

Bidstrup: Papias saying in 125 AD that Mark was accurate and wrote the gospel is too long after the alleged authorship of the gospel to be reliable. Bidstrup wants to show that the first ever gospel or story of Jesus is not necessarily dependable.

Holding: There are many other documents from ancient times that are in the same situation with people testifying as to who wrote them a very long time after and we accept them.

Me: We accept them yes but only until further light comes up and because history contains a lot of theory and speculation just for the sake of filling in the gaps. The evidence is still very weak.

If you cared for your God who you say comes first Mr Holding you would not be seeing him through the eyes of a book, namely your Bible, with such weak credentials.

The gospels themselves by presenting a character who claims to come first in all things are implying, wittingly or unwittingly and it matters not, that we need solid evidence to accept them and accepting them just because we do other books without that evidence is forbidden. The historian cannot however accept miracle stories and it is better to say nothing than to use them for miracles threaten history. For example, if you accept badly backed up miracle reports then how do you know that the Emperor Nero was a man? Maybe he died as a baby and came back as a ghost? You can't do history if you start accepting bad miracle reports.

And the gospels reports have no real credibility for they are not convincing enough. There is no reason to believe that Papias was not just depending on hearsay or on his own detective work which might have been shabby. There is no reason to believe that Papias meant the gospel of Mark, as we have it now, at all.

Holding agrees with The Case for Christ that the secret gospel of Mark which indicates that lumps were hacked out of the gospel of Mark is probably a late invention and does not impugn the integrity of the text of Mark that we have now got. They say there is no proof that the secret gospel was the original Markan gospel. But there is no proof that the Markan one is the original either. Holding and the Case for Christ and the opponent of the Jesus Seminar Dr Gregory Boyd also say that Clement of Alexandria who believed in its authenticity and preserved some of the text of it for us was gullible regarding sacred writings. But Clement made it clear that his friend Theodore managed to stop the heretics who were using the secret gospel to defend carnal doctrines. This means that a wide section of the Church leadership accepted the gospel as authentic so as to be able to confound the heretics for only a widescale effort could be of any help. So gullible or not Clement has to be taken seriously for a lot of people took the gospel seriously. To simply wave the secret gospel aside is just being biased. It is not listening to contrary evidence. That is what the Christians have done for they cannot prove that Clement was gullible in this case. There is evidence that he was not. Not having proof that the secret gospel is real, does not amount to having the right to dismiss it because a small piece of weak evidence could tip the scales against the authenticity of our Mark. I am not saying however that the secret gospel is weak evidence but it is strong evidence.

Bidstrup: We accept the biographies of Alexander the Great as reliable enough they were written centuries after his death but we reject the gospels because they are propaganda unlike those writing though they appeared soon enough after Jesus' death.

Holding: If the gospel events happened and were written about, anything written would look like propaganda. The Alexander biographies sought to make Alexander look good so they had an agenda.

Me: Again the material about Alexander is sometimes believed when other discoveries and documents back them up. When it is not supported we just assume that it is true. Christianity asks for belief in Jesus though it could have been that the evangelists did research not to determine the truth about Jesus but to determine what lies they could get away with. It was not a hard job when the traumatised Jews who were going through one of the hardest times in their history had more to think about that some obscure writings that were affecting Gentiles more than Jews.

The Case for Christ says that all ancient writings were propaganda (page 31) so it itself contradicts its hero Blomberg. The Alexander biographies are accepted because they match facts we can discern as such from other sources and from commonsense. They are not accepted despite being written a long time after Alexander. They are accepted because they

ring true and accepting them is better than accepting nothing. Documents will be accepted as accurate for innumerable reasons and to argue that because the Alexander biographies are accepted so the gospels should be is plain dishonesty and an over-simplification. It is like arguing that because some scientists are right that aspirin can help sick people that other scientists who say thalidomide is good are right. Its not that simple.

The Alexander biographies did try to make Alexander look good but in the way Joan Collins made Alexis Carrington look good. Alexander was presented as a flawed but unbelievable hero. Alexander did not get the moral adulation that the gospels sought to impute to Christ. The gospels are propaganda in the extreme. It is easier to write propaganda than for a man to really do miracles so Holding's assertion that the gospels would look like propaganda though they are not is unacceptable.

