

Review by an outsider of ancient history and new testament studies of "Maurice Casey (2014): Jesus. Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths"

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Summary

Professor Casey's book opposes the historical evidence for Jesus to the mythical origin of the story. Historicism is generally accepted in academic New Testament Studies, mythicism is often adhered to by non-scholars on the internet. The review uses the analogy of Santa Claus to bring forth a point that may have been missed by both professor Casey and the mythicists who he wishes to expose. For Santa Claus there is the historical bishop Nicolas of Myra (Turkey) but it would be inaccurate to call him the "historical Santa Claus" since the origin of the story is rather the neolithic myth of the Norse god Wodan who rides the sky on the back of his horse Sleipnir. The Church imposed the story of Nicolas on the ancient myth in order to control the heresy. If the historical Jesus was a mere man, he couldn't have walked on water or risen from death, and the story of the resurrection reminds of many similiary mythical stories from prehistoric times. For Jesus the religious meaning and the resurrection are the defining issue, for otherwise why tell the story from generation to generation ? If there was a historical preacher, healer and exorcist who got associated with already existing ancient myths of resurrection, then it becomes awkward to speak about a historical Jesus, just like with the "historical Santa Claus", because such historical Jesus is at distance from what defines him for the story that people consider relevant to relate. The review looks into the historical method, Crossley's & Casey's dating of Mark to 40 CE, the value of evidence of the Aramaic language, and some aspects of professor Casey's rejection of the mythical argument. The review is by an outsider of ancient history and New Testament Studies, as the author is an econometrician and teacher of mathematics. His interest is his proposal for a development of a multidisciplinary course on Jesus and the origin of Christianity, explained in his book *The simple mathematics of Jesus* (2012).

Thomas Colignatus is the name in science of Thomas Cool, econometrician (Groningen 1982) and teacher of mathematics (Leiden 2008)

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Introduction

A student of ancient history invited me to read Maurice Casey "*Jesus. Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths*" (JEAMM) (2014).¹ Professor Casey (1942-2014) was emeritus professor of New Testament Languages and Literature of the University of Nottingham (UK). I myself (1954) am an econometrician (Groningen 1982) and teacher of mathematics (Leiden 2008). Thus I can only read professor Casey's book as a consumer, and I will not be able to understand the depth of his reasoning and his grasp of ancient history. Nevertheless, I was honoured to receive this invitation to try the book.

The following is a review of my findings as an outsider to ancient history and *New Testament Studies* (NTS). This review must be seen from the viewpoint of my own background in econometrics and the didactics of mathematics. My target is an understanding at a general level, say students at highschool who also have some math. Originally I hoped that professor Casey would be able to follow it but he just passed away on May 10 2014. As he is the tour guide on an archeological site I hope that my questions are intelligent enough for his surviving colleagues to try for an answer.

Let me invite others with similar quantitative background as mine to read the book by professor Casey as well, then compare this outsider review with their own findings, and then also consider my own book: "*The simple mathematics of Jesus*" (SMOJ) (2012).²

If you are wondering how the teaching of mathematics comes into this, see **Appendix A** before continuing this introduction, because I would like us to be on level ground. If you indeed plan to read the two books, it is advisable to start with SMOJ because of its quantitative attitude.

SMOJ presents a proposal for a multidisciplinary project for teachers of mathematics, history, society & government, and philosophy & religion. The objective is to present students with a sound course on antiquity and the origin of Christianity. Multidisciplinary means that all teachers are involved, as opposed to interdisciplinary where perhaps one teacher draws from various fields. All teachers would be open to the interdisciplinary approach but it is useful to have them available to link up faster to the own discipline.

The multidisciplinary course should in fact appeal to professor Casey's fellow researchers of NTS as it should open up students to scientific findings and warn them against nonsense on the internet.

A curious problem nowadays is that the internet is relatively free while scholars are behind pay walls even though scholars tend to be paid for by public funds. When students use the internet and only find invalid reasoning and data, then we teachers are doing something wrong. The academia got caught within the earnings-model of the publishing industry. Part of an answer is that education makes students aware of the issues by means of such proposed project.

The proposed course should obviously be based upon science and scholarship. The reason to propose a multidisciplinary approach rather than mathematics separately or NTS separately etc., is that there are fruitful insights from combining the various angles. I have developed the case in SMOJ.

Since Judaism and its origin must be discussed and since Jesus is a recognised preacher for Islam, perhaps the project could be widened to the three Abrahamic religions. The issue of Jesus is already complex enough as it stands.

¹ Bloomsbury ISBN 9780567447623. A 2012 excerpt can be found here:
<http://rjosephhoffmann.wordpress.com/2012/05/22/the-jesus-process-maurice-casey/>

² Mijnbestseller.nl ISBN 9789461935052, <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/SMOJ/Index.html>

Given the multidisciplinary character of my proposal, I hope that NTS-scholars can accept that I do not know Aramaic or much about antiquity itself. I had some Latin, Greek, French, German, English, Spanish and of course Dutch at gymnasium β completed in 1972 but there it ends. When Casey refers to the difficulty of translation I can at least understand him. I am neither a scholar in NTS but I am a scientist and naturally respect scholarship and the scientific method.

Professor Casey and I differ on the issue of a historical Jesus. Casey defends the case of a historical Jesus, and I regard it as Santa Claus for Grown-Ups. I am sorry to say that JEAMM does not provide sufficient evidence for a historical Jesus. See SMOJ for the uncertainties, while I will develop some elements here too.

On the issue of the historical Jesus, the basic point is that the scientific method emphasises the uncertainties while Casey tries to be like a judge and decide what history really was. But there is no need for judges to settle historical issues. It is advisable to emphasise the uncertainties, as in proper science, so that students can make up their own mind and look for new questions and answers.

Regard this good interview with professor Dale Allison of Princeton: "But for me this is history, which means that we weigh probabilities and try to find the best working hypothesis. It's not a question of certainty. You can doubt everything if you want to. It's a question of what's more plausible, and it's my sense of things that positing an historical Jesus leaves us with fewer problems than the alternative."³ (2014-01-26) Trained in the empirical science of econometrics, I regard this as unscientific. A scientist should state the uncertainties and should not act as a judge. See the discussion below on the "sieve of realism". This especially holds for issues that are value-laden. Consider the question "whether the Crimea historically belongs to Russia or not". That question is convoluted since "belongs" inserts politics. A properly detached attitude emphasises the uncertainties. The question whether Jesus existed is value-laden not only since people base their belief upon it, but for example also since Rabbinic Judaism doesn't recognise his existence and the importance of the NT. Jews have been called Christ-murderers which would be difficult if he didn't exist. Professor Allison's "fewer problems" argument is silly beyond comprehension and exemplary of the unscientific attitude that we meet in the NTS community.

In the following, I presume that you have read **Appendix A** on how the didactics of mathematics comes into this discussion. See also **Appendix B** on how Jesus applies the (Greek) axiomatic method to reduce the Ten Commandments of Moses to the two commands: honour God and love thy neighbour as thyself. Professor Casey places Jesus solidly "within Judaism" but my suggestion is that there are influences from Babylon, Egypt, Greece and Rome. I surely hope that Jesus did not fail his course on Euclid, though it is always a pity that he didn't use the decimal number system nor gave it to us so that we could help the needy.

Santa Claus provides a good case to understand my position w.r.t. Jesus as well. To treat such issues, I propose to use "the sieve of realism".

Professor Casey follows professor James Crossley in dating the Gospel of Mark before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD at around 40 AD. I will refer to Flavius Josephus for the destruction of the Temple block by block to argue that this is untenable. Crossley and Casey act as judges in deciding for all of us that *fire* would be more important than the *leveling* of Jerusalem.

Subsequently, I accept that Jesus and / or Mark's original language may have been Aramaic, but that does not prove that Mark didn't contribute to a syncretic process with a fictional Jesus. I will use some elementary symbols from propositional logic. It is useful to mention that Aristotelian logic was a new element for Judaism too.

³ <http://christian-agnostic.blogspot.co.uk/2014/01/0-0-1-1963-11194-student-93-26-13131-14.html>

In the first draft of this review I started with the list of "mythicists" and the myths that Casey argues against. This discussion is now moved to the end below. It is better to understand professor Casey's position before considering his opposition to the "mythicists".

Incidentally, I am not on Casey's list (yet). SMOJ is from 2012 and before that the issue didn't have my priority and I collected some notes rather from occasional newspaper reports than the internet. SMOJ came about from looking at those notes from the angle of teaching mathematics. Pyramids are interesting objects, but why were they built ? Pythagoras not only has his Theorem but also Golden Verses that already contain an "Our Father".⁴

My attitude on the mythical character of Jesus is best explained by the example of Santa Claus, to which we best turn next.

