

## Response to Jefford's Review

In his review of my two books on the **Didache**, Clayton Jefford misrepresents me as a scholar. He also misrepresents himself. He implies that his superior familiarity with the secondary literature allows him to evaluate my two volumes “with true accuracy.” In effect, however, all his misleading comments (as detailed below) demonstrate that Jefford was unwilling/unable to understand and to put forward accurately what I have written. In its place he created a straw opponent that he demolished with his implied familiarity with the secondary literature which he claims (wrongly) that I reject *in toto*. What Jefford has found in this literature that weighs so heavily against my origination hypothesis, he never says. The reader is left with smoke and mirrors. Once the smoke clears, however, the reader is left with only a mean-spirited review cluttered with misrepresentations, hyperbolies, and vacuous innuendoes—cheap substitutes for the fair analysis and reasoned arguments that readers of the **Catholic Biblical Quarterly** had the right to expect.

At first, I was just irritated with Jefford and decided to pass over his defective review in silence. Later, however, when colleagues began to draw attention to the review and friends began to question me, I decided to write out a detailed analysis of his review:

### **Below I cite in bold from Jefford's review and offer my response.**

**Milavec's foundational views of the Didache are clearly stated in his introductory pages. He believes that the text should be read as a unified whole, since it was intended to be a "pastoral manual" (p. vii) that reflects the pastoral genius of its author.**

RESPONSE: Clayton Jefford here infers that I “believe” the text is a “unified whole” on the grounds that it was used as a “pastoral manual.” **Nowhere do I do this.** Had Jefford read my volume carefully he would have noticed that I concluded that the text is a “unified whole” due to its linguistic structure: (a) that each section of the Didache has verbal links to other sections (p. xx) and (b) that “the progression of topics is very deliberate and that it follows the ordinary progression whereby the candidate would be ushered step by step into community norms and practices” (235). I draw attention to this in the Preface (xii, and more especially, “The Creation and Verification of an Origination Hypothesis,” pp. xvii-xxv) and repeat this theme and offer textual illustrations throughout (e.g., pp. 98-100). It is embarrassing to discover that Jefford failed to notice this.

**As such, the work contains oral traditions that circulated among specific early Christian communities (i.e., "Didache communities") as a tool by which to prepare non-Jewish converts to Christianity. . . .**

RESPONSE: On the contrary, my examination of the text illustrates that it not only has an inherent unity but an “oral character” that allows us to conclude that it was passed on as an “oral performance” (719) rather than as a (transcribed) text (See “The Oral Character of the Didache,” xxxii-xxxiii, 718-720). Jefford here appear to be projecting his own point of view (1989:18-19, 115-118)—certainly not mine.

**Milavec envisions that Jesus himself "endorsed and lived the entire content of the Way of Life" (p. 98) and that "the whole of the Way of Life was seen, by the framers of the Didache, as having originated from Jesus" (p. 111).**

RESPONSE: The first citation is lifted out of context. On p. 98 I am arguing against those who presuppose that only a few opening lines of the Way of Life come from Jesus. My second objection reads: “By assigning only a few opening sayings to Jesus, we are blocked from imagining that Jesus would have endorsed and lived the entire content of the Way of Life since he was a practicing Jew.” Nowhere do I affirm that Jesus literally “endorsed and lived” the Didache (as Jefford implies). Jefford then goes on to cite p. 111 out of context as well. A few lines after his citation, I write: “Even if, therefore, it is assumed that the framers of the **Didache** made use of a preexisting oral tradition or manual (whether Jewish or Christian), it must nevertheless be allowed that the framers of the **Didache** modified that tradition in order to address the specific pastoral circumstances encountered within their communities” (111). Jefford appears not to have noticed this. In sum, nowhere do I state or imply that the content of the Didache came directly from Jesus. “Originated from Jesus” (when examined in context) has a totally different meaning from the one that Jefford assigns to it.