Bidstrup: Julius Caesar was hailed as the Son of God born of a virgin and resurrected. So why should we believe that about Jesus? Christian people like Blomberg are saying the gospels with their wild tales are right because the gospels say they are.

Holding: Jesus being called the Son of God is different because this title for him is in the context of Jewish tradition and wisdom literature. It does not mean what was meant by Caesar being made the Son of God.

Me: Holding does not argue against the assertion that the miracle tales are taken as true just because the gospel says so for he finds it embarrassing it admit this. And the New Testament is not clear exactly what Jesus meant by being Son of God. All we know is that Jesus claimed to be in some kind of very intimate relationship with God. Also, Jesus abhorred Jewish tradition for he thought it only got in the way of the scriptures being followed. Jesus never clearly linked his divine sonship to the wisdom literature.

Bidstrup: Jesus was not unique for Apollonius and Honi and Hanina ben Dosa did miracles too.

Holding: None of them come close to Jesus.

Me: Holding as a Christian would think that. If these men managed to do miracles in front of more witnesses than Jesus' supreme miracle the resurrection had then they are better. We don't know if this is true so Holding has no right to say such a thing.

Bidstrup: The gospel material contains some embarrassing material that was not helpful to the Christian cause. This is not evidence of historicity because liars would put tales like that in to give the whole scenario the ring of truth.

Holding: The refusal of the gospels to cover up things makes them honest.

Me: If Jesus had big fans after his death then the flaws would have been rationalised away or overlooked. The failure to cover up indicates that the gospels got away with the embarrassing stuff for nobody at the time was worried about it.

The Christians all maintain that the embarrassing material can be reconciled with an image of Jesus as the ideal. It is wholly dishonest for them to use Holding's notion as evidence for the gospels when they don't believe in it themselves. For example, they say Jesus was a spiritual king and that the title King of the Jews above the cross was embarrassing for it implied Jesus was trying to get anointed king in the political sense and failed. But the title could have been put up to mock Jesus. The title could have been put up as a false accusation against Jesus. Jesus insulting the woman he called a dog and calling the scribes and Pharisees bastards to their faces is not embarrassing for the Jews justified revenge. Jesus claimed to be a friend of the God who made cruel laws. The Koran has lots of embarrassing material that was never corrected though it kept the form of oral tradition before being written down and we don't say it is true.

The notorious book, The Jesus Family Tomb, like the gospels admits faults, and shows sincerity. It argues that the box Jesus' bones were in has been found. So Jesus didn't rise from the dead. The book goes out of its way to avoid hurting Christians or denying the resurrection despite wanting us to think Jesus' ossuary or bone box was found. It admits faults and is sincere and compassionate. And Christians say these qualities prove we must believe in the gospels! The gospels actually never admit faults and have very little compassion when they threaten people who don't believe in what they teach.

Bidstrup: The martyrdom of the disciples of Jesus is no different from the early Mormon martyrs.

Holding: it was because the disciples of Jesus saw what they were dying for and the Mormon ones did not that they were different and so we can take the disciples of Jesus' testimony written in blood seriously.

Me: The Mormons died for what their feelings told them was true. The disciples could have died for the same reason despite seeing Jesus risen. They might not have been sure at the time that he rose or that the visions were real but got sure

as time went on. But that does not make them right. Their death has nothing at all to do with proving the resurrection. The Mormons dying cancels out the apostles testimony in blood if that was what they gave.

The apostles claimed to have evidence that their visions of Jesus were real. The evidence was the key. It was the key too for the Mormons. Yet we know that Mormonism and the religion of the apostles were totally incompatible. They cannot both be true.