Santa Claus as a key example

In the story of Santa Claus we have a clear distinction between on the one side the *myth* of the cheeky fellow who rides a sled through the sky and on the other side the *legend* of bishop St. Nicolas of Myra who likely really existed. The question is whether we can call the legendary bishop also the "historical Santa Claus". This is dubious. It is more reasonable to consider that the story derives from Wodan and his horse Sleipnir,⁵ and that the church superimposed the legend of St. Nicolas in order to control the neolithic folk heresy. The idea of flying through the sky is not an accessory but a key element in the story. Santa Claus in Holland rides his horse on rooftops. He doesn't have elves who make the toys, but rather has Black Petes, who represent the spirits of the night who eat the sun and who have to be expelled by making a lot of noise, like fireworks.⁶

Santa Claus is actually another variant of the basic story of Christ, and another one is Father Time who dies on December 31 and is born again on January 1, or say the Phoenix who lives somewhat longer. Santa Claus is a myth overall, since Wodan was, and there is no "historical Santa Claus".

For Jesus, we don't have a clear distinction between a myth and a legend. Overall, the mythical elements are so many that it is more reasonable to assume that Jesus is a myth like Santa Claus, while the church has superimposed some elements from reality, in a similar manner, but still making it nonsensical to speak about a "historical Jesus".

Surely, there will have been Jewish preachers who were crucified, but to hold that one of them was the "historical Jesus" makes as much sense as saying that bishop Nicolas of Myra is the "historical Santa Claus".

Some people continue to try to distinguish between on the one side the myth concerning a story character who walks over water, and on the other side a legendary healer, exorcist and preacher. Apparently Casey belongs to that latter group.

Obviously, if one could show that there was a historical person who did such great things that also myths were allocated to him, then the situation changes, and we would call this person "legendary". I haven't seen the evidence. It is neither in JEAMM (see below). Scholars who keep on trying despite the evidence are vulnerable to the criticism of group-think and holding on to unscientific methods.

Why would it matter, actually ? Speaking personally, I wouldn't care much if there would have been a preacher who could be legendary in such manner that people in the past had started calling him the Son of God, as I would hope that modern education would help students to see that the notion of "Son of God" is at best undefined and rather a contradiction in terms. However, we have had religious wars and the Shoah. Rabbinic Judaism has no place for

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_golden_verses_of_Pythagoras

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sleipnir>

⁶ <http://www.amazon.com/When-Santa-Was-Shaman-Christmas/dp/156718765X>

Jesus and the NT. Jews have been called Christ-murderers, and the Italians who actually performed the deed have gotten away with it. Luther wrote a severely antisemitic tract and Erasmus stated: "If hate of Jews proves that one is Christian, then we are all perfect Christians." (translated from Dutch NRC Handelsblad, 27/08/1995) Clearly, if Jesus Christ did not exist but was created in religious fiction then he couldn't have been murdered. Hence it is advisable to be critical on the existence of a historical Jesus. Clearly, proponents of a historical Jesus aren't responsible for the Shoah, but why persist while science tells otherwise? As the evidence and argument stands now, Christianity is indeed based upon religious fiction. This would also hold for the Jewish Bible, as it is apparently derives from Egyptian and Babylonian influences. There are victims of religion all over. It helps to be clear: if mankind wants new wars, those shouldn't be over religion.

Historical judgement on Jesus and the sieve of realism

A judge must decide whether the accused is guilty or not. Must a historian decide whether Jesus existed or not ? Or can a historian live with uncertainty ?

Shouldn't the historian emphasise the uncertainty, rather than guess at a verdict ?

This is a serious problem. On the issue whether there was a historical Jesus or not, we see that some historians arrive at a judgement. They in fact eliminate the uncertainty that they had exposed before. They behave like judges, which isn't their role.

There is a difference between people trained in *alpha* or *beta* educations. See C.P. Snow and the clash of two cultures, ⁷ between those who read Shakespeare and those who read quantum mechanics. My background is econometrics, say *gamma*, though the degree in teaching of mathematics gave me a MSc title too. With people in law and history, economists e.g. can use the method of *Verstehen*, ⁸ like introspection. With the physicists, we econometricians use hard mathematics and statistics. A tantalising question is whether gamma could be accepted as a bridge between alpha and beta. Would they accept such a bridge ?

Let us look at a judgment. The Dutch legal system originally condemned Lucia de Berk ⁹ as a serial killing nurse. She claimed to be innocent but spent almost seven years in prison and suffered a disabling stroke because of severe trauma, before she was released after much a-do. The key role was for MD Metta de Noo – Derksen and her brother and philosopher of science prof. dr. Ton Derksen who exposed errors in the evidence and the trial. A key supporting role (supporting but still key) was for various professors like econometrician Aart de Vos ¹⁰ and mathematical statisticians like Richard Gill of Leiden who explained that the court had been advised by crummy experts on statistics. My own paper may be found here. ¹¹

Let us compare this with the "historical method". ¹² Historians not only reason like judges but they may feel that they must expound a verdict too, and thus they can be wrong on two counts. Note that I don't use wikipedia as evidence but as a portal to look for the original scientific sources.

The historical method gives an algorithm that Sherlock Holmes might use to perform his forensic art. That the dog didn't bark is evidence too. Fine. This isn't as complicated as econometrics. At the end of the wikipedia article we see some simple statistics. Now this is interesting. I encountered a historian who implied that I didn't understand the historical method. When I look at the historical method, I encounter statistics again, that is part of my training. Don't historians know this ? Don't they know that econometrics is an empirical science ?

⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/C._P._Snow#The_Two_Cultures

⁸ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Verstehen>

⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lucia_de_Berk

¹⁰ <http://www.feweb.vu.nl/nl/afdelingen-en-instituten/econometrie-en-OR/afscheidssymposium-aart-de-vos/index.asp>

¹¹ <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/R2/2007-07-19-Colignatus-LdB-Correlation.pdf>

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_method

I met another historian who apparently cannot live with uncertainty, and feels the need to expound a verdict. Anton van Hooff concludes that there is a historical Jesus.¹³ This is curious. He behaves as a judge, while a scientist would explain the uncertainty of the data.

My suggestion is a sieve of realism:

Most evidence points to the likelihood that Jesus never existed but was created as a mythical figure to flesh out the gospels. Thus there simply cannot exist any evidence that he ever existed. Thus, if a historian claims that there was a historical Jesus, and comes up with a piece of evidence, then he or she should also look for alternative explanations that destroy that evidence. Clear evidence would only surface if there are no alternatives. For example, when Tacitus mentions the crucifixion by Pontius Pilatus he might merely use the statements by the Christians themselves. There is no proof that he used another source, whence the evidence evaporates.

Up to now, these historians don't work like this. They behave like judges but in fact they conceal the uncertainty.

PM. In that wikipedia article (retrieved april 27 2014): "McCullagh sums up, "if the scope and strength of an explanation are very great, so that it explains a large number and variety of facts, many more than any competing explanation, then it is likely to be true." This is right, but the error would be to decide from "likely to be true" to "true". There still is uncertainty, so keep it there.

Indeed the wikipedia article continues with "(1) In thousands of cases, the letters V.S.L.M. appearing at the end of a Latin inscription on a tombstone stand for Votum Solvit Libens Merito. (2) From all appearances the letters V.S.L.M. are on this tombstone at the end of a Latin inscription. (3) Therefore these letters on this tombstone stand for Votum Solvit Libens Merito." (willingly and deservedly fulfilled his vow) Thus, we note that the error is committed of going from likelihood to truth. Now, what is the evidence for point (1) ? You only have the letters and no statement on paper affixed to the stone what they stand for. Or does (1) express that such stones are found on cemeteries and that such an inference is safe for inscriptions found there ? If we grant (2), the error in (3) is that the historian switches from probability to certain truth. Perhaps that particular stone concerned Victor Simplissimus who expressed his love for Lucia M.

The latter is just a simple example of risky reasoning where it doesn't matter much. In the case of Jesus it does matter.