**Sunday Eucharist (p. 236).**

RESPONSE: Jefford finds “Sunday Eucharist” on p. 236 but fails to notice that later I argue at length against this traditional designation. The Eucharist of Did. 9-10 is most probably the first eucharist of the newly baptized and was celebrated on Saturday evening (“Whether the Eucharist Was Celebrated on Saturday or Sunday,” pp. 572-574) following the evening prayer. Jefford’s use of “Sunday Eucharist” in his review thus leaves the reader with the false impression that I conclude that the Didache communities chose Sunday for the celebration of the Eucharist.

**... intended to form a kind of Utopian economic society. . . .**

RESPONSE: Jefford again reads his own meaning into my volume. I do, at one point, refer to “utopian aspirations” but then turn around and draw attention to the “deliberately ordered, balanced, and progressive program for the transformation of gentiles” (168; see “The Didache as Favoring Ordinary Holiness,” p. 864) found in the Way of Life. In fact, I deliberately say: “It would be mistaken to read the almsgiving required of novices and

full members alike as being tacitly motivated by some utopian vision” (194). None of the five remaining uses of “utopian” (xv, 81, 194) are applied to the Didache in the way that Jefford does. Here again, therefore, Jefford fails to correctly represent me.

**Milavec acknowledges his anticipation that most scholars will roundly reject his views about the text of the Didache and the context of its development and usage (pp. xvii-xxii). He believes that this rejection stems primarily from the nearly unanimous agreement among biblical and patristic scholars that the text is the final stage of an evolutionary process that included either the additions of several redactors or a progressive accrual of reactions to problems that confronted the early church as it developed into an institutional religion. He views this anticipated rejection as a demonstration of the raw clout that is usually wielded by the proponents of a majority view, an "abuse of power . . . [that] takes place far too often within ecclesial and academic circles" (p. xxii) determined to squash those who have ventured to challenge the status quo in the life and faith of the church.**

RESPONSE: Nowhere do I anticipate that “most scholars will roundly reject my views.” Rather, in the context of discussing how a consensus changes within an intellectual tradition, I soberly write (emphasis added):

An individual faced with the superior intellectual satisfaction of a new theory takes responsibility for sharing it with those working on similar problems and having similar training. That is what this book is all about. It would be ludicrous, however, for me to expect that all my professional readers would, upon first reading, immediately abandon earlier theories and unanimously cling to my paradigm. Rather, **a book like the present can only modestly expect to gain some adherence while, at the same time, gaining critics as well.**

Capable and insightful critics can be a blessing. They press forward the weaknesses of an origination hypothesis and force the adherents to wrestle with anomalies that may not have been evident earlier. Critics worth their salt do not stop at articulating the soft spots or anomalies within an existing theory; rather, they go on to espouse an alternative that, for them, has a superior intellectual satisfaction and fruitfulness. In the end, therefore, a community engaged in authentic dialogue and facing shared problems of interpretation has much to gain by the exchange between passionately committed intellectual adversaries.

I quote my volume at length to demonstrate how completely Jefford has altered my point of view. As for the “abuse of power” text that follows, note carefully how differently it reads in context:

Even between fierce opponents, there exists a conviviality based upon shared tradition, shared problems, and commitment to a shared quest for truth. In the history of the development of any intellectual tradition, sometimes an issue will

divide a community for some time before a new consensus is formed (Kuhn 1970:144-154). In such instances, care must be taken that the majority does not use its influence to curtail the rights and the standing of the minority. The history of science as well as the history of theology demonstrates many instances in which the judgment of the majority was ultimately overturned by the persistence and superior stand of the minority. When mutual respect breaks down and gives way to name calling, authoritarian appeals, and bullying, however, dialogue flounders. When one side of the argument feels justified in threatening the reputation, the livelihood, and/or the personal safety of an opponent or opponents, the winners do not thereby demonstrate the superiority of their claims, they merely demonstrate that raw power can effectively trample and silence opponents. The abuse of power, sad to say, takes place far too often within ecclesial and academic circles. Personal lives are downtrodden, and the community loses the innovative spirit required for its continued renewal and uplift.

Notice how completely Jefford destroys my meaning by taking the “abuse of power” phrase and applying it to me in particular as the way I have chosen to rationalize my “anticipated rejection.” All in all, I find Jefford’s entire paragraph to be a damning caricature of my work.

