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Theologians as historians

In an article in *Lychnos* (Ellegård 1990), the Annual of the Swedish History of Science society, and subsequently in a book in Swedish, *Myten om Jesus* (The Myth about Jesus, Ellegård 1992), I argue that the Jesus of the Gospels is essentially a myth. The Gospels are largely fiction. They were created around the turn of the first and second century in order to give concreteness and substance to the Jesus who, as the Messiah, had appeared to Paul and his fellow apostles in ecstatic visions.

Let me briefly summarize my argument. Paul's message to his audiences in the Jewish Diaspora was that his and his colleagues' visions proved, first, that Jesus had risen from the dead, second, that he was the Messiah, and third, that the Last Judgement was imminent, at which Jesus, as the Messiah, would save the faithful from death and destruction.

Messianic ideas were rife among the Jews throughout the centuries around the beginning of our era, so Paul's and the others' preaching found willing listeners. But who was Jesus? Paul says very little about him. Evidently his audiences could identify him immediately, since they asked no questions. Moreover, as the main message was that Jesus would soon return and save those who believed that he was the Messiah, the human, earthly Jesus was of little consequence to them.

Paul's only experience of Jesus was clearly through his ecstatic visions. To judge from his writings (1 Cor 15) he assumed that his fellow apostles had had experiences of the same kind. He certainly does not feel inferior to them on that score. But if none of the apostles had ever seen Jesus, the natural conclusion is that Jesus cannot have been contemporary with any of them. This, together with the fact that Jesus was taken for granted in all the Pauline congregations throughout the Diaspora, leads to the further conclusion that he was a well-established figure among them, and presumably one whose activity had been living in their memories for a long time.

Paul had seen Jesus after he had been raised to the heavens, which proved that he had in this sense risen from the dead. But neither Paul nor anybody else said anything about when Jesus' death and resurrection had taken place. It was not an essential question. The chief concern of Paul and his congregations was the imminence of the Day of Judgement. Hence the one thing necessary was to

arrange one's life in such a way as to be saved on that momentous day, which was assumed certainly to arrive within the lifetime of those who heard Paul.

But as years and decades passed without the expected catastrophe, it is understandable that many people turned their attention to other aspects of the teaching of Paul and his fellow apostles. We may assume that Jesus was known as a revered teacher. But what exactly had he taught? How had he taught it? To whom? When? What kind of a person was he?

If those who began to ask these questions towards the end of the first century turned to the writings of Paul and his contemporaries, they found little in the way of answers. They had to construct a life of Jesus largely on their own. This is how the Gospels arose, some two generations after the decisive visions of the apostles.

As for the time of Jesus' death the point of departure was one fairly definite date: the time when Paul and his fellow apostles had received their visions. They had seen Jesus sitting in the heavens around the year 30. It was therefore a most natural hypothesis that Jesus had been crucified and resurrected shortly before that time. Now, around the year 100, more than half a century and a disruptive internal war later, nobody could or would invalidate that very plausible hypothesis. Accordingly, those who tried to reconstruct a life of Jesus at this time could safely place the Crucifixion at the time of the notorious Roman governor Pontius Pilate.

As for the details of Jesus' life and teaching, some scraps of information could be gathered from Paul and other early writers. But above all there were the passages in the Old Testament which had for at least a century been interpreted by Messianic Jews as referring to the Messiah. Since Jesus was assumed to be the Messiah, these passages could be taken to yield information about him. Further, if Jesus had once been a revered teacher in the congregations addressed by Paul and his fellow apostles, we may assume that there existed in those congregations traditions, oral and perhaps written, about what Jesus had said in matters of doctrine.

I am certainly not original in holding that the Gospel Jesus is largely fictional. The philosophers of the Enlightenment took naturally to that view, and it received strong support from the German theologian David F. Strauss, whose *Leben Jesu* (Strauss 1835) created a sensation throughout Europe. In our own century, prominent propounders of the thesis are Arthur Drews (Drews 1910–11), P.L Couchoud (Couchoud 1926) and G.A Wells (Wells 1971, 1975, 1982). None of these three is a theologian: Drews was a professor of philosophy, Couchoud a doctor of medicine turned Bible scholar, and Wells is a professor of German specializing in the history of ideas. Of the three, Wells is by far the most conscientious scholar, with a thorough grasp of the present-day state of the art among the theologians. I am heavily indebted to him in my own research on Jesus.

It is fair to say that most present-day theologians also accept that large parts of the Gospel stories are, if not fictional, at least not to be taken at face value

as historical accounts. On the other hand, no theologian seems to be able to bring himself to admit that the question of the historicity of Jesus must be judged to be an open one.

It appears to me that the theologians are not living up to their responsibility as scholars when they refuse to discuss the possibility that even the existence of the Jesus of the Gospels can be legitimately called into question. Instead, they tend to dismiss as cranks those who doubt that the Jesus of the Gospels ever existed.

It is natural that different historians come to different conclusions on questions for which our sources are late, scanty or biased. Thus most historians, though skeptical about king Arthur, avoid being dogmatic about him, whatever the stand they are taking. But dogmatism is characteristic of the theologians' view of matters which are held to guarantee the historicity of Jesus.

That dogmatism, however, is too often concealed under a cover of mystifying language. An instance in point is quoted by Burton L. Mack, who quotes Helmut Koester, characterizing him, very properly, as "a New Testament scholar highly regarded for his critical acumen" (Mack 1990, p. 25). Koester writes: "The resurrection and the appearances of Jesus are best explained as a catalyst which prompted reactions that resulted in the missionary activity and founding of the churches, but also in the crystallization of the tradition about Jesus and his ministry. But most of all, the resurrection changed sorrow and grief...into joy, creativity and faith. Though the resurrection revealed nothing new, it nonetheless made everything new for the first Christian believers" (Koester 1982:2, p. 84–86).

Mack comments drily: "if the historian hardly knows what to make of such a statement, its purpose, apparently, has been achieved. A point of origin has been established that is fundamentally inaccessible to further probing or clarification... Koester's scenario simply reproduces the Lukan myth of Christian origins, written around the turn of the first century or later." (Mack 1990 p. 25 n 3).

My own hypothesis about Jesus differs in certain important respects from those of Drews and Couchoud. They consider the Jesus figure as wholly a product of the religious imagination. Wells and I think that Paul's letters show that he and his audiences took it for granted that Jesus was a real person, though he might have lived a long time ago. My own contribution is to identify this figure of the remote past with the Essene Teacher of Righteousness, revealed to us in the Dead Sea Scrolls. In this I develop a suggestion made by the French Semitist A. Dupont-Sommer (Dupont-Sommer 1959; see also Allegro 1979), though he himself explicitly denies that the Teacher of Righteousness and Jesus should be identified. My own hypothesis, of course, involves an identification of the Teacher, not with the Jesus of the Gospels, but with Paul's conception of him.

Further, I suggest that Paul's congregations were in fact already existing Essene (or para-Essene) ones. Thus Jesus was their revered founder and teacher, who had probably lived in the second or early first century BCE. Accordingly, though the Gospels are entirely fictional in their portrayal of Jesus as

an itinerant preacher and wonderworker, accompanied by twelve disciples, Paul's Jesus was indeed a historical figure, namely, the Essene Teacher of Righteousness.

The reaction of the theologians

The overwhelmingly negative reaction by the theologians to our hypotheses was not unexpected. Theologians have many ties with the Christian churches, and the accepted theological wisdom on Jesus has always been that the Gospels and Acts provide the groundwork for any historical study of Jesus, in spite of admissions that they have grave weaknesses as historical sources. Briefly, it is assumed that memories of the historical Jesus, crucified under Pilate, gave rise to oral traditions among his followers, and that these traditions were eventually written down and finally incorporated in the Gospels towards the end of the first century CE.

Now if the assumption of a historical Jesus crucified under Pilate is removed, this construction is left without a foundation. Such a complete reversal of the received view would amount to a paradigm shift in New Testament studies. The books of Drews, Couchoud, and Wells did not produce such a shift, although indeed several reviewers of Wells concede that the questions he has raised are indeed pertinent. For instance, Professor Kenneth Grayston (*Methodist Recorder*, 16th Nov., 1971) writes: "instructed Christians ... /should/ admit the difficulties collected by Professor Wells, and construct a better solution". Grayston repeats this judgment in reviewing Wells's second book.

The theological community at large, however, has not followed Professor Grayston's advice. I have gone through a fair amount of the theological literature on the historical Jesus published during the last two decades, but have found very little discussion of Wells's views. Indeed, Wells is not even mentioned in the literature lists of recent Introductions to the New Testament designed for the use of students of theology in the universities (Koester 1982, 1990, Kümmel 1964, 1984). It is true that Charlesworth 1982 mentions Wells in a footnote. But there he is lumped together with a completely non-scholarly book by an Austrian writer, which receives most of the attention, and is (quite properly) dismissed as of no value.

My own judgment on these matters is shared by Burton Mack, who says, after briefly explaining Wells's position, "scholars with theological interests have scarcely taken note of this literature" (Mack 1990 p. 24, note 2).

A scholarly paradigm shift is naturally hardest to accept for the already established generation of scholars. But the almost complete absence of serious discussion is disturbing: it appears like a conspiracy of silence on the part of the theologians, who are, after all, the scholarly specialists as regards the history of Christianity. It is difficult to avoid the suspicion that the main reason for the stand taken by the theologians is that they feel their religion is threatened. I do

not myself think such a conclusion is necessary: my own Jesus figure, after all, is largely modelled on Paul's, and surely Paul must be regarded as a good Christian.

