

Posted 26 November 2010

## Response to Gunnar Samuelsson

Seeing my name in a Chinese (I think) blog today (26<sup>th</sup> November 2010), I found that it referred to Gunnar Samuelsson's blog, in which he has published in four installments his reply to my *Review* of his book, *Crucifixion in Antiquity*.

Perhaps I should begin by mentioning that my first contact with Gunnar was a very pleasant one. On the 3 October 1999, he sent me through Samuel Byrskog his essay "Homosexualitet i NT", in which he had included the following message:

Det är en ära för mig att få sända ett exemplar of [min uppsats] till dig. Jag vill samtidigt passa på att tacka dig för din viktiga skrift "Bibelns syn på homosexualiteten". Den var mig till god hjälp i min studie. Jag vet att ditt bidrag i denna snedvridna debatt har varit många till hjälp. Personer som du skänker hopp till studenter som mig [sic].

(Trans.: "It is an honour for me to send a copy [of my essay] to you. At the same time I wish to take the opportunity to thank you for your important writing "The Biblical View of Homosexuality". It proved a god help in my study. I know that your contribution in this distorted debate has been of help to many. Persons to whom you give hope to students like me [sic!]").

Todate I have only met Gunnar once, since the above was written, and it was a pleasant meeting. The reader will, therefore, realize, that if there ever was any predisposition on my part toward Gunnar, it was thoroughly positive and friendly.

This is important to bear in mind, since it implies that I never had any bone to pick with Gunnar. But, in spite of my positive

appreciation of Gunnar, as a scientist and reviewer, I had to set before me the standard to which I have given expression elsewhere and which Gunnar cites toward the end of his *Reply*. It was precisely because I feel bound to write with integrity and truthfulness, that I have written this review, and it cost me no little pain to have to say the things I say. We are bound to set Truth above friendship!

Reading the four parts of Gunnar's *Reply*, I was left stupefied by the fact that his *Reply* does not contain any material (sachlich) argument against the concrete evidence I supply. His policy seems to be to try to undermine the devastating criticism of my *Review* by assuring the reader that I have not read his dissertation, as if such an assurance could substitute for sound argument and eliminate the facts to which I have called attention. Here, Samuelsson really does not seem to understand how scientific argumentation functions. This policy leads him to make a number of statements—which are misrepresentations of what I write—that lack seriousness, and place the discussion on a level below that of sober linguistics, philology, and exegesis, cf. e.g. “**Greeks know by heart what the ancient Greek terms means ... the notion that every Greek speaking human is a natural born expert on Classical Greek is probably an overstatement**” (2<sup>nd</sup> Installment). See also the puerile irony: **it is only Caragounis as native from Greece that masters Greek in a way that counts** [3<sup>rd</sup> Installment]). These statements do not deserve to be answered.

In this response I do not intend to sink to the level of this *Reply*. What I shall do, instead, is to respond to Samuelsson's misleading interpretations of what I write in my *Review*.

**1. In spite of the fact that I made it quite clear** in my response to Wasserman (Ev. TC blog), who, as Samuelsson's defender had heralded Samuelsson's opinion, assuring them that I

had certainly read the book, Samuelsson still refuses to believe my word. This, however, does not free him from the duty to answer my ‘sachlich’ criticism. And I have yet to see such an answer!

## 2. I wrote in my Review:

Samuelsson rejects all the previous attempts to elucidate crucifixion in the ancient world (e.g. by noted researchers such as M. Hengel and H.-W.Kuhn), including all dictionaries and encyclopaedias, not only in Sweden but everywhere in the wide world. Everything that has been written on crucifixion during the past 2000 years is wrong, according to Samuelsson. This must include also the Greeks, who though using the relevant words continuously from ancient times till today, do not know what is meant by them.

On this Samuelsson comments:

I do not draw that conclusion Caragounis suggests, “that Jesus most probably was not crucified”.

and goes on to suggest that I picked this up from the media (which is wrong).

My answer is as follows:

*First*, my above quote is the gist of Samuelsson’s statements in his entire book.

*Second*, the abstract of his book, which must have been written by him, states that:

The various terms are not simply used in the sense of “crucify” and “cross,” if by “crucifixion” one means the punishment that Jesus was subjected to according to the main Christian traditions. ... Almost none of it can be elucidated beyond verbs referring vaguely to some form(s) of suspension, and nouns referring to tools used in such suspension. As a result, most of the crucifixion

accounts that scholars cite in the ancient literature have to be rejected, leaving only a few. The New Testament is not spared from this terminological ambiguity. The accounts of the death of Jesus are strikingly sparse.

Their chief contribution is usage of the unclear terminology in question. Over-interpretation, and probably even pure imagination, have afflicted nearly every wordbook and dictionary that deals with the terms related to crucifixion as well as scholarly depictions of what happened on Calvary. The immense knowledge of the punishment of crucifixion in general, and the execution of Jesus in particular, cannot be supported by the studied texts

*Third*, according to the EvTexCr blog, who have been Samuelsson's defenders, the Opponent concluded from his reading of the book that all works touching on Crucifixion needed to be rewritten (this was not the media!). Samuelsson did not correct this claim!

*Fourth*, on p. 330, he draws his conclusions for the entire book, saying:

If a suggestion of the holistic view of the terminology is heeded, that there was no distinct punishment of 'crucifixion' before the death of Jesus, it is plausible to say that the punishment of crucifixion, so to speak, came into being on Calvary — *or rather in the later Christian interpretation of the texts depicting the events on Calvary*" (my emphasis).

