

## THE CREED ARGUMENT FOR THE PLAUSIBILITY OF CHRISTIANITY

Argument: "Soon after Jesus died and rose the Christians were using a creed stating those things as facts. That lends credibility to their beliefs. Some point out to cases where creeds in some form appeared soon after fake apparition reports. One case is the claimed visions of Mary at Medjugorje since 1981. That takes away credibility. Others say that the creed we are talking about which is in 1 Corinthians 15 is not a creed at all."

Hector Avalos regarding a Christian opponent Campbell writes,

Campbell's claim that belief in the resurrection of Jesus "was crystallized in creedal form by the eyewitnesses inside five or six years of Jesus' death" is not supported by any contemporary historical evidence at all.

The stories of the existence of such a creed are found in New Testament manuscripts from the third century and later, but there is no actual evidence from 5 to 6 years after the year 30, the approximate date of the supposed resurrection. If I am wrong, then where is a document from around 35-36 CE that showed the existence of such a creed?

As we will see, Campbell is using an asymmetrical requirement. In the case of Jesus he is satisfied if there is a creed about Jesus' resurrection 5-6 years after the supposed event. In the case of Mary, he dismisses any creed that actually DID FORM within 5-6 years after the first apparitions.

We can summarize thusly the evidence for a creed among believers in events related to Jesus and Mary at Medjugorje:

Jesus: Creed attested in manuscripts from 200-300 years later.

Mary: Creed documented in video and print within 5-6 actual years.

And the proper symmetry is the appearance of a creed AMONG BELIEVERS of the event in question, even when there were many non-believers and even if the Catholic Church does not officially express belief in the authenticity of the apparitions.

So, just as Campbell dates the establishment of a creed among BELIEVERS OF THE JESUS APPARITIONS it would be symmetrical to date the establishment of a creed among BELIEVERS IN THE MARIAN APPARITIONS AT MEDJUGORJE.

The "creed" that Mary appeared at Medjugorje crystallized among millions of believers within 5-6 years, and so that far outpaces anything that even Campbell supposes for the Jesus event. The crystallization of the Medjugorje creed is securely dated, especially as it happened within the lifetime of many current researchers.

Indeed, if Campbell finds it historically significant that the Jesus resurrection creed crystallized within 5-6 years of the claimed event, then why does he not find it significant that the belief that Mary appeared at Medjugorje crystallized almost immediately?

### OBJECTION:

Avalos' ... argument is that there is no historical evidence that supports the claim that belief in the risen Jesus was crystallized in an early creed. He seems to think that, because the manuscripts we have date centuries after the events, we cannot admit the Corinthians creed as being early, since they are not contemporary. This is nothing more than a palpable and blatant falsehood that betrays Avalos' ignorance of the relevant scholarship on this subject:

"In the case of 1 Cor 15:3ff., critical scholars agree that Paul's reception of at least the core of this proclamation, and probably the creed itself, go back to the mid-AD 30s, when he spent two weeks with Peter and James, the brother of Jesus. But these two apostles had the material before Paul did, and the events behind the reports are earlier still. This is probably the chief argument that persuades the majority of scholars today that the proclamation of Jesus' resurrection originated in the earliest church. Virtually all critical scholars think this message began with the real experiences of Jesus' earliest disciples, who thought they had seen appearances of their risen Lord. It did not arise at some later date. Nor was it borrowed or invented." - Gary R. Habermas, *The Resurrection of Jesus Time Line*, from Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, eds., *Contending With Christianity's Critics*, B&H Publishing Group, (2009), p125

Avalos might be operating under the delusion that immediate veridicality and contemporaneity are required components of

historical reasoning, but real historians know otherwise. Documents can contain oral formulas, such as the creed in 1 Corinthians 15. That the documents date a few decades later, and the earliest manuscripts date a few centuries later, does nothing to change this. It thus seems as if Avalos is fundamentally ignorant regarding textual analysis and criticism of the New Testament, as well as the arguments actual critical scholars make.

Avalos continues by arguing that an actual creed regarding the Marian apparitions at Medjugorje crystallised within 5-6 years of the alleged appearances there. The problem with such an argument is that, even if this were the case, this completely ignores other factors, such as willingness to endure persecution, criterion of embarrassment and so on, not to mention the clear and obvious differences in socio-cultural context. However, let us assume that such a creed exists, and that it passes these other criteria. All this would do is show that the believers in the Marian apparitions were sincere in their belief. What Avalos seems to be oblivious of is that the earliness of the creed is but one piece of historical data used to justify the claim that belief in the risen Christ was early, widespread and sincere, and that, moreover, the early, sincere, widespread belief in the risen Jesus is merely one of the minimal facts used to infer the resurrection of Jesus. Of course, there is clear and obvious evidence that the visionaries who claimed to have seen Mary were not sincere, whereas there is good evidence that the disciples were sincere. Furthermore, belief in the risen Christ spread in an environment completely hostile to Christianity and the idea of bodily resurrection, and in a socio-cultural environment where critical scrutiny over the lives of others was a part of daily life, meaning the empty tomb, etc. would have been checked.

MY COMMENT:

Avalos is criticised for not recognising certain lines in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians as a creed. That is a small error if it is an error at all. Christians make a big deal of this alleged creed for they want you to think Christians had their faith in the risen Jesus fully formed long before Paul wrote and were continually reciting that creed. But what if Paul himself wrote the creed a month or two before? What if it was not public but Paul's personal creed?

We don't have the apostles under the same scrutiny as the Medjugorje visionaries. They are well off and have been caught telling lies. That did them no harm and their apparitions are still the most popular religious attraction of all time. Historical arguments for religion need to take account of what human nature is like. Human nature does tell lies about its religious experiences.

Avalos writes,

In fact, Campbell has switched to a completely different criterion than the one he uses for Jesus. In the case of Jesus, he measures historicity by the temporal distance between the alleged resurrection event and the first appearance of a creed affirming that event.

In the case of Mary, he measures the historicity of an apparition report by the temporal distance between some arbitrarily-chosen historical dogma and the reported apparition.

Campbell's improper temporal comparison can be simplified as follows:

Jesus: The time between the alleged resurrection event and a creed affirming Jesus' resurrection

Mary: The time between a creed affirming Mary's Assumption and the alleged apparition event.

But, the proper symmetry in terms of temporal distance is:

Jesus: The time between the alleged resurrection event and a creed affirming that resurrection

Mary: The time between the alleged apparition event and a creed affirming that apparition.

If we used the proper symmetry, then Mary's apparitions at Medjugorje not only meet, but exceed, the measure of historicity that Campbell uses for the Jesus stories. As mentioned, millions of believers affirmed the creed that Mary had appeared at Medjugorje within 5-6 years of the event.

The point needs stressing that people can be devoted and sincere in their wrong and silly religious beliefs means that with Medjugorje or the apostles they are evidence of the human spirit not that their claims or ideas are true.

SOURCES

Jesus' Resurrection and Marian Apparitions: Medjugorje as a Living Laboratory By Dr. Hector Avalos at 4/29/2013

<http://www.truthinmydays.com/do-apparitions-of-mary-undermine-the-case-for-jesus-resurrection/>