However that may be, Professor Graham Stanton, reviewing Wells in *The Times Literary Supplement* (1975, p. 977) writes: "Christian faith must collapse if it should ever become possible to prove either that Jesus did not exist or that he was quite unlike the person portrayed in the Gospels". One of my own theological reviewers (Dr. Per Block, *Dagens Nyheter*, 9 Jan 1991) expressed similar thoughts. At the end of a largely favourable review of an article of mine he says: "Christianity...bends its knee to the simple, the weak, the anonymously human. Hence the stubbornness with which Christians have stood by the earthly reality of a historical Jesus.... That conception would be obscured, and made more difficult to uphold, if Ellegård's theory should be true."

Before going on to a discussion of the arguments employed by the theologians to refute the theories advanced by Wells and myself, I shall consider a very common pseudo-argument, namely, the *argumentum ad hominem*, i.e. attacking the person, not what he says. Few of our reviewers miss the opportunity to underline that Wells is a professor of German, or that Ellegård is a professor of English.

It is of course perfectly legitimate to inform the reader about who the author of a book is. But in most cases this piece of information is followed up by sarcastic remarks about how absurd it would be for a theologian to write on German literature, or on the identity of the author of *Hamlet*.

Also, the immensity of the literature on Jesus is adduced to point out how impossible it is for an outsider to master the subject. The implication is that only a life-long study, or rather, life-long studies by a large group of specialists, can hope to arrive at worth-while results on such momentous questions.

Further, even if the newcomer manages to take account of a substantial number of treatises on the subject, he runs the risk of getting hold of a biased sample, missing the most important works, while attaching weight to such as have been dismissed by the mainstream researchers. It is sometimes also pointed out that no serious discussion of the history of early Christianity can be entered into by persons, like Wells and me, who do not know Hebrew or Aramaic.

There is some substance in these allegations: the outsider does run a risk on all these scores. On the other hand, there is also the possibility that the outsider may introduce, from his own previous field of research, experiences and approaches which may be of value in the new context. Moreover, the risk of bias is something that affects not only the outsider, but also the specialist. Nobody can read everything in an area where thousands of publications appear every year. Everybody must make a selection, and run the risks entailed by it.

Still, all these comments about the possible failings of the outsider really belong under the heading of *argumentum ad hominem*, as long as we are not told just how the alleged omissions, or the bias, or this or that piece of background knowledge, has vitiated the theory presented. What specific argument

is refuted by the omitted works? What specific argument has relied on a work whose views have been proved untenable? Where has the use of a faulty translation led the author astray?

Only when such specifications are put forward can we get a worthwhile discussion. But by and large, though the theologians reject our conclusions, they have not advanced any arguments or counterarguments that have not already been dealt with by us. What we may justly demand is a discussion of our actual arguments, not just a rejection of our conclusions.

An unplausible hypothesis

A very common objection to our views is that we propound an unproved and unplausible hypothesis without showing that the established position is in need of replacement.

The objection is not without foundation. Wild speculations are of little value in scientific work and in scholarly discussion generally. Science is cumulative: it progresses by incorporating new knowledge with the body of knowledge that we already possess. This can be done in two ways — the undramatic one of discovering new facts, and the dramatic one of introducing a new way of looking at the existing body of knowledge. It is this latter process that Kuhn termed a “paradigm shift” (Kuhn 1962).

The objections raised against our hypothesis are indeed strongly reminiscent of the ones raised against Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection. As I have myself shown in my book on *Darwin and the General Reader* (Ellegård 1959), the evolution theory as such was largely acceptable to the Victorian educated public. But the natural selection theory, which was the scientifically operative part of Darwin’s theory, was vehemently resisted, no doubt largely for religious or ideological reasons.

The most common objection was that it included an unproved hypothesis, namely, that biological variation could proceed indefinitely. The evidence, objectors insisted, was unequivocally the other way: no one had ever observed variation to proceed beyond the species barrier. Accordingly the established view, to the effect that species barriers were absolute, had to be accepted, and Darwin’s indefinite variation hypotheses must be rejected. And without it, Natural Selection could not be effective.

In the same way, our theological opponents declare that we cannot prove that Jesus was a person long since dead at the time of Paul’s visions, and that therefore the established view, that the stories of the Gospels must be basically true, remains unshaken.

The flaw in this kind of argument, as pointed out by the famous philosopher of science Karl Popper, is that it concentrates on the plausibility of the underlying hypotheses as such (Popper 1959). In a largely deductive science like physics, however, it is clear that, for instance, the hypothesis of the atomic struc-

ture of matter gained acceptance because its consequences agreed with a wide range of observations, although the hypothesis itself had no inherent plausibility. In a non-experimental science like biology in Darwin's time, matters were not as clearcut, but still analogous. Darwin's theory of Natural Selection gained acceptance among the scientists because it "explained so much". Its consequences, the gradual differentiation of organic life, and its increasing diversity under different conditions, agreed with observation.

We hold the same for our own hypothesis, when compared with the established view. There is indeed nothing inherently implausible in the common view that the Gospel story is based on a real Jesus crucified under Pontius Pilate in 33 CE. We may even agree that our own hypothesis, to the effect that the story is based on visions of a person long since dead, is inherently less plausible — at least to the modern mind. However, the essential question concerns the *consequences* of the competing hypotheses. Let us briefly compare them from this point of view. The following are examples of facts which militate against the *prima facie* consequences of the established view:

1. There is no contemporary mention of a successful preacher and wonder-worker called Jesus, or Joshua, the assumed Semitic form of the name.

2. There is no contemporary record of an execution of Jesus under Pontius Pilate.

3. Though Jesus and his disciples, according to the Gospels, were rural Jews, all Gospels are written in Greek, and no Hebrew or Aramaic earlier versions have been found.

4. Paul does not mention any disciples of Jesus — James, John and Cephas are not looked upon as disciples by Paul — though he visited Jerusalem, according to his letters, only a few years after the date of the crucifixion indicated by the Gospels.

5. Paul does not say anything about Jesus' activity in Palestine. Though Jesus' crucifixion plays a great role for Paul, he says nothing about when, where and by whom he was crucified.

6. Though Paul, according to his letters, had seen James, Cephas and John, he never indicates that he received any instruction about Jesus from them. On the contrary, Paul insists that he received his instructions not from men, but from the Lord himself.

None of these points presents an insuperable obstacle for the established view. They can all be reconciled with it, by various additional assumptions. For instance, that non-Christian contemporaries preferred to keep silent about Jesus, that Aramaic and Hebrew texts were not preserved by later Christian churches, which were predominantly Greek-speaking, that Paul did not say much about the earthly Jesus because his letters were concerned with other things, etc.

This line of defense cannot be rejected out of hand. Any hypothesis encounters difficulties. But if too many subsidiary hypotheses have to be invoked to explain away inconvenient facts, the basic hypothesis loses its attraction. Let us see how our own hypothesis fares, and consider the positive evidence first.

1. Paul's letters, undoubtedly our earliest written sources, make it clear that he thought he communicated with a heavenly figure, not with an earthly Jesus. He also apparently assumes that his fellow apostles did the same.

2. In all his letters, including that addressed to the congregation in Rome, which he had never visited, Paul takes for granted that those he addressed knew perfectly who Jesus was. This is what we should expect if Jesus was a long-established cult-figure in those communities.

3. Paul addresses his communities not as "Christians", but as the "Church of God." In the Dead Sea Scrolls, the same term is applied to the Qumran community, which was presumably Essene

4. The Qumran community, and those responsible for the Damascus Document, had a cult figure, long since dead, whose characteristics agree well with Paul's picture of Jesus.

5. The extensive similarities between the Essenes and the Christians, noted even in the 19th century, receive further support from the Dead Sea Scrolls of Qumran, assuming these to be largely Essene.

6. If the early Christian communities originated in para-Essene ones, which received injections of new ideas by Paul and his co-apostles, we get an explanation for the considerable doctrinal diversity, right from the start, among the Christians.

As against this, we may adduce on the negative side the following:

1. There is no hint, in any text, that the Essene cult-figure, the Teacher of Righteousness, was called Jesus (or Joshua).

2. We have no direct evidence of Essene or para-Essene communities in the Diaspora.

3. Nor have we any direct evidence that the Teacher of Righteousness was crucified.

4. Paul's position with regard to the Mosaic law is in direct conflict with the known views of the Essenes, to judge both from Josephus and from the Scrolls.

5. Paul says that Jesus belonged to the tribe of David "according to the flesh", while the Teacher of Righteousness, as a priest, should belong to the tribe of Levi.

What I have set forth above concerning the competing hypotheses provides only examples of the kind of evidence that we have to consider. As always in historical work, our attempt to reconstruct the past can only be provisional, depending on a careful weighing of evidence and probabilities. Some of this will be done below. For a fuller discussion we must of course refer to our books and articles.

The argument from silence

A very common charge against us is that, from Paul's silence on the earthly life of Jesus, we conclude that he knew nothing about it. Naturally silence as such

proves nothing. It is only when we have reason to expect a pronouncement by somebody on a subject, that his silence on that subject becomes interesting, and may allow us to draw conclusions.

In Paul's case we argue that if Paul had been acquainted with the traditions on which the Gospels are supposed to be based, he could certainly have used his knowledge about Jesus to good effect in his preaching. Further, we should have expected his congregations to ask questions about Jesus, the more so as they knew that Paul had been in touch in Jerusalem with Cephas, the chief disciple according to the Gospels. Moreover, when members of Paul's congregations compared him unfavourably with other apostles, they never held against him that he apparently had had no personal contact with Jesus.