Josephus and the destruction of Jerusalem

Flavius Josephus cannot quite be trusted in what he writes or what has come down to us over the ages, but let us consider *War*, Book VII, Chapter 1, section 1, about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD:

"1. Now as soon as the army had no more people to slay or to plunder, because there remained none to be the objects of their fury, [for they would not have spared any, had there remained any other work to be done,] Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish the entire city and temple, but should leave as many of the towers standing as were of the greatest eminency; that is, Phasaelus, and Hippicus, and Mariamne; and so much of the wall as enclosed the city on the west side. This wall was spared, in order to afford a camp for such as were to lie in garrison, as were the towers also spared, in order to demonstrate to posterity what kind of city it was, and how well fortified, which the Roman valor had subdued; but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came thither believe it had ever been inhabited. This was the end which Jerusalem came to by the madness of

¹³ <http://boycottholland.wordpress.com/2014/04/23/tacitus-is-too-vague-on-jesus-too/>

those that were for innovations; a city otherwise of great magnificence, and of mighty fame among all mankind." ¹⁴

Casey p81:

"There are *two different conventional* dates for the Gospel of Mark in more or less mainstream scholarship, apart from the hopelessly late dates proposed by the mythicists. Some scholars, especially from Europe, date it c. 65-9 CE, not long before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, whereas others, especially in the USA, date it c. 75 CE, not long after the same event. A consequence of such late dates is, necessarily, even later dates for the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. Earlier dates have occasionally been suggested, but mostly by scholars whose conservative convictions were strong enough to damage the plausibility of their arguments. All this should now be changed in the light of the brilliant book by James Crossley, *The Date of Mark's Gospel*. Crossley has proposed a date c. 40 CE. I therefore examine the basic arguments for each of these dates."

Casey p84-85:

"The evidence [sic !] provided by Mark 13 is not straightforward either. Here Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple, declaring that 'there shall not be left here a stone upon a stone that shall not be destroyed' (Mk 13.2). The destruction of the Temple in 70 CE was an event of such importance that it is understandable that Christians have interpreted it as a fulfilment of Jesus' prophecy. When people believe predictions like this, they tolerate a certain degree of difference between the prophecy and its fulfilment. If, however, we are to treat Mark 13 as a pseudo-prophecy written after the destruction of Jerusalem, it becomes important that such differences cannot be explained. It is not literally true that not one stone was left standing upon another: some stones are *still* standing, and they are famous as the "Wailing Wall", where observant Jews still worship. Moreover, one of the most famous aspects of the destruction of the Temple was that it was burnt down (Jos. War VI 250-84). It is accordingly inconceivable that a pseudo-prophecy written *after* these dramatic events should make an incorrect statement about the stones and omit the centre of the drama, the burning down of the Temple."

This is close to disingenuous. A Dan-Brown-like author writing after 70 CE and creating a pseudo-prophecy would not be worth his or her salt if he or she would state in full accuracy that there would first be a fire and then afterwards the city would be leveled except for three towers and the West wall, since this accuracy would give away that it was a pseudo-prophecy. As Casey admits that people "tolerate a certain degree of difference" why does he claim *ex cathedra* that the difference on the fire and the towers cannot be accepted ? Whence his claim to be a qualified judge in this ? He is a historian, and his task is to point out the uncertainties and not cover them up. As a historian, he should have criticised Crossley and not have teamed up with him.

Per saldo, Mark's text "there shall not be left here a stone upon a stone that shall not be destroyed" is a nice summary of the destruction of Jerusalem, and hence a fine case of a pseudo-prophecy, that might be believed by people who believe in prophecies.

Casey p85:

"Furthermore, Mark predicts [sic !] that they will see 'the abomination of desolation standing where (he/it) should not' [i.e. a statue of a Roman emperor or the Roman eagle] (Mk 13.14): there was no such event in 70 CE. When this non-event happens, Jesus urges them to flee to the mountains, which did not happen either. It follows from all this that Mark 13 was not written *after* the events of 70 CE; it is a genuine prediction [sic !] written *before* them, though not a prediction made by the historical Jesus."

¹⁴ <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2850/2850-h/2850-h.htm>

Well:

- (1) In 70 AD the tenth legion with its eagle was stationed there.
- (2) In 70 AD a group fled to Massada.
- (3) Please explain "genuine prediction".
- (4) Please retract this conclusion, and accept that this is no evidence that Mark was written before 70 AD.
- (5) The argument that the "historical Jesus" died around 30 AD and thus couldn't have made this "prediction" in 40 AD is convoluted. It suggests "critical scholarship", i.e. to criticise that something is allocated to Jesus that doesn't fit. But it inserts the supposition that there is a historical Jesus who died around 30 AD. Thus, drop this kind of convoluted statements. It creates cobwebs that obscure the issue.

Casey p86 discusses an incident w.r.t. a statue of Caligula. The text in Mark might refer to it, but also might not. As it apparently concerns a rephrase of Daniel, it may apply to various incidents however, like the destruction of Jerusalem or just the end of time or some other catastrophe inbetween. Josephus refers to such eschatological views amongst the Jews as a major element in the conflict. This is a wider explanation than just Caligula's statue. It is unwarranted that Casey behaves as a judge to decide for all of us that it is precisely the issue of the statue of Caligula that is important for Mark 13.

Casey p87 after the error on the fire, and apparently stuck within the idea of a "genuine prediction" around 40 AD, continues with Jesus and Mark 13 towards the Mount of Olives, "a traditional eschatological site". Note that Jesus couldn't have made the "prediction" but still was in an eschatological mood thus apparently for another reason:

"The spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles and the hope for Jesus' second coming were both well established features of early Christianity by the time of the Caligula crisis."

Who has debunked the earlier points reads this statement in utter amazement. Casey refers to "early Christianity and the spread of the Gospels" around 40 AD while those Gospels still have to be written ?? (Also Casey dates Mark to 40 AD. The source of Mark would be Aramaic, which would hardly be the language of the Gentiles, the Greeks and Romans.)

Casey p87 at the bottom, suggests that knowledge of Jewish Law is unlikely at a late stage. But we are still discussing Jewish Law anno 2014.

Casey p90 after discussing some points of Jewish Law that don't clarify much but that might not surprise some orthodox Jews, states *ex cathedra*:

"The Gentile mission began early. (...) I therefore conclude that Crossley is right: Mark's Gospel was written c. 40 CE."

There is no proof for an early Gentile mission. Around the Mediterranean there were Pythagoreans, Therapeutae, sites for Serapis and Isis, Hellenizing and Romanizing Jews and other cults that would later assimilate into Christianity. They are no proof for "an early Gentile mission". Note as said that "Our Father" already is in the Pythagorean Golden Verses hundreds of years before Christ. Casey just follows Church doctrine. The only new reason would be that Crossley attaches more value to *fire* than the *leveling of rocks*. This is again silly beyond comprehension.

If this is "history" then I cannot respect Casey and Crossley as scholars. As I explained, Casey is my tour guide along an archeological site, and as a consumer I observe that he points to a pyramid and explains that this would be a Roman bath. There is no reason why I should not protest even though I don't have a degree in ancient history or NTS. On basic issues an academic degree warrants general respect.

PM. There are some lesser issues in these same pages that might distract but that remain useful to mention.

Casey p83: "Papias has produced a legitimating tradition." I would say, less politely: a church father forges history. I agree that it helps to be polite, especially when some of your NTS colleagues regard church fathers as close to holy. Europe has fought bitter wars on religious disputes. But accuracy is not disrespectful.

Casey p84: "It is probable that Marcus heard Peter preach (...)" This "probability" is not substantiated. The guess apparently is based upon a legitimating tradition and neglects that it is at least as probable that Peter might have been a sign of the Zodiac. With all these texts that he has been struggling with, Casey cannot face up to the possibility that they are just fiction.

The value of evidence from the Aramaic language

A sizeable part of JEAMM is about language but it is rather irrelevant to the issue of the historical Jesus.

We get the impression that the intellectual investment of professor Casey has been much in language, by which he tried to find a key to understanding more about a possible historical Jesus. The endeavour has resulted into more knowledge about those languages and about how biblical texts refer to each other. But this method cannot give information about a historical Jesus, since texts can also derive from other sources, such as reli-fiction. We can feel sorry about the criticism on the internet about such language issues, but when professor Casey frames the issue as one of language then he should not be surprised that he gets response on language.

Casey p259:

"Scholars have long since established that Mark's native tongue was Aramaic, and that he used Aramaic sources when writing his Gospel."

This is fine. It may well be that Mark's Greek was not perfect and that he relied on occasion on Aramaic idiom when he composed the gospel in Greek. However, this does not seem to provide any information about a historical Jesus.

It cannot be precluded that Mark's text was produced in an effort at syncretism of Judaic, Greek, Roman and Egyptian religions. Gods ways are myriad. A syncretic Greek text might be translated into Aramaic, or at least in parts, and those parts then be translated back by Mark. Who is to say ?

Mark's Judaic / Aramaic origin may have helped that a Jew was selected rather than a Greek or Roman as the main actor of a Passion Play but it does not prove that there was a historical Jesus. The Greek or Roman alternatives may be lost in history.

Let us use symbols for the different situations (not quite "propositions"):

A = (There is a historical Jesus who spoke Aramaic)
B = (Jesus is valuable enough so that someone (Mark ?) translated from Aramaic)
C = (Invented texts were available in Aramaic), while we allow that such Aramaic texts could have been translated from Greek or Latin themselves.

