

Class 3a

HOW MUCH SKEPTICISM IS WARRANTED? THE MYTHICAL VIEW OF JESUS

Outline

- Early & Current Mythicists
- Reactions to Mythicism by NT Scholars
- Mythicism Run Amok
- The Basic Mythicist Position
- An Initial Rejoinder

Early Mythicists

- 1791 – Constantin François Volney
 - all religions are at heart the same
 - Christians invented variant on sun-god tradition (Krishna)
- 1795 – Charles-François Dupuis
 - a more influential work in the same vein
 - Jesus a variant on sun-god theme
- 1840-1877 – Bruno Bauer
 - A New Testament scholar
 - Gospel authors invented Jesus
 - Christianity an amalgamation of Judaism and Roman Stoicism

Early Mythicists

- 1900 – J. M. Robertson
 - Jesus like fertility gods
 - death and resurrection myths mimic nature cycles
 - Jesus may have existed, but he was nothing like the dying-rising Christ that Christians made him
- 1909 – Arthur Drews
 - Jesus was not a real historical figure
 - Lenin was convinced; myth theory popular in Soviet Union

Current Mythicists

- 2009 – Earl Doherty
 - *Jesus: Neither God nor Man* (2009)
 - no historical Jesus worthy of the name existed
 - Christianity began with a belief in a spiritual, mythical figure
 - the Gospels are essentially allegory and fiction
 - no single identifiable person lay at the root of the Galilean preaching tradition
- 2003-2011 – Robert Price
 - *The Incredible Shrinking Man: How Reliable Is the Gospel Tradition?* (2003)
 - *The Christ-Myth Theory and Its Problems* (2011)

Current Mythicists

- 2005 – Thomas L. Thompson
 - *The Messiah Myth: The Near Eastern Roots of Jesus and David* (2005)
 - Hebrew Bible scholar and famous "minimalist"
 - King David and Jesus never existed
 - Christians invented savior figure from precedents and stories in Jewish scriptures
- 2014 – Richard Carrier
 - *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* (2014)

Current Mythicists

A Variation on the Thesis

Jesus existed, but he was not the founder of Christianity.
Christians invented the mythical Christ

- 1975 – George A. Wells
 - *Did Jesus Exist?* (1975)
- 2011 – Archibald Robinson
 - *Jesus: Myth or History?* (2011)

Reactions to Mythicism

by New Testament Scholars

The mythicist...does not get fair play from professional theologians. They either meet him with a conspiracy of silence or, if that is impossible, treat him as an amateur whose lack of academic status...robs his opinion of any value.

- Archibald Robertson

Mythicism run amok

The Christ Conspiracy

- Christianity is an astrotheological religion in which the sun-God was transformed into a historical Jew. (Acharya S.)
- Jesus was invented by Jews in Egypt, who invented a new mystery religion with a dying-rising man-god in the 200s (Freke and Gandy)

*These sensationalist claims give mythicism a bad name,
but serious mythicism needs a hearing*

The Basic Mythicist Position

An Initial Rejoinder

1. silence is not positive evidence of non-existence
2. gospel genre is not meant to be "history"
3. specificity of the accounts
4. development does not equal whole-scale invention
5. if Christians invented Jesus, why didn't Jews and pagans critique them for *that*?
6. problems with Roman sources don't make them useless
7. agenda of deniers is not objective
8. no credible alternative explanation for the rise of Christianity