Paul's silence, and his congregations' lack of interest, are surprising, if we accept that Jesus had died only a few years before Paul had joined the Church of God, and if Cephas was the close companion of Jesus portrayed in the Gospels. But both Paul's silence and the congregations' lack of interest are quite natural if both Cephas and Paul had indeed seen Jesus seated on a heavenly throne in visions, but had taken it for granted that his death and resurrection had occurred a long time ago.

It is, moreover, not only Paul who is almost silent about the earthly Jesus. The same is true about all texts (outside the Gospels) which can with some plausibility be dated to the first century CE: the epistles of Peter and James, Revelation, Didache. Again, their silence is a problem on the traditional view, but quite natural on our hypotheses.

Death and resurrection

Very many theologians refer to the passage in 1 Cor 15:2–11 as a major stumbling-block for any hypothesis asserting that Jesus' death had taken place long ago. The passage, however, is entirely consistent with our hypothesis. We read that Jesus was resurrected on the third day "according to the scriptures". But we hear nothing about when the death occurred, and accordingly cannot say when the resurrection occurred either, except that it took place three days later. Note that Paul has nothing to say about Jesus actual ascent to Heaven. It is enough for him that Jesus appears to him in his heavenly glory.

If it be objected that this is an unnatural reading of the passage, we may point to the fact that Paul mentions himself as the last in the list of persons who had experienced the vision of Jesus sitting in the heavens. It is therefore natural to suppose that he regarded the others' visions as similar to his own: he certainly does not suggest any essential difference between the appearances. Moreover, we can be reasonably certain that Paul's vision did not occur immediately after Jesus death and resurrection: after all, according to the story in the Gospels and Acts, we have to allow time both for Paul's persecution of the Church of God, and his "conversion". Thus we hold that the natural reading

of the passage is that the visions of the apostles were not temporally connected with Jesus' death and resurrection.

Jesus' companions

One detail that many theologians regard as a decisive argument against any hypothesis that places Jesus' life and death in the distant past, is that Paul, in Gal 1:19, writes about James as "the Lord's brother". (In 1 Cor 9:5 he refers to "the Lord's brothers" without naming any). Surely, if Paul was contemporary with Jesus' brother, it follows that he was also roughly contemporary with Jesus.

Wells has treated this matter rather fully, arguing above all that *brother* in these passages can be read as "member of a brotherhood" — a meaning that is very common in the New Testament, and elsewhere in the Greek *koinē*. The expression "the Lord's brothers" should not really surprise us, since, after all, Paul's congregations commonly called themselves "the Church of God". It is worth noting, also, that the expression used is "the Lord's", not "Jesus' " brother.

It would certainly also be remarkable for Paul to make only a very casual mention of these brothers, if he had really had the idea that they belonged to the *family* of Jesus, the Messiah. Moreover, though the Gospels do sometimes mention Jesus' brothers (and sisters), they play a rather inglorious part there, difficult to reconcile with their later becoming important members of the church. Even more remarkable is the fact that Luke, in Acts, when talking about James, does not even so much as hint at his being Jesus' brother. We may add that in the Gnostic texts of the 2nd century, James is ordinarily called the Just, not the brother of Jesus. In those texts it is Thomas who gets the honour of being called the brother of Jesus, no doubt a speculation built on the meaning of his name, which is "twin".

In view of all this, it seems reasonable to conclude that the description of James as the brother of Jesus is a late, probably late 2nd century construction. Possibly this was done in order to make sense of Luke's presentation of James in Acts. Up to the beginning of Acts 12 the only James we hear about is the son of Zebedee, brother of John, one of the twelve in the Gospels. In 12:2 we are told that he was decapitated by Herod. Then in 12:17 we read that Peter, who had been imprisoned by Herod after James's execution, and then miraculously released, asks his companions to send word to "James and the other brethren".

There is no word of introduction for this James, so the unwary reader may think that we still have to do with James, the son of Zebedee. But that is impossible, since he had been executed by Herod 15 verses before, and the context makes it unambiguously clear that the episodes are arranged in chronological sequence: Peter had been imprisoned after James's execution.

So the James of Acts 12:17, who afterwards is presented as a leading member

of the Jerusalem community, is a mystery. But Luke himself never calls him the brother of Jesus. He would hardly have left out such an important piece of information, if he had regarded him as such.

On balance, I think Luke simply inserted the notice of the execution of James in the wrong place, thus creating two Jameses out of one, though he was unable to make out who the second James was. There are more instances where Luke shows ineptness in handling his chronology (e.g. the Quirinus census, the date of Theudas the Egyptian, etc.). This conclusion is also supported by the fact that the actual date of the execution of James, to judge from Josephus (whom Luke had probably read) is 62 CE, that is, some 30 years after the presumed date of the crucifixion of Jesus. If the story of Acts is assumed to have been built up chronologically, we have 12 chapters out of a total of 28 devoted to the period from Jesus death around 33 CE to the year 62 CE. The remaining 16 chapters would then cover only a handful of years, since the ending does not go as far as the death of Paul, probably some time in the early 60's.

On my hypothesis, of course, the twelve disciples are a late construction, where the main factual basis is probably the men whom Paul called the "pillars" of the Jerusalem community, James, John and Cephas. Thus Luke is in reality talking about just one James, without realising it. The fact that Paul had met these men cannot without circularity be taken as a proof that he must also have been contemporary with Jesus, since there is nothing in Paul's letters to suggest that the "pillars" were, or had ever been, Jesus' companions. It is only in the Gospels that they are presented as such.

Paul and the Gospel tradition

Several theologians object to my own hypothesis that Paul's communities were para-Essene ones, on the ground that they certainly differed very widely from the Qumran brotherhood. But Josephus, to whom we owe most of our information about the Essenes, says explicitly that in addition to the monastic Essenes, now generally equated with the Qumran community, there were others who lived among ordinary people in the towns, and that they observed less strict rules, as is natural and indeed inevitable.

Now the archaeological evidence is that the Qumran community did not exceed some 200 members, whereas the total number of Essenes in Palestine, according to Josephus, was 4000 (as against 6000 Pharisees). My hypothesis is that the (pre-)Christian communities are to be found among the urban Essenes. Hence it is not surprising that the communities addressed by the early apostles differ from the Qumran sect in terms of strictness. Moreover, as Paul's communities undoubtedly contained non-Jewish proselytes and *sebomenoi*, they must necessarily have been less strict than the Qumran sect as regards purity rules in the matter of meals, for instance.

It is also quite clear that Paul's message to the communities introduced very

considerable modifications in their theology. To regard Jesus not merely as a revered teacher and founder, but as the crucified Messiah, involved a tremendous reorientation — “to the Greeks folly, and to the Jews a scandal”. Paul’s teaching that the coming of the Messiah meant that the regulations of the Mosaic law were now superseded, met with vehement resistance, not only by Cephas and James, but also by other apostles, referred to especially in Galatians. Paul had to fight hard to get his revolutionary ideas accepted. That Paul’s doctrine differed from Qumran is therefore hardly a weighty objection.

Another line of argument is that we have no evidence of Essenes in the Diaspora, Paul’s chief field of activity. That is very true. But our chief evidence about the Essenes in general is from Josephus, who does not deal with the Diaspora. I assume, as a minimal hypothesis, that the religious views of the Diaspora Jews of the times were largely similar to those in the home country, with some bias towards a more syncretistic outlook (for which Philo might be cited as evidence).

Regarding my identification of Jesus and the Teacher, it is objected that Paul declares him to be a descendant of David “according to the flesh”, whereas the Teacher must have been a priest, and accordingly should be a descendant of Levi (more specifically, Aaron or even Zadok). My comments are, first, that we do not really know which tribe the Teacher came from; second, that Davidic descent was taken for granted for one who was held to be the Messiah, and third, that the curious discussion of Hebrews, to the effect that a Davidic Jesus could be made high priest for ever, “after the manner of Melchizedek”, is evidence that the theological difficulty was taken note of, and at least one kind of solution was found.

Traces of the Gospel tradition in Paul

One frequently advanced argument to show that Paul was aware of a tradition that eventually emerged in the Gospels, is that some fragments of that tradition can in fact be found in his epistles.

In several cases Paul says that he reproduces something which he has directly “from the Lord”, presumably in connection with his ecstatic visions. In the case of his description of the Last Supper (1 Cor 11:23–25), for instance, Paul says that he has “received it from the Lord”. There is hardly any reason to reject Paul’s testimony on this point. As his description agrees very closely with that in the Gospels, we can hardly avoid the conclusion that the Gospels have taken over their story from him, elaborating it in various ways. Paul himself presumably partly built on what circulated about the Teacher among the Essenes. The Qumran texts do not give any details about the occasion when the Teacher was captured by his enemies. It is hardly surprising that Paul allowed his imagination free play on these events, since his own most tremendous theological innovation was exactly the creation of the suffering, crucified Messiah.

But Paul also advances propositions for which he disclaims any sanction by Jesus. On my hypothesis, such passages do not present any problems. If the early Christian communities were in fact Essene or para-Essene, and Jesus their Teacher and Founder, we may of course assume that they possessed traditions of various sorts, both about the Teacher and about the doctrines taught by him. It is true that the secret literature so jealously guarded by the Qumran monks contained very little concrete information about the person of the Teacher. The ordinary Essenes in the towns did not have access even to that literature. But they were certainly not wholly without guidance. Paul talks about those who were apostles before him. And the Didache text (see Audet 1958) may be taken as an example of the kind of teaching that such apostles disseminated among the dispersed members of the Church of God.

In other words, the correspondences between Paul and the Gospels are quite naturally and plausibly explained by taking the Gospels to derive partly from Paul himself, partly from the traditions of the urban Church of God communities about the Teacher of Righteousness. To derive the earlier texts from the later ones, as most theologians do, constructing a hypothetical "tradition" essentially based on the later texts, the Gospels, is *petitio principii*.