Then we have $A \Rightarrow B$ (A implies B), or that (Jesus spoke Aramaic \Rightarrow he is valuable enough to be translated from Aramaic) but also $C \Rightarrow B$. When we have B, then we cannot decide to A, since there is also option C.

It is only because professor Casey categorically denies the invention of Jesus that he can try to insist that an Aramaic translation leads to a historical Jesus: *for, where else can those texts come from ?* But this is begging the question.

We can say that (not-B => not-A), or that if there didn't exist texts that are translated from Aramaic, then there could not be a historical Jesus who spoke Aramaic. However, that such texts must have existed does not mean that we should actually have them. Suppose that we had only Luke, and didn't have Mark. In that case we might still wonder whether there was a historical Jesus. Apparently, by showing that Mark links up to the Aramaic language of a hypothetical Jesus, professor Casey thinks that he has established a link to a historical Jesus. But this is only because he doesn't investigate possibility C.

Knowledge of Aramaic would matter if there would be different independent sources in Aramaic. In that case Aramaic would be crucial to establish their evidential value. As I don't know Aramaic, I cannot judge whether some scribbles or papyri have this relevance or not. We rely on professor Casey for the observation that such independent sources apparently don't exist. Thus he has an important role but this role is not the affirmation of a historical Jesus but actually the opposite.

PM.

Interestingly, Steve Mason recently suggested that Vespasian and Titus spoke about the "Jewish War" as if it was a war with a foreign power, while it actually was a regional conflict in what already was part of the Roman empire. Winning a "foreign war" allowed Vespasian to make a grand entrance into Rome and to support his claim to be emperor. (Mason's book is announced as soon to be released by OUP.)¹⁵ If Vespasian could stage-manage this, he might perhaps also be somewhat instrumental in the creation of a new religion, as Ptolemy had created Serapis around 300 BC. We need still to explain how a Jew called Jesus became the central figure. The story of sin and redemption apparently was stronger than other stories. An important element in Christianity of course is church work, caring for the community (Jewish *halacha*). For this, see SMOJ.

Incidentally, we find in Josephus, *War*, various Jesuses and Lazaruses. In Book VI, chapter 5 section 3, there is a Jesus, son of Ananus, who for seven years walks the streets of Jerusalem crying "Woe, woe to Jerusalem", who is whipped by procurator Albinus, and who dies in 70 AD when he is on the city wall and a stone (*petra* ?) from one of the slinging engines hits him.¹⁶ Well, why would this not be the "historical Jesus" around which the stories have been put together ? The clairvoyance of the madman (or political insight of his father) is inspiring for any Dan Brown to compose a more captivating tale. A midrash would be that the new church will be built upon this *petra*. Hopefully I don't give the impression that I think that this is really how it happened. My position is that we can no longer know. Idiocy happens. Fantasy writers abound. The "historical Jesus" might have been that madman, who indeed may have spoken Aramaic. Professor Casey cannot prove that this isn't so. Some things in the past are really beyond our reach. And the real point is that a possible historical Jesus is only imprinted onto the myth that people find interesting, and that the patsy itself isn't that relevant.

Casey on the historical method

Casey's chapter on historical method suffers from the perceived "need" to explain basics and stating the obvious. I am sorry to read that Carr, Elton and Hobsbawm had chairs in history without behaving like proper historians but rather like ideologues. Hopefully this is a thing of the past.

Apparently there is a lot of confusion on the internet and Casey selects some quotes to clarify how confused the internet can be. On page 50 he qualifies a statement by D.M. Murdock as "malicious" while I would rather use "over the top". If Casey allows Papias to be "legitimizing" without allowing for deliberate deception, he should allow that Murdock asks some relevant

¹⁵ <http://www.nrc.nl/handelsblad/van/2014/maart/22/jeruzalem-werd-geofferd-in-de-romeinse-machtsstrij-1359103>,

English: <http://www.rug.nl/ggw/news/events/2014/second-university-colloquium-with-steve-mason>

¹⁶ <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2850/2850-h/2850-h.htm>

questions without malicious intent. We would get into a curious discussion when a church is allowed "honest destruction of heresy" and the heretics are presented as "maliciously opposing destruction".

Casey p52:

"The next main point is that the synoptic Gospels are quite clearly set within first-century Judaism. This is a major problem for the mythicist view, because mythicists generally wish to present early Christianity as a Hellenistic cult, and never offer any proper explanation of the major Jewish elements in the synoptic Gospels."

This is to the point though still leaves to be desired. The round peg goes into the round hole but the peg is small and the hole is big so we can't say that it quite fits.

What I understood from Murdock is not just influence from Hellas but also from Babylon and Egypt and even earlier Indo-European sources. The Old Testament (OT) would be influenced by Babylonian and Egyptian religions, and the NT partly relies on the OT, while there are also new influences after Alexander the Great. Thus "Judaism" isn't quite so pure as professor Casey suggests. Also the Pythagorean cult and hence Plato would be influenced by Egypt, thus Hellenism isn't as pure either. In internet texts on the origin of Christianity there is also distinction between circumcision (Jewish) and no circumcision (Greek and Roman, hence Paul's mission), and thus professor Casey isn't quite right that Jewish elements aren't mentioned, as circumcision is key to understand the NT. (How many Americans mutilate their baby boys because they are falsely informed about a "historical Jesus" ?)

It is true though that Jewish issues like on the observation of the Sabbath get little attention on websites devoted to mythical origins. This is like attention for algebra on sites devoted to geometry. A website devoted to the mythical origin of Santa Claus is not likely to develop what is known about bishop Nicolas of Myra.

When there were various stories, and the story about Jesus won, this does not mean that Jewish discussions about observing the Sabbath would be so relevant. Such stories fit a Jewish Jesus but don't prove that this Jesus existed. The story about Jesus won not because of his Jewish setting but because of other reasons.

Nonetheless, I agree that it helps to understand more about Judaism, with issues like midrash and so on. It helps to understand more about the Shoah. It helps to understand the movement for a Third Temple and the conflict in the Middle East.

Whatever the complaint about the internet, I myself developed the case of Judaism in SMOJ and hope that professor Casey's colleagues find time to consider it, so that they will not put my work into one basket with his preferred enemies.

Casey p51-52:

"(...) Galilee, which was a primarily oral culture (...)" and "(....) the evidence for his existence in first-century Galilee should not be expected to be the same as evidence conventional (...) for our knowledge of Roman emperors."

Yes, primarily oral, and people in the past could perform miracles of memory. Still, they would know about writing, as they had sacred texts. They would know that it would be important to get texts onto paper. Yes, the evidence for Jesus would differ from emperors on coins. No, it would not differ in being *evidence*. If Jesus was so famous, where is the *evidence* ? It is improper to hold that who asks for evidence is only convinced by coins.¹⁷

¹⁷ Actually, Lena Einhorn has a nice theory about a time shift:
<http://lanaeinhorn.se/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Jesus-and-the-Egyptian-Prophet-12.11.25.pdf>

Casey p52: "It follows that *Talitha kourm* [girl rise] is *exactly* what Jesus said." He suggests that the *i* is missing because: (a) the oldest and best manuscripts, (b) oral history, for which it would be "good reason to believe" that the *i* of proper *koumi* is not pronounced, (c) the majority of (Aramaic ?) manuscripts have (proper) *koumi* and thus would have been editing the oral history. If I didn't see Casey's statement in print in 2014 I would feel that I am back in the Middle Ages.

Casey mentions possibilities, and then, in a leap of faith, acts as a judge, and decides what should be the truth. Whence the authority, whence the need to decide for us and prosperity, why the need to utter such nonsense ? Why not state:

(i) there is orral history, in which some may and some may not pronounce the *i* on occasion,

(ii) the manuscripts have different versions, perhaps some recording what is said, others inserting proper *i*, others perhaps dropping it,

(iii) the oldest and best (elaborate this) has no *i* (so it may not be that good),

(iv) we don't know what Jesus exactly said because we don't have more evidence, and perhaps he did not exist at all, so that this story, about a supposedly dead girl who isn't actually dead, is also made up or a derivation from another story.

Now read back what Casey states, and feel the chill of the Middle Ages.

Casey p54 suggests that the "*quality and nature*" of the Aramaic sources in the gospels are such that they apparently would support a historical Jesus.

He may be right that the quality and nature of the (inferred) Aramaic sources are not appreciated on the internet, but he cannot infer that those sources are evidence of a historical Jesus. The difference between *kourm* and *koumi* may be appreciated by a student of Aramaic but doesn't carry the evidential value that Casey attaches to it.

See the above (on statements A, B, C). Making a distinction between Aramaic per se and the *quality and nature* doesn't change the logic.