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

When Christians are faced with a breakdown of the half-truths and lies and stupidity in books like *The Case of Christ* they can happily assert that the critic has no knowledge of the way a court of law works and that circumstantial evidence for Jesus is being ignored. Circumstantial is indirect evidence. It means that when a number of facts only make sense if X is the case and not Y then this is circumstantial evidence. The book makes circumstantial evidence its *raison d'être*. But circumstantial evidence is taken only as worth something when what it points to is plausible which is not the case with miracles so they need better evidence than circumstantial evidence and not only that and when there are so many pieces of circumstantial evidence that point in the one direction that their doing so by chance must be inexplicable meaning that they prove whatever they point to. In Jesus' case the problem is that circumstantial evidence can be produced to support religious claims that contradict those of Jesus. The evidence for Humanism being true is clear and far from circumstantial. It is not good enough for proving that Jesus Christ has the right to dictate to you how to run your life and your spirituality for that is a very serious matter. It is circumstantial evidence that gives us so many different candidates for being Jack the Ripper. No lawsuit can be won with circumstantial evidence that is open to many interpretations which is the case with the evidence that the Christians boast about.

Here is a rebuttal of circumstantial evidence as used in *The Case for Christ*.

* The argument that the disciples died for their beliefs is not circumstantial evidence for they could have been on drugs for all we know. We don't know the circumstances in which they were sent to their deaths. They could have been killed for other reasons so that recanting their faith would not have saved them anyway.

We cannot be sure that the apostles were arrested and then executed against their will. If they were, then can they be considered martyrs and sincere? Soldiers

* The argument that determined sceptics change their minds and come to Jesus in faith therefore there is something in Christianity fails. Determined anti-atheists have converted to Atheism. What about the sceptics that don't convert to Christianity? You can only ignore them by accusing them of dishonesty but that would be very vicious and judgmental and bigoted. Christians soon flout "Love thy neighbour as thyself", to suit their purposes and those of their long-dead cult leader Jesus. People who believe that there is no real knowledge of anything come to that belief reluctantly. They hold that our reason could be deluded and our senses misleading us so what we call knowledge is really just guesswork and belief and opinion. Their attitude means the loss of their beloved faith in their knowledge. There is no evidence that in the days after Jesus supposedly lived, people who knew him would have been easy to meet. And hardened sceptics who knew what they were talking about would have been harder to meet. What is the point of pointing to converted sceptics who were not in a position to investigate and question witnesses as evidence for the plausibility of Christianity? And hardened sceptics didn't care enough to debunk Jesus in those days for the cult of Jesus was only a speck on the religious landscape of the Holy Land.

Paul is pointed to as an example but nothing in the accounts denies the possibility that he persecuted Christians because he already believed or felt an inclination to and this was his way of handling it and finally on the road to Damascus he gave in and converted. A temporary mental illness could have caused his conversion and he was so touched by it that he stayed faithful to it forever.

* The argument that thousands of Jews were willing to alter the social structure they had fought for years to preserve over Jesus is a blatant lie despite being voiced by JP Moreland. The Church according to the Book of Acts never forced the Jewish believers to abandon their customs. Indeed those who wanted Gentiles to be made to follow these customs were considered to be brethren and invited to conferences. There is no evidence that many of the Jews persisted in their faith. Assuming Moreland was right then how do you know that the crowd Peter converted on Pentecost did not mostly abandon Christianity when they realised what they were being asked to give up? The other converts could have done the same.

* The communion remembers not the teachings or great deeds of Jesus but his demeaning and gruesome death. Christians feel this means that his death was considered to be a victory over death in the resurrection and this view was held from the early days of the Church. The Church was celebrating the communion as far back as the fifties of the first century about twenty years after the resurrection appearances. Christians hold that this indicates that this is circumstantial evidence for the resurrection being true as is baptism which symbolised the death and resurrection of Jesus.

The Bible can be interpreted as saying the communion was only started in the fifties. This would mean the gospels were lying by putting it back in the thirties AD when Jesus supposedly started the sacrament.

Nobody doubts that stories of visions started Christianity off. These visions could have started off these rites. Remember, the apostles claimed to be prophets so most of what was attributed to Jesus might not have come to them in visions or Jesus but from this supposed ability.

* The emergence of the Church indicates that the Christian account of Jesus is true for the Church was so successful despite all the odds and a seemingly insane gospel. Does the rapid spread of Christian Science which is one of the silliest religions of all time in the 19th and 20th indications that this cult is credible? Remember this cult used healings that even true Christians suppose could be supernatural as evidence of its divine authority and should have put people off by its opposition to medicine but strangely it did not. Medicine did more good than prayer the Christian method of healing and medicine lost out! When people are like that with something utterly preposterous they are more untrustworthy with something more credible!