An appeal

I do not really believe that it is a "conspiracy" of silence that has prevented a serious discussion of the views advanced by Wells and me. The reason is probably rather that insufficient communication between theologians and "lay" scholars, be they historians (including historians of ideas), anthropologists or philosophers, has led to a climate of opinion in the theological world in which basic assumptions of the Christian creed tend to be insulated from the scholars' inquiring spirit and the general scholarly debate.

That is an unfortunate state of things. Religion is an important aspect of human civilization, and it is obvious that the study of religion is an essential ingredient in the study of man. Theology is part of the humanities, and theologians should be considered, and consider themselves, as full members of the free republic of scholars. I have written these lines in the hope that a fruitful exchange of views may at long last get started.

Comments by Bertil Albrektson

It is with some hesitation that I have accepted the invitation to comment on Alvar Ellegård's article "Theologians as historians", as I am not a New Testament scholar (my own field is the Old Testament). On the other hand, the exegetical disciplines are closely related from a methodological point of view, and as Ellegård has, moreover, emphasized the value of contributions from nonspecialists, my participation can perhaps be defended.

I certainly agree with Ellegård that scholarly works by outsiders can be stimulating and valuable, provided that they are not vitiated by errors caused by the author's lack of familiarity with the subject. It is not difficult to mention experts in other fields who have made useful and important contributions to biblical studies. Max Weber, the famous German sociologist who wrote *Das Antike Judentum*, is a well-known case, and a more recent instance is the Swedish philosopher Ingemar Hedenius, who published a brilliant critical analysis of the New Testament doctrine of Hell.

Admittedly a few theological reviewers of Ellegård's *Myten om Jesus* have treated the author somewhat superciliously, stressing the fact that he is not a New Testament scholar. But this is not the general impression one gets from the criticisms expressed by theologians. As a rule they have discussed Ellegård's arguments, not his person, and their own reasoning is on the whole strictly historical and does not presuppose a particular religious standpoint.

It may be appropriate to give some attention here to the term "theologian". The word is ambiguous, with at least two different meanings. It can denote (a) a person who studies the theology, i.e. the religious doctrine, of Christianity or some other religion, with scientific methods and regardless of the scholar's own faith or lack of faith. But it may also refer to (b) someone who embraces such a theology, who tries not only to analyse and understand it but also to defend and develop and propagate it. Ellegård does not clearly distinguish between these two meanings. He maintains that "the main reason for the stand taken by the theologians is that they feel their religion is threatened". Of course it is true that a great majority of academic theologians are believers, closely connected with religious communities. And this clearly involves considerable risks: it is as if almost all political scientists studying Marxism should themselves be dedicated Marxists. But we must not forget Ellegård's own warning against "a very common pseudo-argument: namely, the *argumentum ad hominem*, i.e. attacking the person, not what he says". Ellegård's accusation against Christian biblical scholars — that the main reason for their standpoint is that they feel their beliefs threatened — is a kind of *argumentum ad hominem* as long as he has not shown how this alleged bias has distorted their arguments or made them disregard certain facts.

All theologians in sense (a) are not theologians in sense (b). In fact a great many biblical scholars do practise their profession as an ordinary philological and historical subject, avoiding dogmatic assumptions and beliefs. It is unfortunate that the same word is used both about preachers and about scholars, and Ellegård has exploited this ambiguity. Perhaps it would be a good idea to change the name of *Teologiska fakulteten* and call it instead *Religionsvetenskapliga fakulteten*.

The failure to distinguish properly between the two uses of the word "theologian" has led to certain obscurities in Ellegård's article, e.g. when he speaks of "a climate of opinion in the theological world in which basic assumptions of the Christian creed tend to be in-

sulated from the scholars' inquiring spirit". This may be true if by "the theological world" we mean primarily churchmen and clergy. But it is not quite fair as a general description of biblical scholars in university faculties of theology. Many of these do not accept any creed as the foundation of their work; they do in fact honestly try to investigate scientifically the basic documents of Christianity in the same way as other texts from antiquity. The reviews of Ellegård's work give ample evidence of this.

To my mind Ellegård exaggerates the silence of the biblical scholars, describing it as an "almost complete absence of serious discussion". It is difficult to reconcile this complaint with those parts of his article where he discusses the reviewers' objections to his hypothesis: obviously a number of arguments have been brought forward, and it seems strange to speak of "silence" when Ellegård's own rejoinder to his critics refutes this accusation. His book and his articles have been discussed both in the daily press and in specialist journals. Among his critics are a number of professors and lecturers in New Testament studies. In fact it would be difficult to find in this country a recent work on a biblical subject which has attracted so much attention as Ellegård's.

The heart of the matter seems to be, not that the critics have not discussed Ellegård's theory seriously, but that they have rejected it. And in the end the fundamental question is simply whether or not they are justified in doing so.

Ellegård's *Myten om Jesus* has a number of merits. It is well and interestingly written. The author has acquired an impressive knowledge of the political and religious situation in the Mediterranean world at the coming of Christianity. His presentation of the problems is refreshingly free from the dogmatic presuppositions which mar so many popular works on Jesus and his times. In fact it is in several ways a book that could have served the general public as an excellent introduction to the historical beginnings of the Christian religion — were it not for its lack of balance, its zeal for a new and unconvincing hypothesis. Perhaps the real weakness of the book lies in its combination of two functions: one is to give a survey of the political and religious background of early Christianity, which in many ways it does rather well, the other is to argue a bold theory about the Gospels as late fiction and Paul's Messiah as a figure of the remote past, the Teacher of Righteousness known from the Qumran writings, a purpose less suited to a semi-popular work.

This is not the place for a full discussion of Ellegård's arguments, but I ought perhaps to indicate briefly why I regard his hypothesis as less plausible than the traditional view. Generally speaking he seems content to present possibilities. But possibilities become really important only when they can be shown to be probabilities, and this can only be done by demonstrating their superiority over other possibilities, i.e. by weighing carefully the arguments for different solutions. This is where Ellegård frequently fails. A case in point is his surprisingly late dating of the Gospels. Perhaps this is not an impossible standpoint, but it is difficult to avoid the impression that an extremely late date is chosen chiefly because it favours his main theory, not because it could be shown to be the most plausible dating. The correct method would of course have been to compare rival arguments for the chronology of the Gospels first, and to arrive at a solution which is probable as such, whether this result favours the main hypothesis or not. The question of the date of the Gospels is a difficult one, and all answers must be tentative, but I cannot find Ellegård's treatment of the problem entirely satisfactory.

The idea of a crucified Messiah was such a tremendous innovation (to use Ellegård's own words) that it is hard to understand it as a free invention by Paul. His theology of a crucified Christ is more plausible as an attempt to cope with an embarrassing historical fact.

Another weak point is Ellegård's treatment of the relation between prophecies in the Old Testament and episodes in the Gospels. It is certainly true that some stories about Jesus seem to derive from Old Testament passages rather than from real events. The legend of the flight into Egypt of Joseph, Mary and the child is no doubt a *midrash* built on passages in Exodus and Hosea, and the two donkeys on which Jesus rides in the Gospel of Matthew obviously owe their existence to a misunderstanding of a passage in Zechariah. But Ellegård has paid insufficient attention to the fact that some scriptural "proofs" adduced by the authors of the Gospels are rather far-fetched, so that the natural conclusion is, not that the stories have been inspired by the prophecies (then they would fit much better) but that the events came first and that one has tried to find suitable Old Testament "prophecies" to fit them — not always entirely successfully (see, e.g., Matthew 2:23, 8:17, 13:35).

The Teacher of Righteousness is repeatedly described by Ellegård as a "cult figure", which must mean that he had been an object of worship in the Essene communities. There is, however, no trace of such a view of the Teacher in the Qumran writings. What the texts tell us is that he was the founder of the community and that he had received the divine gift of interpreting the biblical prophecies. Of the Teacher of Righteousness as a cult figure there is not a word. Thus a key element in Ellegård's theory lacks support in the sources.

In a case like this, where absolute proof is not available, the question is in the end, as Ellegård has rightly seen, which of the rival hypotheses is the more plausible: the current idea of a Jewish preacher and wonder-worker called Jesus, who lived and was executed in the first decades of our era, and whose life and message were later described — with considerable legendary and mythical elaboration — in what became the four Gospels, or Ellegård's thesis of an Essene cult figure, seen by Paul in ecstatic visions, proclaimed more than a century after his death as the Messiah and afterwards given a fictional biography in the Gospels. It becomes a matter of judging probabilities. For my own part, using Occam's razor, I cannot but reach the conclusion that the traditional explanation is preferable, as it requires fewer uncertain or implausible subsidiary hypotheses. But Ellegård has made an important contribution by reminding us that hard historical facts about Jesus are few and that the established view, too, is a hypothesis.

Comments by Per Bilde

I have been asked briefly to comment on Professor Alvar Ellegård's article "Theologians as historians" (1993a) which, in itself, is a comment on some "theological" reactions to his recent works on the origins of Christianity. Of these works I have also seen Ellegård's book, *Myten om Jesus* (1992), the article, "Jesus, Paul, and early Christianity" (1990), and an unpublished article, "The Teacher of Righteousness and the Jesus of Paul" (1993b). As I have to be brief I have chosen mainly to concentrate on what I regard as a fundamental element in Ellegård's reasoning: his treatment of the canonical gospels. By implication this means that, in this context, I have to leave out a great number of other points in Ellegård's works which could merit to be discussed.

