

Some readers have objected to my insistence that New Testament scholars, on the whole, do not take seriously the claims of the mythicists that Jesus never existed. I have always stressed that Jesus' existence is known (and can be demonstrated) by thousands of New Testament scholars. But I have also always stressed that scholarly consensus on this issue is not in itself *evidence* (my detractors among the mythicists seem to overlook this little point, when they claim that I argue that since the consensus says something it must be true; that's not my view at all!). At the same time, it is worthwhile knowing what the experts say — whether talking about the age of our universe (13.8 billion years; but I wouldn't be able to calculate that myself); about the theory of evolution (Hey, it's just a *theory*! yes, but so too is the "theory" of gravity!!); about the forgery of the Hitler diaries; or about anything else that involves expertise. At the same time, it is worthwhile in all these cases to know what the evidence is. That is why in Did Jesus Exist? I don't simply state that virtually every expert on the planet says yes, but I show what the hard evidence is.

A couple of days ago a prominent New Testament scholar stated his own view of the matter, which I found amusing: he is even more forthright than I am! This is Larry Hurtado, emeritus professor of New Testament studies in one of the premier programs of religious studies in the U.K., at the University of Edinburgh. His full comments can be found at <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2012/08/28/hurtado-on-did-jesus-exist/> Here is the relevant section.

I was emailed last week by someone asking why scholars don't engage the "mythicists" (as they are called) on the issue. Were we afraid that we'd be out-gunned in an argument? Did we secretly know that the deniers had it all? Were we being elitist?

For me, it's a matter of having a good many prior commitments to produce positive contributions to the study of early Christianity (e.g., right now, I'm trying to get on with an essay on "Who Read Early Christian Apocrypha?" for a multi-author volume). But another reason for feeling it less than necessary to spend a lot of time on the matter is that all the skeptical arguments have been made and effectively engaged many decades ago. Before posting this, I spent a bit of time perusing my copy of H. G. Wood, *Did Christ Really Live?*, which was published in 1938. In it, Wood cites various figures of the early 20th century who had claimed that Jesus of Nazareth was a fiction, and patiently and cordially engages the specifics of evidence and argument, showing that the attacks fail.

So in one sense I think I'm not alone in feeling that to show the ill-informed and illogical nature of the current wave of "mythicist" proponents is a bit like having to demonstrate that the earth isn't flat, or that the sun doesn't revolve around the earth, or that the moon-landings weren't done on a movie lot. It's a bit wearying to contemplate.

Let me stress, these are not my words. They are the words of one of the top scholars of Christian antiquity in the U.K. But they are certainly worth noting, for their candor if nothing else. My sense is that most experts would agree with him.



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