Casey p54 considers Paul. Just to be sure: when the 12 apostles reflect the tribes of Israel who represent the Zodiac, then Paul as number 13 seems to present a problem for the astrological interpretation of the NT. However, as months have 30 days, then $12 \times 30 = 360$, or the 360 degrees of a circle, and then we need a small month of 5 days to complete the year, and Paulos means "short" (with a Greek origin). The Egyptians also had 9 months of 40 days (Jesus' stay in the desert, the sign Leo) but also used such a short month to complete the year. I refer to SMOJ for a more systematic treatment, and thank Murdock for the introduction to these aspects.

Casey p56: "(...) would have to dip a stylus repeatedly in a disgusting black substance which we normally dignify with the name of "ink" and scrawl with that on papyrus sheets. This was a difficult and time-consuming process (...)" Well, as a kid in 1961 I learned to write with ink and a metal pen, and it was okay. I suppose that feathers from the ibis might be a bit more complicated, but a scribe would have his tricks. The remark is silly, perhaps a small joke. Perhaps it makes some sense to kids swiping on the internet but not to readers of JEAMM.

Casey p57: "(...) what we call Christianity to emerge from the Jewish diaspora in the Greek world." It is useful to mention that these were not only Jews. As said, there were Pythagoreans, Therapeutae, followers from Serapis and Isis, and so on. There could be various stories about holy people. Church work helped community cohesion. Eventually Christianity dominated that indeed also accepts the OT, but it is historically wrong to say that it "emerged from the Jewish diaspora". Bishop Nicolas is not the "historical Santa Claus".

Casey p59 and his conclusion of the chapter: Professor Casey hasn't erected a straw man, but has found errors around on the internet, and can fairly easily but with obvious exaggeration denounce those as "total contempt for sound historical method". At various points he is too quick, as shown above, but it is obviously true that his opponents don't all have degrees and professorships in NTS. It is actually amazing that there are such few NTS "mythicists", which is evidence of group-think.

Be that as it may, Casey's chapter 2 on the "Historical method" is a grave disappointment. It lacks the "sieve of realism" and shows a strange mixture of both (rather veiled) criticism of "legitimation" by the church and invention of new crookedness. The major point is that the chapter borders on being disingenuous. His opponents may make errors but they have the sound intuition that Jesus is a myth, and they have every right to question the nonsense that they hear from the academia about a "historical Jesus". The proper response is to listen to what they want to say and not to catch them on awkward expressions that can indeed be over the top. To treat criticism with respect is the attitude of the academic. The academic is paid to behave like that, and not paid to tell others that they aren't academics.

PM.

To close this, let me say the following. A problem in supporting the mythical origin is that it assumes a lot of text editing, not only the gospels but also Paul's travels and the epistles. However, Mark is relatively short and once Paul is put into the scene then subsequent authors can elaborate. It is amazing how many texts were written in those days, and how many texts the church had to declare to be heresy. Don't forget that some people in Alexandria could be very thorough. Why doesn't professor Casey supply us with a list of all the reli-fictions and theatre plays produced in Alexandria around that time, to show the capacity to create a work of fiction ?

After the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, the Jews around the Mediterranean were in shock. The annual tribute to the Temple and the very popular pilgrimages were impossible. Professor Casey's historical explanation downplays them and their shock. Of the multitude of reactions, one result was Rabbinic Judaism, and one result was the story of Joshua, descendent of David, named after whom had earlier led the Jewish people into the Holy Land, whose crucifixion symbolized the destruction of Jerusalem, whose resurrection symbolized hope, and who would return at the end of days. Note that crucifixion codes for Romans, since Romans crucify. Not to alarm the Romans, though, it was safer to locate the story of Jesus one generation of 40 years earlier in 30 AD, whence Pilate entered the scene, and so on. The explanation of shock and atonement on Jerusalem makes more sense than the shock in a tiny sect on the crucifixion of an unknown exorcist in 30 AD seen just by itself.

There remain puzzles. Tacitus states that Nero after the burning of Rome in 64 AD accused "Christians" and burned them too. Is the sentence by Tacitus a forgery ? For example, might an original reference to Jews have been replaced by a reference to Christ and Pilate ? How does this relate to the Jewish uprising starting in 66 AD ? Or were Christians already present in Rome so abundantly so that it is a miracle that they are not mentioned more often ? I am happy that I don't have to decide on issues of history, and can resort to merely point out such puzzles. The assumption of church doctrine with a historical Jesus is one way to solve them but also implies accepting possible forgeries, and we should be hesitant to do so. Casey in JEAMM contains too many examples of "legitimizing" stories and he speaks about "*ancient* historian" in opposition to plain historian. Casey as a "historian" shows criticism but also falls in various traps himself, also traps that he creates himself. Better be alert. I don't have to check the evidence on the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" and similarly I don't have to check the evidence on the "epistles of Paul". The safe position is what I have explained here.

The term 'primary source'

The term 'primary source' in common discourse on history refers to sources from the time of the supposed event. Apparently primary sources are lacking for NTS, and hence Casey defends a different use of terms:

"Consequently, many of us use 'primary sources' to refer to the synoptic or canonical Gospels when studying Jesus, and Paul's epistles when studying Paul, while we use 'secondary literature' to refer to the works of Funk, Marshall and all other modern scholars. This terminology is clear as long as it is understood, and Blogger Godfrey has no excuse for ordering us to use his interpretation of Von Ranke's comments instead." (p65)

I am actually somewhat shocked by this. If something is not primary, why call it such ? Does it not help cleanliness of mind and sanity of expression to call an apple an apple ? Especially when you are communicating with outsiders who have a different perception of what primary sources are and who are unfamiliar with your group-think ? Please note that it really is a different message when you say "The historicity of Jesus has been established by primary sources" instead of "The historicity of Jesus has been hypothesised from secondary sources (as hear-say is all that we have)".

Why the need to use the term 'primary sources' when those aren't primary ? The need for authority ? The need to impress other historians and the lay public ? The notion that there actually is no history when primary sources are lacking ?

Consider a cloister where the group-think is to call apples oranges. One of the monks walks to the village and tells that they eat oranges at the cloister. The villagers are impressed by the healthy diet, and some send their children to the cloister school so that they may also eat oranges. One of the kids is named J.C.. He is annoyed and complains: these are apples ! The Prior becomes real angry, ties J.C. to the pillory and says: "*You have no excuse for ordering us to use your interpretation of what are apples and oranges.*" (Please note that it is okay for Jesus Christ to criticize the authorities, but it is not okay for this kid J.C. to do so while he is right. Well, isn't this a nice parable, and shouldn't it ring true to scholars used to read parables ?)

Incidentally, on the same page 65: "Jesus of Nazareth left no literary works at all, and he had no reason to write any."

It is a bit amazing that a scholar who encourages reading and writing can state this without losing some respect for said Jesus. Jesus behaves a bit like Blogger Godfrey as portrayed by Casey. According to Casey both don't properly study and write, but Jesus is great and Blogger is bogus. Note that most if not all of the sayings attributed to Jesus can be derived from the OT and other sources, as Casey himself demonstrates with Daniel, so his persona may well be composed by other true literati. Whence the respect of scholar Casey for a persona who doesn't write and even doesn't feel the need to do so ?

Incidentally, the gospels might turn into primary sources under the scheme of Lena Einhorn, referred to above. The ingredients are a time shift to 50 AD and rewriting from Josephus. Josephus may well be Joseph Arimatea. Riding on the road back from Bethlehem to Jerusalem he is also on the road to Damascus. He reports about saving a crucified friend in 70 AD. Flavius Josephus would be an eyewitness on the true historical scene. The gospels rewrite but may also include elements of primary data. It is strange that Josephus doesn't mention the name of the Egyptian. Has it been deleted ? Did he delete it himself since he knew him personally ? The Egyptian threatens to bring down the walls of Jerusalem, which reminds of Joshua and Jericho. And Joshua is Jesus in Hebrew, I understand. In this case, we have primary sources for events in 50-70 but not for around 30 AD, still.

Selection of mythicists and their backgrounds

JEAMM is not a regular book that professor Casey would aspire to write and be remembered for. It is his academic outrage at the nonsense on the internet especially by the "mythicists".

As I understand it, "mythicist" takes myth by axiom, and evidence to the contrary would be neglected. Personally I think that Jesus is a myth but I base this upon evidence and argument, and am quite willing to revise if needed. As scientist I emphasise the uncertainty, since what happened is lost in time, but as a person I think that a myth is more reasonable to assume. See the section on Santa Claus.

List of mythicists

Casey p10: "I introduce here the most influential mythicists who claim to be 'scholars', though I would question their competence and qualifications."

Then follows a list of (20) mythicists (LOM) with short biographies: Acharya S. (Dorothy M. Murdock), Dan Barker, Richard Carrier, Earl Doherty, Bart Ehrman, N.T. Freke, L.P. Gandy, T. Harpur, Rook Hawkins, Harold Leidner, Niels Peter Lemche, Derke Murphy, Emanuel Pfoh, Thomas L. Thompson, Thomas Verenna, G.A. Wells, F.R. Zindler, and "bloggers" Steven Carr, Niel Godfrey, and Tim Widowfield.