I emphasize straight away, that I am unable to accept Ellegård's hypotheses that Christianity originated from the Essenes, that Paul's Jesus is identical with the Teacher of Righteousness from Qumran, that the canonical gospels are late and fictitious creations, and that, consequently, the Jesus figure of the gospels is an unhistorical construction.

Finally, I would like to stress that my point of view is that of the historian, or more precisely, that of the historian of religions, and not that of the theologian.

First, however, I take the opportunity to commend Ellegård for drawing our attention to the obvious and very important fact that striking similarities do exist between the Qumran (Essene) literature and early Christian sources. Likewise, our author is to be praised for reminding us of the remarkable fact that Paul does not refer to the historical Jesus and seems to be uninterested in him. And I agree completely with Ellegård in his hypothesis that, in the centuries around the beginning of the common era, Judaism, early Christianity and Gnosticism were not three independent religions, but rather three tendencies within the broad, common religious stream of Hellenistic Judaism.

Secondly, then, I turn to my criticism of Ellegård's treatment of the gospels: In the title of Ellegård's book the word *myth* refers to the gospels in their capacity of imaginative construction and literary fiction, precisely as it is used in the title of a famous Danish book by George Brandes: *Sagnet om Jesus* ("The Jesus Legend") from 1925. It is an important part of Ellegård's hypothesis, not only that the gospels are late (from the beginning of the second century), but that they, at that time, were created on the basis partly of the very few hints in Paul and Ignatius, partly of a number of "messianic" texts in the Bible, and partly of the imagination of their authors.

On this background I expected Ellegård to treat the gospels in detail. However, this has not been done in the works I have seen. In his book (1992, 116–151) Ellegård discusses the gospels, but we find no detailed analysis, neither of the gospels generally nor of their various basic elements.

I regard this fact a fundamental mistake. It is not enough, as Ellegård has done, to discover that the Jesus figure of the canonical gospels is unknown in the early Christian literature of the first century (the epistles of Paul, James and Peter, the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Revelation of John, and Didaché). For, as Ellegård readily admits (1993a, 9–10), there might be good reasons for this fact. Accordingly, it is unacceptable from this observation to conclude that gospels or Jesus "traditions" did not exist in the first century. Therefore, as far as I can see, an independent examination of the existing gospels is unavoidable for a scholar aiming at proving their fictitious character.

However, Ellegård has not produced such an examination, and he has not found it worth the while to review, comment on and criticize already existing works of this type: 1) literary critical analyses of the interrelations between the gospels, 2) so-called redaction critical examinations of the ideology and theology of each of the gospel writers, 3) so-called form critical analyses of the basic genre elements of the gospels (legends/myths, parables, stories of Jesus' healings, exorcisms, teaching, conflicts etc.), and 4) — most important for all — examinations of the historical development of the gospel tradition from its beginnings to its latest manifestations in the apocryphal gospels of the second, third, fourth and later centuries. The most famous of these works is Rudolf Bultmann: *Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (Göttingen 1921 and later editions). In such works scholars have worked out criteria to distinguish between Palestinian and Diaspora, apocalyptic and non-apocalyptic (either wisdom, Gnostic or other types), historical and legendary, primary and secondary material. A major result of this type of research is that, in the (canonical) gospels, we have many different layers, many different "theologies", "christologies" and "eschatologies", and, in fact, many different "Jesus'es" (both messianic and unmessianic). (For a closer review of modern gospel research, see my article, "Den nyere evangelieforskning og spørgsmålet om den historiske Jesus", *Dansk Teologisk Tidsskrift*, 41, 1978, 217—243. A recent Danish example of "alternative" Jesus research which has taken these problems serious, is Villy Sørensen: *Jesus og KRISTUS* (København 1992, cf. my review in *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift*, 22, 1992, 109—118).

This character of the (canonical) gospels indicate a long and complicated process of development and transmission. And this process leaves open the question whether a "historical" Jesus may be assumed to have existed at the beginning of this development.

This situation invalidates the following statement of Ellegård: "Now if the assumption of a historical Jesus crucified under Pilate is removed, this construction [of the Jesus figure of the gospels] is left without a foundation" (1993a, 5). This is so because the Jesus figure of the gospels does not exclusively rest on Ellegård's assumption.

Summarizing, I am unable to understand how the historicity of (some part of) the Jesus figure(s) in the canonical gospels can be handled without any analysis of the sort mentioned above, and I find it fatal to Ellegård's hypothesis that he has neglected this fundamental analysis. Therefore, I should like to ask professor Ellegård why he has left this task undone?

Thirdly, I want to touch on another aspect of the same issue: As already mentioned, Ellegård assumes that the canonical gospels have been created on the basis of the few hints in Paul and Ignatius, a number a "messianic" texts in the Bible, and their authors' imagination (cf. 1992, 116—151). To me this "explanation" is not satisfying. In 1992, 116—152, Ellegård explains only a modest part of the gospel material in this way. Far too much material in the gospels is left unexplained, as for example the parables, many stories of healing, exorcism, conflict etc., and a great part of the passion narrative. It is no wonder that Ellegård's key word, the "imagination" of the gospel writers, cannot satisfy his critics. Quite frankly, I am unable to understand how Ellegård himself can feel satisfied by this sort of "explanation".

Many other problems in Ellegård's works need to be criticized, for example the surprising fact, that Ellegård has neglected an important feature in the historical context of the gospels, namely the numerous Jewish eschatological prophets and messianic pretenders in the 1st century described by Josephus. Ellegård touches upon John the Baptist, but there are many others such as Judas the Galilean, Theudas, the "Egyptian" prophet, Jesus Ben Ananiah and Simon Bar Giora (cf. Steve Mason: *Josephus and the New Testament*,

Peabody 1992, ch. 4–5). The decisive point is that precisely for a *historical* analysis this contemporary context is indispensable.

So, what I first and foremost have against Ellegård's works on early Christianity is not that they are not theologically satisfactory, but that they are far from being *historical* enough. Generally, they are too general and too "rhetorical". They do not go deeply enough into our sources, neither the gospels nor the Pauline letters or the texts from Qumran.

Comments by Matti Klinge

Professon Alvar Ellegård's book *Myten om Jesus* ("The Myth of Jesus") and his articles on the subject have appeared at a time when the Dead Sea Scrolls are attracting fresh interest. It is possible that the near future will bring new evidence to bear on his subject, Jesus as a person and the earliest days of Christianity. Independently of Ellegård, the question of whether or not Jesus is a historical figure has recently aroused attention in other countries, judging by the French and English press.

I find it obvious that Ellegård has much of importance to say. He revives old theories but sheds new holistic light on them. Actually, many historians at least have long accepted the idea that, since the New Testament canon arose in the fourth or fifth century, this period should be regarded as the time when the theology and the sacred mythopoeia of Christianity were established. In theological research, as Ellegård shows, continuing detailed study has elucidated the composition and origin of the gospels and the apostolic epistles. It is important, however, to keep asking the basic question: did Jesus exist, or is he wholly a fictitious mythological-religious ideal figure? As is well known, this discussion has been going on since the days of D. F. Strauss, Feuerbach, and Renan, but the question is older than that. Pascal and his contemporaries asked what is in some ways the crucial question: why does Josephus not mention Jesus?

What Ellegård says about the Teacher of Righteousness and his position in Paul's epistles seems convincing to me, but I am in no way a specialist in the field. It seems to me that it is precisely this point which we might expect to be illuminated by new findings resulting from the publication and study of the Dead Sea scrolls which we shall probably see in the next few years.

I am more sceptical about Ellegård's idea that there was no historical Jesus, specifically his claim that everything that cannot be reconciled with the Teacher of Righteousness is a fiction concocted from prophecies in the Old Testament and other ingredients.

The account of the passion seems to me to be a possible historical core. I see here a Jewish rebel, perhaps of little historical significance, but nonetheless a real person, to whom both his contemporaries and later historiography could apply the prophecies. The fact that there are no other sources for this historical figure does not mean that he did not exist.

Ellegård's strength and weakness lie in his passion for source criticism and the so-called critical school, source positivism, which has often thrown away the baby with the bathwater.

Speaking and arguing with the prophets can be a way to describe one's own times, quite simply because people versed in the Scriptures — then as now — had a language of their own, larded with quotations and proverbs. Take Henry of Livonia's *Chronicle* from the thirteenth century: the struggle against the Estonians is described with words and phrases from the Bible; Henry knew them well, and it was natural that they should come to mind when he was describing his own times.

Many folklorists and anthropologists, in my view, have sinned just as much as the "critical" historians. The fact that myths wander, that they are religion and literature, need not mean that they cannot simultaneously be historical on another level. Compare it with fiction, which consists of "literary" events and accounts which are not "true", that is to say, not "directly" true. Yet the authors use the historically true world as material

for their creation, otherwise we would not understand the result. Many a humanist would do well to read Proust.

Georges Dumézil must undeniably be counted as one of the most prominent humanists of our time. His methodological approach and his profound insight into the nature of myth and narrative, exemplified in his major series *Mythe et épopée*, ought to be able to contribute something to the question of Jesus as a historical or mythical figure.

From the third century onwards, Jesus has been a historical person in the sense of being a real figure in the history of ideas, and it is perfectly possible to cling to him. In the mother churches in particular, which have not relied solely on the Scriptures as the Protestant churches and sects have, tradition is acknowledged as a reality in a way quite different from what we know from a world more influenced by Protestantism and positivism.

Research into the myth of Jesus should not be pursued without some insight into the Homeric question, just as it should also be studied in parallel to the discussion of the relation of myth to reality in the Old Finnish and Old Norse literary tradition. As far as I can see, all these branches of research have been advanced — at the cost of enormous effort — far too independently of each other, with occasional exceptions such as Dumézil and Martti Haavio here in Finland. Yet these giants of learning, although contemporaries, were never acquainted, whether in the flesh or through each other's work.

