

The Letters/Opinions section of the Gazette is meant as a campus forum for all Dalhousie students. The opinions expressed within may not necessarily be those of the Gazette staff or editorial board. We welcome all submissions, but reserve the right to edit for style and content. It is the Gazette's policy not to print racist, sexist or homophobic material.

# OPINIONS

## The Bible... truth or fiction?

I am responding to an article in last week's Gazette by John Gerald David Holton entitled, "Lecture a facade for Christian evangelism." I take issue with his portrayal of Ragnar Oborn's lecture on the historical reliability of the Bible as a cunning and deceitful plot to evangelize unsuspecting onlookers.

First of all, Mr. Oborn began the lecture by explaining that he was not a Biblical scholar or historian, but that he had an interest in the Bible and had studied some of the historical aspects of scripture. At that point Mr. Holton, or anyone else for that matter, could have expressed his disillusionment concerning un-met expectations by quietly walking out of the room.

Also, Ragnar Oborn made several comments that indicated his sensitivity to the reality that not everyone in the classroom would agree with the points he was making, and he offered students an opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns at the end of the presentation.

Although I disagreed with Mr. Holton's surmising about the motives of Ragnar Oborn and "those responsible for organizing this lecture", I concur with a couple of the specific points that he made.

For example, I too would have liked to see Mr. Oborn raise the issue of the apparent internal contradictions in the gospels and comment specifically on how those details relate to internal testing for the New Testament's historical reliability.

Nevertheless, his characterizations of Oborn and Evangelicals are otherwise prejudicial and at times malicious. And it seems to me that Mr. Holton has perpetrated the very same scholarly crime that he attributes to Oborn — using a public forum (in this case, the Gazette) to offer his one-sided, biased characterization of Ragnar Oborn, Evangelicals, DCF and Navigators (groups who have participants from various Christian denominations), and

Biblical scholarship.

I do not fault Holton for adopting a certain posture on this issue, nor for revealing his alignment with specific streams of historical inquiry. What is appalling however, is his hypocritical attack on Ragnar Oborn under the guise of protecting cherished objectivity.

The most important point to keep in mind is that when you talk about volatile and meaningful issues you will inevitably take a stand of one kind or another. If a person examines the Bible and the scriptural depiction of Jesus from a historical vantage, and is convinced from his study that the Jesus of the Bible is the Jesus of history, does that make him less of a scholar?

Moreover, Mr. Holton subtly mocks Mr. Oborn for concluding "that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is more likely than not a historical fact."

It is evident that there are Biblical scholars who argue that if a supernatural explanation is allowed to be considered, then historians can make a strong case that Jesus rose from the dead. The vast majority of scholars agree that after Jesus' death his disciples were a fearful, cowering lot who felt their own deaths were imminent.

Some event (or events) transformed those timid followers into radical proponents of a faith they were willing to die for. There are numerous factors which seem to confirm the historical hypothesis of the resurrection, and there is one piece of circumstantial evidence in particular that is connected to Mr. Holton's claim that canonized scripture "was almost certainly edited regarding which details of Jesus' life it included."

Keeping Holton's assertion in mind, it is extremely unlikely that Christian "editors" would overlook a narrative in which women were the first witnesses of both the empty tomb and the resurrection. Women had a relatively low status in Jewish culture (and in most cultures) at this time and they could rarely serve as legal witnesses. For

Christians to invent a story that depicts Jesus' male disciples hiding in cowardice while his female followers courageously attend to Jesus' body is extremely unlikely. This story would have been particularly humiliating to the early patriarchal church. In light of the relatively low legal status of women, why would the early church choose females to be the first witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, unless that is what actually transpired? In addition to his criticism of Oborn's belief in the resurrection, Mr. Holton implies that Jesus was likely not buried in a tomb since 'the Romans almost never buried the bodies of crucified victims'. On the question of Jesus' burial, Mr. Holton is setting his face against the consensus of Biblical

scholarship.

Like John Holton, Ragnar Oborn drew attention to historical data that supports his position. University is about diversity and variety, and hopefully we are all challenged to search for truth. Mr. Holton was exposed to a teaching that was obviously incompatible with his worldview, and since he thought he was misled, it is understandable that he was upset.

Nevertheless, to dismiss Oborn's presentation as a desperate plea to rescue lost souls is not only inaccurate, it is foolish.

The elitist overtones of Mr. Holton's review are quite disturbing. As students and professors, we are a community of scholars; John Holton is implying that only those who meet his

required credentials should hold information sessions on campus. Moreover, Mr. Holton seems to think he is fulfilling a courageous role as a university watchdog, pacing around gullible, "bewildered and naive" students, protecting them from the wiles of Evangelical manipulators.

This is not grade 5, and university students are not so easily deceived! Like Mr. Holton, most students will also investigate material before forming conclusions. Besides, if you don't agree with something and can't swallow it, just spit it out — or even better, walk out of the room.

SEAN O'NEIL

## Lecture not a facade

It is truly unfortunate that, in his attempt to critique the public lecture "Is the Bible...Reliable", John Holton committed the same 'crimes' which he accused the speaker, Mr. Ragnar Oborn, of committing.

Mr. Holton accused Mr. Oborn of pretending to give an objective, historical lecture on the reliability of the Biblical documents, while utilizing such an opportunity to 'evangelize' those attending.

If Mr. Holton is going to accuse Mr. Oborn of having a particular bias and of promoting and spreading his own belief system, he must admit that by submitting his 'opinions' piece he is doing the same thing. Mr. Holton's bias could easily be considered anti-Christian, his one-sided view of the unreliability of ancient Christian documents (in particular the Bible) and his belief system, one of suspicion of Christianity. In writing his 'opinions' piece, he is also trying to 'convince his audience of certain conclusions that he had decided from the beginning true'.

Mr. Holton points out that there exist other writings which suggest Jesus Christ used his divine powers to kill children. It would appear that he believes these documents are reliable. He raises a myriad of other theories about Jesus Christ and Christianity (well known to philosophy and classics students) which he assumes are true. Yet he refuses to grant the same consideration to the Bible.

Mr. Oborn, contrary to the opinion of Mr. Holton, never suggested that the lecture was designed to address all of the various perspectives of the Bible and Christianity. The lecture was not set up as a debate, nor did Mr. Oborn pretend to consider all sides of the various arguments. He did what in effect all undergraduate students at Dalhousie do; he proposed a thesis, and then used various facts and theoretical arguments to support his thesis.

Mr. Holton implied that Mr. Oborn has no authority to even give a lecture on the reliability of the Bible simply because he is a forestry instructor. This is nonsense. We could easily say that no

undergraduate (or even graduate) student should have the right to publicly promote his or her own theories on a particular issue because they are not 'experts' in the field.

Mr. Holton's accusation that Mr. Oborn (and thus the Dalhousie Christian Fellowship and Navigators Christian Fellowship) were 'perniciously' recruiting by offering such as lecture is also unfounded. While it is true that there have been instances of aggressive religious recruitment at Dalhousie, it is the strategy of a minority, most Christians will happily tell you that they disagree with such tactics. No one was forced to attend the lecture, people came of their own free will.

Dalhousie University should remain a place where individuals have the freedom to explore various religions and/or spiritualities, where an openness about spiritual issues is promoted, and the rights of students to question (without accusing or being accused) is protected.

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