Casey lists Robert M. Price too but I take the liberty not to include him in that LOM. Price doesn't warrant Casey's treatment of the LOM as far as I can verify. In Casey's discussion of their backgrounds and work, only Robert M. Price comes out somewhat decent, though readers in the NTS community may be more sensitive to Casey's choice of words. I am somewhat tempted to defend Robert M. Price since I find his website texts informative. Overall I trust that he can defend himself and I will not further discuss his work as I am no scholar of that field.

I wasn't aware of LOM. My book SMOJ lists only Murdock, see below. I have further no developed view about these authors. My suggestion is that they read and react to SMOJ, and then I can see from there.

This is a rejoinder by Neil Godfrey on JEAMM:

Neil Godfrey responds that Casey's biographies are incorrect: "Only if one redefines "American Catholicism" as an "American fundamentalist" faith can we find four names that fit the description of Casey's myth. And of those names two (like Thomas Brodie — albeit an Irish Catholic) continue to enjoy participating in the Christian life and religion." ¹⁸ Note this nuance: Grown-Ups who recognise the myth of Santa will stop believing in him (except when they have kids), but LOM apparently has some people who recognise the myth of Jesus but still would believe in it as a base for a church. Religion is deeper than a belief in Santa Claus (depending upon age).

Godfrey: "Well if you read the author profile in Godfrey's blog you would have seen that he has never argued against the existence of a historical Jesus." ¹⁹ See his personal defence too. ²⁰

Godfrey has two weblogs on professor Thompson too. ²¹

Though I am quantitatively tempted to make a table and compare the scores by Casey vs Godfrey, I don't think that this would be so informative. As we have seen above, professor Casey doesn't have a strong case.

Godfrey already provides a table with backgrounds but doesn't make a split between positions on the historical versus mythical Jesus. ²²

For balance, James F. McGrath: "I remember when I read an early draft of Casey's book, I too found some claims problematic and even self-defeating. But none of those changes the fact that the majority of the book is an insightful, detailed, and persuasive case for the view that remains the overwhelming consensus of historians and scholars who work in the relevant

¹⁸ <http://vridar.org/2014/03/08/maurice-caseys-mythicist-myth-busted/>

¹⁹ <http://vridar.org/2014/03/05/maurice-casey-fails-his-historical-method-essay-monday/>

²⁰ <http://vridar.org/2014/04/16/maurice-casey-once-more/>

²¹ <http://vridar.org/2014/03/23/maurice-casey-meet-thomas-l-thompson/>

<http://vridar.org/2014/03/24/maurice-caseys-mind-boggles-reading-thomas-l-thompsons-messiah-myth/>

²² <http://vridar.org/2014/04/18/maurice-caseys-failure-to-research-mythicists-more-evidence/>

fields: that there was a historical Jesus of Nazareth." ²³ We ought to hope that McGrath finds the time to read this review and think about it somewhat deeper.

If Murdock (Acharya S) would need defence

My book SMOJ lists only D.M. Murdock, with two books: "*Christ in Egypt*" and "*The Christ conspiracy: The greatest story ever sold*". Obviously, I haven't treated those books as coming from the accepted academia. I got "*Christ in Egypt*" after a fairly positive remark by Robert M. Price and indeed do appreciate the book as an enlightening introduction to a subject of which I know virtually nothing. Of course I do not know whether it is a proper introduction or a map of Paris applied to London, but it poses relevant questions while facts can be checked on other sources such as the British Museum; and later on I also got a book by E.A. Wallis Budge (and look at the hieroglyphs in amazement). The argument to buy the Murdock book is that the academia apparently are reluctant in asking and discussing such questions about origins of Christianity in Egyptian history and faith. I subsequently also got the "*Christ conspiracy*" and found it informative as well, again for the questions that can be asked. See SMOJ how I have dealt with these books. On these counts, I think that Murdock's work certainly contributed to sharpening SMOJ. These books deserve a defence at least on these counts and likely a bit more. The books deserve a place in a multidisciplinary project on Jesus since you would not want students to avoid the issue of a "conspiracy", i.e. deliberate syncretism like with Serapis. JEAMM at various points suggests errors by Murdoch w.r.t. scholarly methods and findings, but it doesn't mention the good points, and it not true that those don't exist. Again, see SMOJ, and allow for the idea that there was no historical Jesus.

More than often, JEAMM criticises Murdock on her manner of expression and choice of words while the issue might be straightened out if they had sat together. For example, the gospels discuss Jesus's birth but apparently don't mention December 25, so that this may be a later choice by the church. Astrologically, the birthday is relevant, and might already have been part of oral communication, i.e. not necessary to put in writing. (1) Casey suggests that the gospels considered the birthday irrelevant. We may wonder about this, since birthdays are relevant for astrology. (2) Murdock is quoted: "The idea that the followers of an 'historical' Jesus would have no clue as to when he was born is ridiculous, particularly in consideration of how significant birthdays were to Jewish mothers." (p211) (3) Casey makes fun of this and holds that the gospels focussed on salvation: "The date of Jesus' birth was quite irrelevant to this (...)" (p212). But note that Jesus on December 25 is born in the sign of Capricorn, a goat, and that he is sacrificed as a lamb or pharmakos or scapegoat for the sins of the world in the sign of Pisces. Thus, if the NT is read as an astrological story, then the birthday is quite relevant, also for the notion of "salvation". (4) Casey: "We should also note that there is no evidence that birthdays were considered particularly important in first-century Galilee." Well, birthdays are important in astrology, and astrology permeated ancient society. Is Casey to imply that he studied ancient history without looking at the influence of astrology? (5) Casey: "For all we know, Jesus brother Jacob, Peter and the sons of Zebedee really had no interest in the date of Jesus' birth." (p212) This is close to disingeniousness. Apparently there is no statement by them that they find it uninteresting. Concluding that they weren't interested is an inference and not a fact. The word "really" is unwarranted. Perhaps there is no recording since it formed part of the oral context that was obvious and wasn't necessary to record. Perhaps Jacob, Peter and the sons of Zebedee were also merely signs of the Zodiac, and it is somewhat weird when the signs discuss each other's birthdays. (6) Casey admits that Jesus selected 12 apostles in reference to the 12 tribes of Israel, but he does not account for that the those 12 tribes in the OT likely derive from the Zodiac. (p216+). Casey: "There is, however, no trace of the Signs of the Zodiac in the Gospels." (p217) No trace? See point (3) that the NT can be seen as an astrological tale. Note also that Jesus dies on the Idus of March / Nissan, with Idus ~ Judas, in the Sign of Pisces (Ictus), and look at precession. (7) Please note that I do not claim that Murdock has established various incontestable points and that her statements are accepted within scholarship. I only state that she asks relevant questions. Students in a multidisciplinary project could find this discussion enlightening.

²³ <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/exploringourmatrix/2014/03/how-you-can-tell-maurice-caseys-book-about-mythicism-is-good.html>

Casey's Conjecture on Fundamentalism (CCF)

For virtually all of LOM, Casey points to conservative and frequently fundamentalist Christian backgrounds of the people involved. His book is a collective *ad hominem*. Admittedly, when arguments don't arrive, you must wonder whether there is an address.

His propositions is: they are still fundamentalists but now with another belief. Let us call this *Casey's Conjecture on Fundamentalism (CCF)* The argument is: They haven't experienced an environment of serious academic research and the need to deal with uncertainty and doubt. They are not interested in research. Their sources are English texts by other mythicists often on the internet, and they cannot imagine e.g. why it would be useful to study Aramaic. Jesus is a myth (axiom) so it doesn't matter what language he spoke.

James Crossley of the University of Sheffield (of whom Casey says that his dating of Mark is brilliant, but we have seen above that it is silly) states on the back of the book cover:

"After much online polemic levelled at academic attempts to reconstruct the life and teaching of Jesus, Maurice Casey, a leading expert in historical Jesus studies and Christian origins, has responded with equal ferocity. Casey not only challenges some bizarre misreadings of critical scholarship he also brings his expertise and experience to analyses of a range of ancient sources. What is distinctively new about this book, and of significance for future research on strands within the phenomenon of "mythicism" is his examination of Christian "fundamentalist" backgrounds of certain conspiracy theorists who retain all the hallmarks of "fundamentalism" by a staunch refusal to listen to positions with which they do not agree and which they relentlessly misrepresent. This book will certainly generate some heated debate!"