Professon Ellegård's work appears to me a fine example of the application of the positivist-critical method. His book should be read as a methodological exercise in historical seminars" But it should not go unaccompanied by a word of warning, because Ellegård's book is at the same time a striking illustration that the positivist-critical paradigm has its limits and is a product of its times.

Comments by Birger Olsson

The idea is as follows: An author writes a book, others react (or fail to react) to the book. The author then writes a reaction to the reactions (or lack of reactions), some people are invited to comment on this reaction, and finally the author reacts to the reactions to his reaction to the reactions to his book.

I am not convinced that this is a good way to discuss a research hypothesis. I would much prefer to confine myself to discussing the historical reconstruction presented in Ellegård's book. As it is now, there is a risk of losing the thread on the way. People write at cross-purposes. There is no solid footing for an exchange of opinions.

This feels all the more necessary because the hypothesis is mostly based on arguments of plausibility — blended with a form of source criticism. Frequently recurrent qualifications are “evidently”, “clearly”, “in all likelihood”, “naturally”, “of course”, “perhaps understandably”, “surely”, “to some extent the idea was in the air”, and so on. The list could easily be prolonged. A systematic scrutiny of all these “evidently” statements is an important part of the scrutiny of Ellegård's hypothesis.

The title of the article — “Theologians as historians” — appears in the first instance to be an invitation to a discussion of the research community, about the role played in research by a scholar's beliefs, convictions, gender, age, and so on. This can concern differing religious views, political stances, perceptions of humanity, philosophies. In the reception process that has arisen, I feel unsure about whether Ellegård really wants to discuss this topic. The material, however, is highly limited for a debate of this kind. And the sweeping way Ellegård describes theologians — unlike humanists — is one that I do not recognize from my own field, that of international biblical research. I shall therefore confine myself to the original hypothesis in the book *Myten om Jesus* (1992).

Ellegård's historical reconstruction is essentially grounded on the books of G. A. Wells (1971, 1975, 1982, 1986). Nevertheless, I shall base the following attempted summary on his own presentation.

1. There were *strong Messianic currents* among the Jews in the first century. They had their seed-bed in the political, social, cultural, and religious unrest that characterized the three centuries around the start of our era. Messianic and apocalyptic writings were the predominant literary genre at this time. Quotations, allusions, and paraphrases from the Books of Enoch, the Book of Jubilees, and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs also occur in many New Testament texts. The recipients of Paul's epistles had a very detailed knowledge of the Books of Enoch, for example. Messianic enthusiasm dwindled after the Bar Kochba revolt in the 130s.

2. *The Qumran scrolls* have brought us into a completely new research situation requiring a radical change of previous views. “Finally, not least through the Qumran finds, the emergence and triumph of Christianity begin to be comprehensible.”

3. *The Essene movement* now appears clearly, both inside and outside Palestine, organized in “congregations of God”, held together by itinerant apostles. The urban Essenes in the Diaspora banded together in church congregations for mutual assistance and edification, and gradually acquired more and more Messianic features. They were not so strictly bound to rules as the Essenes at Qumran.

The Teacher of Righteousness was the founder of the movement, a prophet and interpreter of the Scriptures, but he developed into a cult figure of supernatural dimensions.

The thoughts of the Essenes were zealously centred on him. He became the object of their ardent faith and was expected to return at the last judgement.

Practically all the properties and characteristics which the Qumran scrolls associate with the Teacher of Righteousness recur in Paul's conception of Jesus.

4. *The Essene congregation in Jerusalem* had a key position among the Essenes in the time of Paul. The leaders — according to Gal. 2 — included Cephas (Peter), James, and John. Around the year 30 Cephas, James, and others had ecstatic visions (1 Cor. 15) of the Teacher of Righteousness ascended into heaven, sitting on a heavenly throne. From this they drew the conclusion that the Teacher of Righteousness was the Messiah. He would return for the last judgement. Through revelations they also learned that his name was Jesus.

5. *Paul* also had revelations. He had just joined the Essene movement after having persecuted it for a time as an orthodox Jew. Now the Teacher of Righteousness appeared to him, sitting on the throne of God the Father, the place which the Messiah was expected to occupy. Paul interpreted the ecstatic visions in his own way: (a) An emphasis on the suffering and crucifixion of the Teacher of Righteousness. (b) His death was a propitiatory sacrifice. (c) The Teacher of Righteousness was the Messiah. (d) His resurrection was a promise of the resurrection of the faithful. (e) Belief in the Teacher of Righteousness was more important than observance of Mosaic law. The latter in particular provoked opposition in the Essene congregation in Jerusalem. After his revelations, Paul had no influence in Palestine.

6. Paul turned to *the Essene congregations in the Diaspora*. He realized that his interpretation of the law would be more appropriate for them. Moreover, the proclamation of a suffering, crucified Messiah was reminiscent of the mystery religions. The decisive new element was that the cult figure they worshipped, the Teacher of Righteousness, was the Messiah and was called Jesus. In the Essene congregations/synagogues Paul also met proselytes and "God-fearing" people who welcomed his preaching. Baptism was of no great importance to Paul. The old ideas were supplemented only by new ones, the result of special revelations in the 30s.

7. *The Essenes in Palestine* continued to act as orthodox Jews even after the revelation of the Teacher of Righteousness as the Messiah. They took part in the Jewish rebellion and disappeared in the disaster of AD 70. The Essene writings were hidden, any oral traditions of the Teacher of Righteousness vanished, and the urban Essenes in the Diaspora could go their own way, following the preaching of Paul.

8. After AD 70 *the Essenes in the Diaspora were transformed into Christians*. The congregations acquired more and more non-Jewish members, and a new religion came into being. Paul made the Jewish religion universal: the Teacher of Righteousness/Jesus died and rose again for everyone. Faith replaces circumcision and purity rules. Christianity thus arose in the Jewish Diaspora.

9. *The gospels were produced at the start of the second century*, that is, a century after the events they describe. They are thus not reliable. There is no evidence of earlier oral traditions. There were several reasons for the creation of the gospels: (a) The apostles who had had the revelations were long since dead. (b) The message of the last judgement was no longer of burning relevance; there was a new focus on Jesus' earthly life. (c) The Gnostics questioned whether Jesus was a mortal. (d) The Essenes no longer existed. (e) The Qumran writings about the Teacher of Righteousness were hidden.

The gospels are mostly products of fantasy but are also based on what is said in Paul's epistles, what the Old Testament says about the Messiah, traditions about the Teacher

of Righteousness, and writings such as Didache, the Books of Enoch, the Book of Jubilees, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, and the Psalms of Solomon.

This historical reconstruction, in which I have largely tried to use Ellegård's own expressions, should be tested in the customary fashion, perhaps first with the tools that Ellegård himself uses: traditional source criticism and plausibility arguments, partly influenced by Popper.

The latter approach could take the following form:

Example 1: If Jesus had been a well-known preacher and miracle-worker, or if he had been crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate, some contemporary ought to have written about him, and this text should have survived until the present day.

Example 2: If the Essenes of the Jewish Diaspora had played such a decisive role in the first century, it should be evident from texts that have survived until the present day.

Example 3: If Jesus and his disciples spoke Aramaic (although they probably knew some Greek too), then writings about them should not be in Greek.

Example 4: If the Essenes had been so widespread in the Diaspora, then at least some tiny fragment about the Essenes ought to be in Greek.

Plausibility arguments require a great deal of space, so I shall try the simpler method: testing some points in Ellegård's hypothesis against the sources he uses, ignoring the gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. We are then left mainly with Paul's epistles and the Qumran scrolls.

It is extremely rare for Ellegård to refer to texts as direct support for his theses. When he does so, the source references are sometimes wrong. His reading of Ignatius (pp. 99 f.) is incorrect. I would like to see proof of the alleged familiarity of Paul and his addressees with the Books of Enoch.

If we turn to some central points in Ellegård's reconstruction, the following questions arise:

1. Where is the evidence for the established organization of Essene congregations in the Diaspora? How do we know that Paul turned to proselytes and "God-fearing" people? There is no support for this in Paul, nor in the Qumran scrolls.

2. How can one prove (or at least make it seem plausible) that the Teacher of Righteousness was a cult figure in the Diaspora congregations or in Jerusalem? The plausibility arguments (pp. 86 f.) are more than usually tenuous. "This naturally leads to a heavy emphasis on the importance of believing in him. . . . But the thought lay near at hand. Near enough for us to assume that at least some readers of this passage had entertained this thought. . . . Admittedly, he does not call himself the Messiah. But it is only a very short step." Ellegård's talk of "a religiously conditioned, ritual veneration of an elevated person" has no basis in the texts with which I am familiar. Ellegård's thesis about the Teacher of Righteousness as "a cult figure of supernatural dimensions" is essential to his reconstruction.

3. Where do we find evidence for "ecstatic visions of the Teacher ascended into heaven"? They are fundamental to Ellegård's theory of Paul and the origin of Christianity. At least Paul should have mentioned them.

The references to Gal. 1:12 and 1 Cor. 15:3–8 do not hold water if one takes into account the genre and the wording of the texts. The Galatians passage concerns Paul's gospel versus that of his opponents, that is to say, chiefly his message to the Gentiles: they do not need to follow Mosaic law or practise circumcision. This has nothing to do with the Teacher of Righteousness/Jesus. Where does Ellegård get the expression "as sitting on the throne of God"?