**Indeed, it will undoubtedly be true that many of those who oppose M.'s views will find that his claim to have uncovered the "key" to understanding the secrets of the Didache is only the outcome of a studied effort to arrange the data to suit his primary thesis.**

RESPONSE: Jefford then launches into a substantive critique of my volume. At this point, we never hear Jefford’s personal judgment expressed, however. Rather his judgment is hidden under vague references to “many of those who oppose” and “others may charge” with no names being given. The reader is being led on to believe that “it will undoubtedly be true” that many will oppose my views because they detect “a studied effort to arrange the data to suit his primary thesis.” Jefford chooses not to illustrate this; hence, it is impossible to evaluate the implied weakness suggested here. Then he continues:

**Others may charge that his effort to "rectify a gender distortion that has misrepresented the intent of the use of the Didache by both women and men in the Didache communities of the mid-first century" (p. 10) is, instead, a blatant attack on current policies in the Church, biased as they are toward male dominance, which have inspired the opposition to M.'s previous publications and teachings.**

RESPONSE: Jefford begins by misquoting me and lifting my citation out of context. The issue is gender-inclusive translation which is characterized as “a blatant attack on current policies in the Church.” What? Check again, Jefford I never say a word about

“current policies in the [Catholic] Church” relative to my gender-inclusive translation. My choice is based entirely on the failure of most English translations to render the inclusive grammatical sense of the original Greek. Jefford, however, misreads my motive as somehow caught up with “male dominance” and makes a jab at my “previous publications and teachings.” Strange that the phrase “male dominance” never appears even once in my entire thousand pages. Stranger, indeed, is that Jefford is here evaluating my Didache volume on the basis of what he opposes in my (unnamed) “previous publications.” Is this an academic review or a chance to smear Milavec with innuendoes?

**His critics may question why he has chosen to offer a fresh translation of a text that many capable scholars have already rendered with great care, now imposing on the text the specific marks of his own interpretation, such as his belief that "apostles and prophets" (Did. 11.3) should be rendered "apostle-prophets," based on a reading of the Shepherd of Hermas that admittedly stems from a different context (p. 463) and later literary activity (if one accepts Milavec's early dating of the Didache).**

RESPONSE: Jefford now goes on to expand his discontent with my gender-inclusive translation to include the fact that I translated the text at all. He appeals to the “many capable scholars” who have done this “with great care.” I, however, am not invited to join them in this effort since I am accused of “imposing on the text specific marks of my own interpretation.” Case in point—my rendering of “apostle-prophets.” According to Jefford, my translation is “**based on a reading of the Shepherd of Hermas.**” It most certainly is not. Page 463 discusses Hermas by way of clarifying “habits of the Lord.” My translation of 11:3 is based entirely on Greek grammar (an attributive modifier) (438-439) as confirmed by the internal logic of the text (439-441). Thus, Jefford not only misrepresents me to his readers; he completely disregards my stated reason and fabricates an argument that will gain easy agreement. At this point, Jefford has clearly gone too far. Jefford goes from smearing me with innuendoes to openly inventing arguments that make me appear foolish.

**Finally, some may wonder why his "apostle-prophets" are not identified with well-known figures in ecclesiastical history, such as the Twelve or Paul. . . .**

RESPONSE: Jefford now digs his own grave. No major Didache scholar writing in the last fifty years identifies the apostle-prophets with the Twelve or with Paul.

**. . . or why he thinks the text freely shifts between the training of individual novices ("you" singular) to the coaching of their teachers ("you" plural) without clear indication of such transitions. . . .**

RESPONSE: Jefford suggests that the text “freely shifts.” I conclude that the text “deliberately shifts” and explain just when and why the reciter introduces such shifts (e.g., 244-246, 576-577). One cannot tell whether Jefford failed to notice this in my volume or whether he disagrees with my explanations.