Casey p226:

Casey on a book by Thompson: "In short, this is the most incompetent book by a professional scholar that I have ever read. It is not a serious improvement on the works of Doherty and Murdock, instead illustrating the pitfalls which await professional mythicists, Thompson has not followed evidence and argument. Having begun as a Catholic who followed the convictions fed him by the church, he has been converted to a different set of convictions." (p226)

Casey on a text by Godfrey: "Learned articles on the memory of mice or anything else do not discuss the outpourings of incompetent bloggers." (p256)

An academic wouldn't want to see his or her work be discussed like that. It would already be horrible to receive lines like these in the privacy of your own office as a peer-review report when you have sent an article to some editors for publication in a journal. To have your work discussed in these terms in public would be quite embarrassing. It would not be neutral with respect to job prospects.

It is for this reason too that we can infer that professor Casey isn't likely to have aspired to write this book. Perhaps he felt his end nearing and decided that he could and actually had to speak his mind.

Once he decided that the LOM required a public answer, the sluices opened. The book is replete with statements like: "To infer from the published papers that any of us knew nothing about historical method is the kind of creative fiction which Blogger Godfrey excels in." (p48).

There is a danger that the reader starts enjoying statements like these, but the message is more accurately received when the reader stops, and considers what such statements imply.

Overall, it would require a study in psychology and more statistics to check the CCF. Casey may shoot holes in the work by the LOM, but it doesn't necessarily bring down the castle. Subsequently, we have seen that his case for a historical Jesus is not convincing, and ever and ever more he starts reminding of that madman Jesus on the city wall of Jerusalem.

Since he has given the LOM biographies, Casey is so fair to also give his own. One may agree that it doesn't appear fundamentalist. Still, whatever the CCF, we can certainly not infer that people without a fundamentalist background are without risk of error. Casey left the church at age 20 but he hasn't left the idea that there was a historical Jesus that he was brought up to believe in.

PM. My own background is Catholicism with a mixture of conservative and liberal elements. Schools for boys and girls were separated but we were allowed to play together around the house and in the village swimming pool. Remember that the Dutch bishops in 1954 put out a "mandement" that Catholics could not join or vote for social democratic parties.²⁴ What was considered to be "normal" back then may be rather strict for now. An uncle of mine however joined the social democratic party and became member of Parliament in 1956.²⁵ My mother however has voted for the moderate religious parties all her life. I decided at about age 10 that I didn't believe in a god, as I respectfully asked for a sign and wasn't given one. As a scientist I am agnostic and as a private person I am atheist. I find that it helps to be clear about this, also in teaching mathematics at Christian schools, since it shows that you have a serious respect for issues of philosophy and religion of colleagues, students and parents. If Jesus is only a story, the story can still carry important messages.

On tenure

Professor Casey makes an issue of tenure. His suggestion is that much American research on Jesus is done at Christian universities that have a commitment to the Christian belief, whence many American scholars are not at liberty in their research and may risk their job. As a consequence the bloggers don't quite trust the American academia. By consequence the gap between the academia and the bloggers is bigger too. Casey holds that the situation in the UK is much better, in particular for him, and that his (unreligious) research has been protected by proper tenure. While the bloggers might perhaps be right in their criticism w.r.t. American scene, they misjudge the situation in the UK, and they misjudge Casey's work in particular. This would also hold for Blogger Carr in the UK itself.

I tend to think that Casey is a bit too optimistic. Perhaps there is a difference between the UK and the rest of Europe again.

In economics, we had the case of Bernard Connolly who had tenure at the European Commission but still was dismissed for his criticism for monetary policy and the creation of the euro in 1995. It is a scandal that the European Court allowed this.²⁶ In my own case, the directorate of the Dutch Central Planning Bureau applied censorship of economic science and dismissed me with untruths in 1991, when I worked there since 1982 and had tenure. The court did not start an independent investigation and took the statements by the directorate as "judgement by proper authority", showing that it is entirely useless to appeal, as even errors in logic are glossed over. See **Appendix C**.²⁷

Thus, when Casey suggests that he has been able to speak his mind and has been protected by tenure, then we ought to take it with a grain of salt. It may be that he only was allowed to stay at the university because he blended in with the research community that adheres to a historical Jesus. He shows that he was sensitive to his situation, as he preferred Nottingham over a German Research Fellowship because of his marriage and children, even though he admits that the German invitation might have been better scholarwise (p39).

I'd rather seen that Casey had explained that all UK scholars who adopted the idea that Jesus was a myth still could get tenure or keep it. It is such an obvious research position and it is amazing that it doesn't seem to be abundantly present.

²⁴ http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bisschoppelijk_Mandement_van_1954

²⁵ http://www.parlement.com/id/vg09lkzkg4zq/f_h_j_m_frits_daams

²⁶ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bernard_Connolly

²⁷ <http://boycottholland.wordpress.com/about/>

It doesn't need explaining that there are scholars who stick to a historical Jesus since this is a continuation of the theological position, but it does need explaining that the reasonable view is absent. It may well be that promising students dropped out because they observed that they wouldn't have a life.

Nonetheless, we can appreciate Casey's statement: "I have spent the whole of my life as a scholar trying to tell the truth." (p37) Not only this, but he has apparently tried to follow the methods of science and scholarship. Hence it is exasperating when bloggers from nowhere start attacking your work based upon their own phantasies, and that also awaken suspicion about your own errors. The truth is a harsh mistress.

Let us hope that professor Casey's surviving colleagues and I can find a common ground in speaking the truth. I can affirm that I have spent the whole of my life as a scholar trying to tell the truth as well. I can affirm that I follow the methods of science and scholarship. (I hope that the censorship of science of my work is lifted, so that I can submit my work to the journals without that burden of having to protest against censorship.) I hope that the study of Aramaic is not a precondition to the application of logic. Let us proceed and see how far we can get in understanding the origins of Christianity. As Casey brings in his results, I am a lay person in history and only provide questions seen from the logic and realism of econometrics and the didactics of mathematics. At the present I think that Jesus is a myth like Santa Claus but I am willing to change my mind based upon evidence and argument. I have read one of their books, let them now read one of mine. Let me invite NTS scholars to read and react to SMOJ and let us proceed from there. Let us bring in other people with a quantitative background, and indeed do such a multidisciplinary project.

Conclusion

This paragraph can be used for the summary: Professor Casey's book opposes the historical evidence for Jesus with the mythical origin of the story. Historicism is generally accepted in academic New Testament Studies, mythicism is often adhered to by non-scholars on the internet. The review uses the analogy of Santa Claus to bring forth a point that may have been missed by both professor Casey and the mythicists who he wishes to expose. For Santa Claus there is the historical bishop Nicolas of Myra (Turkey) but it would be inaccurate to call him the "historical Santa Claus" since the origin of the story is rather the neolithic myth of the Norse god Wodan who rides the sky on the back of his horse Sleipnir. The Church imposed the story of Nicolas on the ancient myth in order to control the heresy. If the historical Jesus was a mere man, he couldn't have walked on water or risen from death, and the story of the resurrection reminds of many similar mythical stories from prehistoric times. For Jesus the religious meaning and the resurrection are the defining issue, for otherwise why tell the story from generation to generation? If there was a historical preacher, healer and exorcist who got associated with already existing ancient myths of resurrection, then it becomes awkward to speak about a historical Jesus, just like with the "historical Santa Claus", because such historical Jesus is at distance from what defines him for the story that people consider relevant to relate. The review looks into the historical method, Crossley's & Casey's dating of Mark to 40 CE, the value of evidence of the Aramaic language, and some aspects of professor Casey's rejection of the mythical argument. The review is by an outsider of ancient history and New Testament Studies, as the author is an econometrician and teacher of mathematics. His interest is his proposal for a development of a multidisciplinary course on Jesus and the origin of Christianity, explained in his book *The simple mathematics of Jesus* (2012).

It should be obvious that alongside the historicism line of research there should be a line of research that looks into the influence of myths. I'd rather opt for a general approach but perhaps that might be too much to ask for established journals and editors.

My impression is that the issue will only be resolved if both sides succeed in bringing in more academics and teachers with a quantitative background. A teacher in physics might not be able to detect a forgery in Eusebius but would be able to explain to students in NTS that their "historical method" is deficient, since it is important to identify uncertainty rather than select what is "probable". Or, if you don't believe me that $C \Rightarrow B$ critically reduces the evidential value of $A \Rightarrow B$ and B , allow another teacher of mathematics to explain it to you. And so on. This resolution is only possible if the academic community allows more openness across the disciplinary boundaries.

Overall I would advise the academic community to open up to the public. To hide behind the pay-wall and the earnings-model of the publishing industry might have provided comfort, but is self-defeating, as it has already stifled debate and progress. It will help the research community to translate findings into lay language so that the general public can better understand what is happening in research.