The passage in 1 Cor. 15 is about traditions that Paul has adopted (v. 3) and not about his own visions of Jesus as the Messiah. In 1 Cor. 11:23 ff., too, Paul is most likely referring to adopted traditions. In 1 Corinthians the point is to show *that* Jesus rose from the dead, not *when* and not *how!* Jesus has already revealed himself to some people after his death.

Ellegård's attempt to make a chronological distinction between the revelations and Jesus's death and resurrection does not agree with the wording: "*that* Christ died . . . *and that* he was buried . . . *and that* he rose again . . . *and that* he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve." The natural thing is to see this as a coherent temporal sequence. Paul then goes on to list more people to whom the risen Christ appeared, ending with Paul himself. If we had nothing but this passage we would no doubt link Paul quite closely in time to the others.

4. If we accept Ellegård's thesis, how then does it explain Paul's texts in totality and in detail? What about the references to traditions? The general assumption that all the recipients of his epistles have been baptized in the name of Jesus Christ? The information in 1 Thess. 2:14 about "the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus" (early 50s) or in Gal. 1:22 about "the churches in Judaea which were in Christ" (40s)? Following Ellegård's method, questions like these must also be asked of his hypothesis.

This is a fairly common way to look for evidence for a historical thesis: to find textual statements. The serious limitations of the method are well known. As for modern research into Jesus, the question also arises: how well do the pictures of Jesus (in the New Testament) agree with what we know of Judaism at the start of our era? Now we have a much broader picture of Judaism than before, thanks to the pseudepigrapha, the Qumran scrolls, archaeological finds, and analyses in the vein of social science. The result is that Jesus the Jew has a clear place in his times. Findings like these contradict Ellegård's view of the gospels as fictitious biographies from the second century.

This highly limited test of Ellegård's hypothesis leaves it far from convincing me that it is superior to more traditional theories. Ellegård might respond by saying that I make this judgement because I am a Christian. With a little imagination, however, one can find other reasons. It can even happen that a scholar, when examining a new hypothesis and finding only evidence that speaks against it, puts the book away and reads something else instead. One need not suspect a conspiracy behind such behaviour.

Comments by Rolf Torstendahl

Do we care, as historians, whether Buddha, Krishna, Moses, Jesus, Muhammed and other central religious figures really led an earthly life or not? For most historians the answer is, I suppose: No, we don't. What we care about is that religions have played an important role in history and that they continue to do so. Religions are certainly important historical phenomena with social repercussions so deep that nobody can ignore them irrespective of his or her convictions about religion. This does not imply, however, that the historical existence of the founder or central figure of any religion is important to the historian. It may be important to the religious believer, for many religions claim that certain historical events should evidence their truth. If this is taken seriously, history (a certain small segment of history) is made a question of belief rather than a question of normal historical argument. Believers tend to let the two grow together: some Hindu scholars have spent much time to reconstruct the exact site and happenings of the battle of Kurukshetra (where Krishna acted as charioteer for Arjuna and told him the wisdom of the Gita).

There may be a difference in our attitudes to Muhammed, Jesus, Moses and Buddha. It seems that many Christians and Jews accept rather willingly that many stories in what Christians know as the Old Testament have rather a symbolic than a literal meaning. Buddha may have been a local noble of historical existence, but few scholars would go into detail about it. The historical existence of Mohammed, on the other hand, is never disputed. The sources are really different. For the historian there can be a problem of the person and actions of the central figure of the religion only if there is a material which allows analysis of such things.

Few historians doubt that the historical development of religions in society is rather independent of the amount of "historical truths" which can be said to be evidenced in the mythological core of the religion. The myth in itself is the social force. Out of such considerations questions relating to the historicity of specific persons or events, however religiously central, cannot rank high in what I have called the historian's optimum norms. It seems that many historians share my opinion on this, or they ought to have devoted much more energy to such questions. They have not done this and have thus, implicitly, given such questions low marks as regards importance and fruitful relation to more general problems concerning the role of religions.

Another view is the methodological in a strict sense. In respect to what I have called minimum demands there are good reasons for a historian to shrink from judgments on the historicity of the person of Jesus. This means, however, that the historian in this case, as in so many others, will say neither "The evidence is that he lived there and then" nor "The evidence is that he did not live there and then". The *logical possibility* of the existence of Jesus (at the religiously assumed place and time) cannot be denied, but the evidence seems to be too weak to give such a statement a minimum probability. It is easy to defend a statement with its logical possibility. Giants in ancient Scandinavia, unicorns, and the activity of the God Ape Hanuman are all within logical possibilities, though out of probability. However, "a grain of truth" may be in the stories about these beings, but still only as a possibility and not at all within the reach of any "minimum demands" of evidencing.

Many researchers (not all too many but certainly a number) before Ellegård have tried

to clarify that as historians we cannot accept the narratives of the Gospels, not even the “main facts”. Still this is worth saying.

The part of Ellegård’s reasoning which is his own in a more specific sense is, however, less convincing from the point of view of minimum demands. When he identifies “Paul’s Jesus” with the Essene Teacher of Righteousness, the evidencing is not convincing and very thin.¹ One of the arguments, an important one in Ellegård’s text² and the only one developed in the essay presented in Scandia, is that Paul’s listeners did not ask about the Master when he talked about him. The silence from their side — especially as the only recording stems from Paul himself — cannot be accepted as evidence for anything (as Ellegård himself states about arguments from silence in another connection). Ellegård’s claim that his hypothesis tallies with a wide range of observations is hardly quite true, if we consider the specific hypothesis about the Essene Teacher of Righteousness, at least not as the case is presented by Ellegård. (I have no specific knowledge of the sources or the literature beyond his texts.) The strength of the argument lies in showing what we cannot accept as evidenced, not in the alternative hypothesis.

It has always been difficult for people to accept that historians have to leave some questions open. We cannot decide (with rational arguments) on everything we would like to know something about, and this is very true of history. The thick web of myth which is naturally connected with religion makes it difficult to sift historical arguments from mythical. Only when it is urgent for the solution of other problems the historian cannot avoid the effort to weigh *imponderabilia* in favour of one or the other hypothesis. It is difficult to see that this is needed for questions about founders of religions.

Notes

1. Ellegård takes up the question in *Lychnos* 1990, pp. 12–17.
2. I refer here to Ellegård’s *Myten om Jesus* (1992) and Ellegård in *Lychnos* 1990.

Reply by Alvar Ellegård

My intention in suggesting that *Scandia* should open up its pages to a discussion of the historicity of Jesus was to encourage participation from both theologians and historians. It seems obvious to me that both categories of scholars will benefit from an exchange of ideas about a subject that concerns us all.

The discussion, I thought, should be focussed on the fundamental question of the historical reality of the Jesus figure of the Gospels and Acts. That is also the Jesus figure both of the general public and of theological scholars — whether Christian or not.

In order to get the discussion started, I briefly presented my own view, referring chiefly to my own publications and those of G. A. Wells, the scholar who first drew my attention to the subject. For concreteness, I also took up for discussion a few points which were meant to illustrate the kind of difficulties which the “received” view has to cope with, and where my own hypothesis (which is to a large extent also Wells’s) seems to offer a much better explanation of the known facts.

I certainly did not wish to limit the present discussion to those few points, or to the arguments that I have myself advanced in print. I believe I made it clear that it was the theologians’ reaction to *both* Wells and me that formed the basis of my criticism of their failure to live up to their duties as scholars. In fact, the reaction to Wells is the most important in this respect, as my own publications are too recent to have become widely known in the scholarly world.

Hence I am somewhat disappointed that Olsson and Bilde, both specialist on early Christianity, do not refer to Wells at all — something which underlines the truth of Mack’s observation that “scholars with theological interests have scarcely taken note of this literature”. I am even more disappointed, however, that neither Olsson nor Bilde take up the wider question of the historicity of the Gospels and Acts. Olsson devotes, quite unnecessarily, half his space to a quite fair summary of my hypothesis. That leaves him only a page or so to criticize it.

In my writings I argue first, that my interpretation of Paul is possible, and second, that it is plausible. Olsson focusses on the (lack of) plausibility. But as I argue p 00, the Popperian view of the function of a hypothesis implies that, once a hypothesis is (empirically) possible, its value is decided by its consequences, not by its intrinsic, direct plausibility. Hence Olsson’s objections are largely beside the point.

Just a few comments on details. In 1 Cor 11:23 Paul says that he has received his information “from the Lord”. This is surely as clear a statement as we can wish that it is the Lord, not the tradition, that Paul relies on. As for Paul’s “ecstatic visions of the Teacher, Jesus, exalted to heaven”, I must admit that my rhetorical propensities (criticized by Bilde!) took the upper hand somewhat. Paul had “visions and revelations of the Lord” and was raised to “the third heaven” and “to paradise” (2 Cor 12: 1–4). His vision of the raised Jesus is also referred to in 1 Cor 15:8. Olsson objects that Paul does not explicitly place him beside God. Others did, as is abundantly clear from the contemporary apocalyptic literature. I cannot see that Olsson’s objection has any importance in the wider context.

Bilde considers it “a mistake” on my part not to discuss more fully the date and composition of the Gospels. Since Albrektson makes a similar point, I can agree that I should perhaps have gone more fully into those questions. My excuse is that my predecessor, Wells, whom I refer to, has dealt quite thoroughly with them. My frequent references to

Helmut Koester, a prominent scholar of the Bultmann school, should make it clear that I am not unfamiliar with the relevant arguments. I cannot of course go into details here.