**. . . or why he offers neither any geographical or historical context for his hypothetical communities of this "Way of Life" nor any explanation of why these groups disappeared so completely from the memory of church historians and commentators.**

RESPONSE: Jefford may have missed my discussion as to “**Whether the Rule of First Fruits Reveals the Location or Date of the Didache**” (520-522). He might also have missed my efforts to identify the historical context and social location (e.g., 176-183, 438-464, 583-808) of its participants. As for explaining why the Didache communities “disappeared so completely from the memory of church historians,” Jefford need only reflect upon why the Christian Scriptures as well as Josephus have nothing to say about the community at Qumran that has independently come to light by virtue of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Contrary to Jefford’s claim, moreover, the Didache was noticed for its shows up in canonical lists and in patristic quotations. It gets edited and included in various church orders (Niederwimmer 1989:4-23). Since Jefford has published widely regarding the Didache, it astonishes me that he fails to know this. It is thus misleading to describe the Didache communities as having “disappeared so completely. . . .”

In the late 80s, Clayton Jefford put forward the argument that the Didache was a training manual designed within the context of Matthew’s community specifically for the training of new elders (1989a:123-129, 1989b). Would Jefford fault his own writings using the words he uses to fault mine? I think not.

**These two volumes will undoubtedly challenge many who seek to understand the background and perspectives of the Didache. Those who wish to evaluate M.'s work and conclusions with any true accuracy, however, should first become thoroughly familiar with the rest of the secondary literature with which he consistently finds fault and which he routinely rejects as misinformed.**

RESPONSE: Jefford closes his review with the prospect that “these two volumes will undoubtedly challenge many.” In so doing, he would seem to imply that there is more substance in these volumes than he has had the time or space to review. The last line, however, withdraws this compliment. The reader is warned that the secondary literature must be relied upon to judge my merits. No matter that the secondary literature (unspecified) is quite varied and could be used to support and to discredit just about every opinion currently held about the Didache. Jefford fails to recognize this. Perhaps Jefford fancies that he is “thoroughly familiar with the rest of the secondary literature” and could specify what segment of that literature he relies upon to judge the merits of my work. Of this, however, he says nothing. What he does say, however, is that I “consistently” find fault and “routinely” reject this secondary literature as “misinformed.” This is a bald lie.

Anyone who reads my book for him/herself will quickly discover that my volume contains over two thousand citations from other authors—the vast majority being used approvingly. I openly acknowledge that I have stood on the shoulders of giants, and they have enable me to see far. That I have respectfully analyzed and disagreed with other judgments expressed in the secondard literature; however, should come as no surprise.

In the end, therefore, Jefford misrepresents me as a scholar. He also misrepresents himself. He implies that his familiarity with the secondary literature allows him to evaluate my two volumes “with true accuracy.” In effect, therefore, all his misleading comments made above demonstrate that Jefford is unwilling or unable to understand and to put forward accurately what I have written. In its place he creates a straw opponent that he demolishes with his implied familiarity with the secondary literature that he claims (wrongly) that I reject *in toto*. What Jefford has found in this literature that weighs so heavily against my origination hypothesis, he never says. The reader is left with smoke and mirrors. Once the smoke clears, however, one finds only a mean-spirited review cluttered with misrepresentations, hyperbolies, and vacuous innuendoes—cheap substitutes for the fair analysis and reasoned arguments that readers had the right to expect.

**Postscript:** In my index of authors, Clayton Jefford’s works are referred to on fifteen pages. I included Jefford at key points because I trusted that his work has evolved major theses that have been largely ignored in the secondary literature. In the end, I found them wanting, but I explain in detail why they fail to satisfy the evidence of the text. Jefford never claimed that I misrepresented him. I’m sure he is disappointment that I did not find greater areas of agreement. Nonetheless, I have consistently honored Jefford publically and have offered him responsible positions in the annual meetings of the Didache Unit at the SBL even though it was clear that he vigorously disagreed with my two Didache volumes. It leaves me sad that he had to resort to misrepresentation and to innuendo to discredit my work. That his review was published in the **Catholic Biblical Quarterly** is a cause of confusion and pain for me and a disservice to the academic community—many of whom will take his review as authoritative.

P.S.: An alternative [review by Robert J. Daly](#).