Let me extend my condolences for the passing away of professor Maurice Casey, just this May 10 2014. My suggestion to his surviving family and colleagues is to put the book "*Jesus. Evidence and Argument or Mythicist Myths*" (JEAMM) (2014) as PDF online. It is likely not his best book, at least I would tend to expect given my critical comments above. Still, this review and its plea wins in value if readers have easy access to JEAMM.

It may be concluded that JEAMM is actually a rather hopeless book. Its evidence and arguments don't stand up against basic logic and realism. While some "mythicists" can be over the top, professor Casey has been over the top as well. As Casey wrote this book at the end of his life and may have been aware of his end and thus have taken more liberty than usual - I am of course guessing here - we may regard this situation as special. There is no need to discard JEAMM, but let it be publicly available as PDF. This would be an invitation and also warning to the NTS community not to follow the same approach.

Appendix A. Examples how mathematics comes into the discussion

(1) Mathematics plays a role in astronomy and the development of the calendar. It started as astrology as "early belief & science". Early stargazers couldn't make photographs and such. They relied on stories to code their information and observations. Such stories could develop into myths for people that didn't get the code. For example, Little-Red-Riding-Hood may stand for the red colour of the moon at a lunar eclipse, the wolf for say Anubis, and the hunter for say the sun or Sagittarius. The story may also stand for mundane events like virginity and such, but it is useful to grow aware of astro-theology in the past and how it still affects common beliefs.

(2) Mathematics can be liberating. You don't accept authority but the proof must convince you. It is an exercise in developing an open mind, since the proof may force you to accept views that run counter to what you believed before. Notwithstanding that some mathematicians can show very closed minds, though.

(3) There are the abstract questions of faith. If the soul is an abstract concept then the soul is eternal, just like a circle as an abstract concept has some perfect properties. Mathematics deals with abstraction and we have seen influences by Pythagoras and Plato.

	<i>Man and world</i>	<i>Man and gods</i>
<i>Concrete tangible</i>	Round things such as a ball	Human body
<i>Concrete intangible</i>	Radius drawn with a compass	Consciousness, breath
<i>Abstract</i>	Perfect circle and sphere	Soul, psyche (Gr. "breath")

(4) At Matthew 22:36-40 Christ reduces the Ten Commandments of Moses to two main laws: honour God and love thy neighbour as thyself. This might be influenced by Greek axiomatics, to reduce a system of propositions to a set of independent and sufficient axioms to deduce the rest. **Appendix B** contains the page in SMOJ that discusses this.

Interestingly, JEAMM:220 discusses this issue too. Casey refers to Leviticus 19.18:

"18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD." ²⁸

I can admit that I am much amazed to see the literal phrase "love thy neighbour as thyself". This only goes to prove that I am no biblical scholar. SMOJ contains a number of phrases that I came across that are close but none contained that full formula. My impression was that Jesus had concocted it himself. Now his talent may have been to select it from Leviticus.

Still, Casey concludes: "This locates Jesus where the Jesus of history really belonged, in Judaism."

Casey however hasn't excluded that there still can be that Greek influence of axiomatics. Didn't they teach Euclid at Jesus's school ? Also, see **Appendix B** that Jesus suggested a different approach to Moses's law. It seems an academic point to still count it as Judaism when Judaism adapts to foreign influences.

Subsequently, we can find that the Old Testament (OT) or Judaism contains much from either Babylon or Egypt, so it is also debateable whether this can *all* be counted as Judaism. The NT adopts much from the OT and can also have direct influence from Alexandria and Rome. One possible influence is that the "historical Jesus" is a fictional character like Moses, Hamlet or Sherlock Holmes.

²⁸ <http://www.biblija.net/biblija.cgi?m=Lev+19&id7=1&l=nl&set=10&pos=0>

Appendix B. The highest command: Love your neighbour as yourself

The Ten Commandments can thus also be found in the Egyptian Book of the Dead.²⁹ According to God the highest commandment is: Worship no other gods. According to parents the highest commandment is: Honour thy parents. According to our neighbours the really highest commandment however is: *Love your neighbour as yourself*. Matthew (22:36-40) records:

- “36 Master, which is the great commandment in the law?
- 37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind.
- 38 This is the first and great commandment.
- 39 And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.
- 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”³⁰

We see Jesus busy as an Alexandrian mathematician in the spirit of Plato who reduces the Ten Commandments to what is logically necessary and sufficient. When you love others as yourself then, by implication, you will honour your parents, you will not steal and murder, and so on. He also applies didactics: not only “love your neighbour” but also, for who does not see what that means, “as yourself”.

Jesus is keen enough to give priority to the love for God, otherwise the priests would have little to do, and nobody would take him seriously. Who reads between the lines will understand however that it is likely sufficient to love the neighbour, because this implies that you also love God. How might one love God otherwise than via the neighbours ?

Does Jesus speak the truth with respect to the Old Testament and the Prophets ? In Exodus 20 the 10th commandment of Moses is:³¹

“17 Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant [slave], nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.”

A lawyer or mathematician asks: What *is* thy neighbour's? For Moses it would not be required to give people presents on their birthday. Jesus however argues: if you enjoy getting presents yourself, expect that others do so too.

Moses can exclude some people from active or passive voting rights, since these are not things that they possess. Jesus thinks: When you enjoy having the active or passive right to vote, expect that others do so too.

Moses mentions specific points. Jesus regards these only as examples.

Moses says specifically $2 + 3 = 3 + 2$ and there arises an argument about *letter* versus *spirit*. Jesus directly gives the general abstract formula $x + y = y + x$.

In verse 40 above Jesus says carefully that his analytical reduction gives the *foundation* of the Law and the Prophets. There actually remains a difference. You might reject that foundation and maintain that the specific cases mentioned in the Law suffice. This concerns the difference between lawyers who regard what is strictly written (the letter) and the judge who also wants to keep account of the intention of the law (the spirit).

If Jesus would suggest that he only preaches the Old Testament then this would not be quite true. He preaches a new approach, a new view on the Old Testament.

29 Renouf (1905, p214, PDF p317), <http://archive.org/details/egyptianbookofde00reno>

30 <http://www.biblija.net/biblija.cgi?m=Mt+22%3A34-40&id7=1&l=nl&set=10&pos=0>

31 <http://www.biblija.net/biblija.cgi?m=Ex+20&id7=1&l=nl&set=10&pos=0>

Appendix C. A bit more on the reviewer and his work

In the body of the text I have explained that I am an econometrician and teacher of mathematics. Readers might be interested in what this entails.

As my essay "*The simple mathematics of Jesus*" (SMOJ) (2012) and above review of the book by Casey might be regarded as unconventional, the same might hold for my work in econometrics and the didactics in mathematics. Some regard it even as controversial.

In econometrics, I present a new analysis on unemployment. I worked at the Dutch Central Planning Bureau (CPB) in 1982-1991. My analysis on unemployment got blocked from discussion and hit by censorship, and I was dismissed with untruths. Since 1990 I protest against that censorship and since 1991 against that abuse of power. The economic crisis of 2007+ and in particular the events in Europe with the euro confirm my analysis. Please be aware that you better use my analysis if you want to resolve the economic crisis. Since 2004 I advise to boycott Holland till the censorship is lifted, see my [weblog](#).³²

One option was to become a teacher of mathematics. I earned a MSc teacher of mathematics at Leiden 2008. I discovered that since mathematicians are trained for abstract thought, they are thrown into a state of cognitive dissonance when meeting real life pupils in class. They resolve their anxiety by resorting to teaching tradition. This tradition however is not necessarily targetted at good didactics. For example, $2\frac{1}{2}$ is supposed to stand for "two *and* a half" (which is *plus*) but it is written as "two *times* a half" (compare $2a$ in $2a + 3a = 5a$). Since 1971 there was a reform in Dutch mathematics education by Hans Freudenthal.³³ He didn't repair those errors in traditional mathematics education. Instead, he moved away from top-down Euclidean methods to applied mathematics as in engineering. However, Freudenthal was still an abstract mathematician and wasn't competent in empirical didactics. His idea of "realism" is an abstract notion of "realism". For example, in current math courses, Dutch students are supposed to learn about linear relationships by first considering real world linear processes, for example a steady stream of water from a faucet into a bucket. This isn't a good approach to learning mathematics, since watching or thinking about a stream of water doesn't necessarily kindle interest in abstract recognition of patterns. And we still have the errors in the old traditional math like $2\frac{1}{2}$. Nevertheless, the Freudenthal new error on didactics has become the new dogma. My books on this are "*Elegance with Substance*" (2009) and "*Conquest of the Plane*" (2011) and I advise to a parliamentary enquiry to remove the dogma in math education. See [here](#).³⁴

³² <http://boycottholland.wordpress.com/about/>

³³ <http://www.fi.uu.nl/en/projects/realme.html>

³⁴ <http://thomascool.eu/Papers/Math/Index.html>