

CURE FOR CREDULITY: The Bigger and More Important the Claim the Better the Testimony Needs to be

Credulity means we accept what others tell us without checking it. Or it can refer to when we do check it out but neglectfully. It is dangerous for it is to blame for most of the evils and superstitions in the world. Think of the impoverished mother who gives away her last dime to a charlatan who says that God will reward her by healing her baby. We do not want to encourage a framework of credulity wherein that can happen. And that is what we are doing if we give any support to credulity at all. Many of us will make mistakes and be credulous without meaning to be. That has to be acknowledged. And we must not hold it against ourselves or others. We must learn from our errors and rash judgments.

Suppose a good friend, who we have never found out to be a liar, says to us that they experienced an instant healing from terminal illness because somebody gave them a satanic witch potion. It seems disloyal and insulting to suspend belief. Should we take the person's word for it? But nobody can expect us to have complete confidence in their being right but only in their sincerity. That is all any reasonable witness can ask. Thus we are entitled to investigate and ask questions to see if the person is sincerely mistaken. We are not accusing them of being unreliable or lying. If we are then it must be slander then for a lawyer to cross examine a witness to a crime! We ask questions all the time to check out what we are told. A true friend would welcome that. They wouldn't want us to see us led astray.

There are certain things that should not be accepted except by those who have checked them out carefully and slowly and thoroughly and found them believable. Miracles and magic are top of the list. Suppose some Catholic investigators have evidence that Lourdes really had been visited by the Virgin Mary in a supernatural vision. They cannot encourage anybody or let anybody agree with them who has not become an investigator like them. They cannot encourage people to mistreat the truth and to have disrespect for evidence.

To protect yourself from being misled, to protect others too, to guard against the dangers of error, demand extraordinarily good testimony for extraordinary claims. And what is more extraordinary than miracles and the supernatural? Remember extraordinary evidence just means have a higher standard that is all. Be careful not to be looking for a miraculous level of evidence or an impossible one for that is just another form of credulity!