As for the dating, suffice it to say that we have no evidence that any of the canonical Gospels existed before 140 CE (mention by Papias, as reported by Irenaeus, late 2nd century CE, and Eusebius, 4th c. CE). Dating Matthew in the 80's is based on the view that writers such as Clement of Rome and Ignatius of Antioch, both fairly reliably dated 90–110, had access to Matthew and half-quoted him. My own view, which my opponents should try to refute, is that it is more likely that the shoe is on the other foot: that it was Matthew who used Clement and Ignatius. Hence Matthew's early dating cannot be upheld. However, the chief argument for placing the gospel of Mark around 70 CE has been that Matthew certainly knew it (Kümmel 1964, Stanton 1985). That argument now falls.

The principal argument for the "received" dates is that the stories told by the gospel writers must be based on "traditions" going back to Jesus and his times, 0-30 CE. I readily admit that the Gospels used traditions. But those traditions may well have had other sources than Jesus, and may have originally been told about others: a well-known phenomenon in oral literature (Lord 1960) and generally in anthropology. Koester, among others, points to collections of wisdom sayings and of miraculous feats by wandering preachers or "philosophers" (Koester 1982, 1992). The evangelists — all presumably working in the Diaspora, outside Palestine — knew that the visions that Paul and others had of their revered founder and teacher (let us not quibble about the word "cult figure", Albrektson!), had occurred around 30 CE. Writing long after that event, they concluded, plausibly, that his crucifixion had taken place just before. Hence the stage was set for attaching whatever traditional materials they could lay hands on to their hero. Presumably those materials also included traditions that the Essene-Christian communities preserved about the *real* Teacher of Righteousness from the late 2nd c BCE.

The oral tradition is constantly appealed to by theologians both to justify their early dating of the Gospels, and to support their credibility. About this kind of argumentation I write (p 172) that "if the assumption of a historical Jesus crucified by Pilate is removed, this construction is left without a foundation". Bilde misunderstands me here, taking "this construction" to mean "the Jesus figure of the gospels". But what I mean is that the hypothesis of an "oral tradition" dating from 30 CE is left without a foundation. Consequently, the chief argument for the essential trustworthiness of the Gospel stories is also left hanging in the air, especially in view of the total absence of references to the Gospel story, not only in Paul, but in all the early texts. The Letter to the Hebrews is particularly interesting, since its writer does show an interest in details of Jesus' life on earth: his descent from the tribe of Judah, his suffering, and his death. But there is no elaboration. What we have in Hebrews is the kind of information that might be circulating about the Teacher of Righteousness. (See Kosmala 1959, Grässer 1992, Ellegård 1992).

Albrektson has an interesting discussion about *argumentum ad hominem*. He thinks my suspicion, that the Christian faith of most theologians creates a bias in favour of the "received" position, is also a kind of *argumentum ad hominem*. I can agree there is a certain analogy. On the other hand, there is an important difference between rejecting an argument because of the personal characteristics of the person who propounds it, and trying to find an explanation for the arguments advanced in such characteristics.

Albrektson objects to my complaints about the silence of the theologians. Evidently he has not noticed that, as I said above, my accusations concern the silence about *both* Wells and me. As Albrektson is not a New Testament specialist, he may be excused for not entering deeply into those matters. That my newspaper articles have been widely discussed

in the Swedish daily press and in several periodicals serving various religious groups is hardly surprising. After all, my express purpose was to stir up the theological establishment.

The negative reaction was hardly a surprise, though I had hoped that at least some committed Christians had been able to see that my thesis can well be reconciled with the essentials of the Christian religion. It might even have become a liberating agent for reflections on such religious essentials. Those hopes, however, were not fulfilled.

I was of course disappointed that my theological reviewers did not take the opportunity to engage in a more serious argument, now that *Scandia* opened up its pages. It is of course true that publications aiming at a non-specialist audience are not suited for such a discussion. It should be the responsibility of the scholarly press, theological or historical. Unfortunately we do not encounter it there.

Albrektson specifies a few points where he contrasts the received view with my hypothesis. I have already dealt with the question of dating (above, p 173). Albrektson further argues that Paul's treatment of a crucified Christ is "more plausible as an attempt to cope with an embarrassing historical fact" than the hypothesis I present. But I too think that Paul assumed the Teacher of Righteousness had been crucified. The Qumran documents about the Teacher certainly mention persecuting and suffering (see Vermes 1987), and the religious speculations which we know the Qumran people spun around him might well have furnished Paul with materials for concluding that he had eventually been crucified. The Habakkuk commentary (Vermes 1987, 283–289) is telling evidence, besides providing an excellent illustration of how "far-fetched" the community's interpretations often were. The Gospels are by no means unique in this respect.

Albrektson ends up by appealing to Occam's razor: *entia non sunt praeter necessitatem multiplicanda*. But the application of the razor is not without its problems. It is not a question of just adding pros and cons for each hypothesis, and then calculating the difference. Once again, therefore, I refer to Darwin's remark that he stuck to his hypothesis "because it explains so much" (above, p 175). It is very much in line with Popper's philosophy of scientific explanation (above, p 174).

The two historians who have responded to my article, Klinge and Torstendahl, take a much more detached view of the two competing hypotheses, my own and the received view. Instead, they concentrate on the problems of historical reconstruction as such, recognizing that it must necessarily be largely hypothetical. The difference between historians and theologians is in general precisely this: theologians do not admit that the received view is hypothetical. They tend to regard it as an established fact. But it is not established. The burden of proof lies on the theologians — if they mean to do historical research.

Torstendahl's basic attitude is that "the historicity of specific persons and events" is not of central importance for the historian. I agree that religions arise and develop in many ways and from a multitude of roots, among them myths about founders. Whether those founders, and their deeds, are historical realities or not may be of minor importance for the historical development of the religion in question. However: in the first place it is a fact that the question of historical truth is often very important to the adherents of a religion. Secondly, the historian who takes as his subject the history of mankind as such (a great and noble subject!) is bound to take an interest in how the question of historicity may itself influence different individuals and groups. In other words, the relative importance of myth and reality is an interesting research subject.

The question of historicity is especially relevant in the case of Christianity, since all

Christian churches regard Jesus not as just a man, but as the son of God. Christianity's mother religion, Judaism, and its sister religion, Islam, do not have this problem. Neither Moses, nor Muhammad, are looked upon as divine. Further, many writers also look upon the recognized historicity of Jesus as an essential element of Christianity, and an important factor for its success in the world (Toynbee 1960, p. 216, Angus 1925, p 273,309, Bell 1953, p 103. See also my discussion p 173 above). Every historian is of course entitled to his own priorities. But I do not think we should dismiss the question of the historicity of Jesus as of little weight.

The question of the historicity of Jesus has another dimension too. The fact that almost all theologians have taken for granted that Jesus died c. 30 CE has undoubtedly influenced their interpretation of the first century Jewish and/or Christian literature — including their dating of it. Accordingly it is not only the historicity of an individual, but the history of early Christianity that is involved. Surely that is a worthy subject for the historian.

Torstendahl finds the evidence I present in favour of my argument "thin" -- he says nothing about the foundation of the received view -- and exemplifies by quoting me on Paul's audience not asking questions about the earthly Jesus. I chose that point because I thought it was striking. But there is of course very much more both in my own writings and in Wells's.

One point should perhaps be made clear in this connection. I do not deny the historicity of Jesus, only the historicity of the *Jesus of the Gospels*. What I maintain is that the Jesus of Paul (and of Paul's communities, and of his fellow apostles) should be identified with the Essene Teacher of Righteousness, whose reality is hardly doubted by anybody. That of course does not imply that Paul, or the others, knew very much about what kind of a person the Teacher was. It may well be, as Klinge suggests, that they added traits taken from the charismatic prophets and preachers who are mentioned by Josephus, and whom Bilde also mentions as possible candidates. For my own part I do not think those people contributed very much in Paul's case. Paul's Jesus was not a popular preacher, but mainly a prophet and teacher. For the Gospel writers, on the other hand, the Palestinian figures mentioned by Josephus, and also others, such as John the Baptist and the Proto-Gnostic Simon Magus, may have provided background material. But even more material could be picked from the collections of wisdom sayings and miraculous deeds that circulated widely in the hellenistic world at the time. It was on that basis that they could paint a picture of Jesus that was intelligible and plausible to their contemporaries.

Let me finish with a few comments on Klinge's words about the "positivist-critical paradigm". I certainly have no objections against being called a positivist (on the contrary!) But I must stress that my positivistic attitude does not derive from the "source-critical" school of historians, but rather from a fair familiarity with the kind of thinking that prevails in the natural sciences, and also, in the philosophy of the English empiricists.

Against this background I can also accept Klinge's final warning about the limits of that paradigm. But I would add that those limits exist for all paradigms, all methods, all hypotheses. As scientists and scholars we try to explain and understand reality. We have made much progress -- and I would add, much more by the positivistic methods than by any others. But we shall never arrive at the final solution. All our hypotheses are subject to revision, both because of a constantly expanding data base, and because of new theories about how data are connected with each other. The ever-increasing flow of information and hypotheses about the Dead Sea Scrolls is a case in point. Thus I am quite prepared to see my hypothesis about the early Christians as Essenes, and about Jesus as

the Teacher of Righteousness, being replaced by better ones. My aim in the present article has been to make both historians and theologians realize that there do exist other ways of explaining the origin of Christianity than the traditional one.

What I have just said should not be construed as a lack of confidence in my own — and Wells's — hypothesis. In fact, in my continued research I have all the time been on the look-out for facts and arguments that would refute it. But though our reviewers have certainly pointed out inadequacies in our presentations, I have not come across any real counterevidence. On the contrary, I constantly find more and more supporting evidence. That is the mark of a good hypothesis — although, to be sure, it does not prove it true. I now hope that both historians and theologians will carry on the search.

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