Here, he clearly claims that it was the Early Church that 'discovered' the Crucifixion! Do we need more evidence? Has he regretted the formulation? Then, he should say so and admit his mistake.

The above four points show quite clearly that my assessment above is absolutely correct. I have NOT misinterpreted Samuelsson's

son. If Samuelsson did not mean what he wrote, is another matter. As a reader, I must go by what I read!

### **3. When he says:**

And since it is not possible to decide exactly what happened on Calvary I hence call it a “suspension”

I must say that I have already pointed out in the *Review*, that the verb σταυρῶ does not mean “to suspend”.

### **4. Samuelsson misrepresents my objections, when he writes:**

Instead he states that I only study “a small number of occurrences” and adds that “[t]he evidence for crucifixion is altogether too overwhelming to cite here”. To prove his point he presents texts as being other texts than the “small number” I have studied in the thesis, i.e., texts from the “overwhelming” number Caragounis knows. The problem is, however, that all texts, except those outside the studied time span, Caragounis presents as proof texts are discussed in detail in the thesis. Could he have missed that if he had read the book?

In my *Review* I mention that there are many thousands of occurrences relating to the such terms as (ἀνα)σταυρῶ, (ἀνα)σκολοπίζω, and προσηλῶ. I then say that Samuelsson has treated a smaller number of them (this is only by way of information, no criticism is proffered), “but even these should have been sufficient to clarify the meaning of crucifixion”. I have also made clear that my criticism of Samuelsson is his methodology, i.e. the way in which he treats the evidence. Thus, my objections to his thesis do not build on other texts than the ones he presented, but

on his wrong interpretation of these texts! This is clear not only in my *Review*, but it has also been emphasized in my responses to Wasserman. This means that Samuelsson's above complaint is totally unwarranted. Once again, let me repeat, that my objection has not been that Samuelsson did not treat a sufficient number of texts, but that he misinterpreted those he treated!

### **5. I have written:**

The Greeks, too, have always been well aware of the meaning of these terms in their various contextual uses, making use of them appropriately throughout the history of the Greek language (p.9).

This is picked up and ironized by Samuelsson, who writes:

Greeks know by heart what the ancient Greek terms means. That a native Greek-speaking scholar, especially with a solid education in Classical Greek, has an advantage compared to βάρβαροι in the ancient Greek sense, is more or less natural. But the notion that every Greek speaking human is a natural born expert on Classical Greek is probably an overstatement.

Neither here nor anywhere else will the reader find the caricature claim that is attributed to me, namely, that “every Greek speaking human is a natural born expert on Classical Greek”. It is a pity that Samuelsson cannot be more ‘sachlich’ in his presentation of others.

However, this affords me the opportunity to say two words on Samuelsson's derisive remarks. I have lived in Sweden for over forty years. I read Swedish, I speak Swedish, and I write Swedish. Yet I would not presume to argue a point in Swedish grammar or a point in which the Gefühl of the language is involved with a

learned Swede. Now, I am not acquainted with any non-Greek scholar who reads, speaks and writes Greek to the same extent as I do Swedish! The second thing I should like to say is that, knowing the meaning and use of a word like  $\sigma\alpha\upsilon\rho\hat{\omega}$  is not of any technical nature that an ordinary Greek might not know. Samuelsson might like to use commonsense here: Is it likely, or probable, or even possible that the Greek Nation has used a term such as  $\sigma\alpha\upsilon\rho\hat{\omega}$  for thousands of years without knowing its meaning until Samuelsson wrote his dissertation?

### **6. Samuelsson's irony here is rather cheap:**

I might not be such a competent scholar of Greek as Caragounis wishes for, and I am sadly not Greek, but I am curious about other competent reviewers' comments on the outcome of my thesis that are rather contradictory to Caragounis conclusion below.

I have written a review of Samuelsson's book based on his interpretations of the evidence and on a study of the evidence itself. I have not seen any "competent reviewers' comments" that contradict me.

### **7. Samuelsson tries to gather support, saying:**

My thesis has been presented in parts in seminaries not only in Gothenburg, but also in Lund, Oslo and on conferences arranged by *EABS* and *SBL* (3 Installment).

He forgets that in science it is evidence and sound argument, not titles or positions, that count. My objections are based on concrete texts, which he misinterprets.

**8. After quoting at length what I write** about how to write reviews, Samuelsson asks:

My third question is: does Caragounis follow his own suggestions concerning a good review? The feeling I get reading the review is that Caragounis is in for no less than an academic execution, and not a dialogue.

My answer to the first question, is: Absolutely! If the book is bad, then the review must be critical in the sense that it criticizes and points out the weaknesses of the book; otherwise it is not a good review.

With regard the the second sentence, in which Samuelsson gives vent to his feelings that my review is “an academic execution”, I am very sorry. Indeed, I regret it. He has, after all, spent many years of toil to collect and read the material and try to find some new way to interpret it, so he will have done something worthwhile. Yes, I feel for him. But what could I do? Truth and facts cannot be compromised, because we want to help somebody. It is better to face the facts squarely, even if they are disappointing. Who knows, something far better may come out of this bitter disappointment.

What i do not understand, in my turn, is that he did not receive better help while he was on the way.