

EARLY PUBLICATION OF THE GOSPELS IMPROBABLE

If we could be sure that the four New Testament gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were censored or largely censored during the first few decades of their appearance we reduce the already weak evidence for the claims the Church makes for the sinister Jesus Christ considerably. And we can be sure. There is absolutely no evidence that anybody who would have been able to refute the gospels had access to them and there is plenty of evidence that the gospels were kept out of their clutches.

To discount the notion that the gospels are evidence for Christ and his divine sonship and/or his existence we need to knock down the “proofs” that the gospels were available to the generation that knew Jesus and the times he lived in. And it isn’t hard.

There is no evidence of early publication.

There is no evidence that the publication could impact for it was hard for any writings to do that.

There is no evidence that anybody outside a niche interest group cared or knew of the gospels.

If we cannot prove that the gospels were open to public awareness then we cannot prove that they should be taken seriously. The gospels were written for believers and prospective believers and not critics. They say that. This reduces the validity and quality of their testimony considerably.

They would have more right to be believed if they addressed and invited the observations of critics. Books that cannot do that have no business asking us to believe in resurrections and miracles which need a high standard of evidence. That God failed to make them better evidence indicates that they are not his word at all.

a) “If the gospels needed to be kept hidden from the people who knew Jesus in case they would expose them then they wouldn’t have been written.”

It was intended to publicise and popularise them when the proofs against their tales ceased to exist and could no longer be verified. And anyway there is always an audience for believing your lies especially a long time after the events.

b) “There would be outlandish and crazy tales in the gospels if they were made up and hidden from those who could expose them. There are not so they were not hidden.”

The stories are crazy though they could be a lot worse.

The fig tree story is ridiculous. Jesus allegedly made it wither because it had no fruit on it. The miracle was needless for Jesus did not need to let the apostles see his power if he had done other miracles or to do this to symbolise what happens when people do not bear fruit.

It is absurd to think that the gospel Jesus would have been so free to go about his daily business when everybody wanted him dead. He was claiming to be Christ and acting it and drawing huge crowds according to the gospels anyway. If they are telling the truth, then the Roman government would not have tolerated him for ten seconds.

d) “You say that a lot of Jesus’ miracles were not miracles but that miracle interpretations are unjustly read into the text by credulous Christians. (See my book, Non-Miraculous Witnesses.) If that is right then why would anybody hide the gospels? They were ordinary enough so they didn’t need to be hidden.”

That only means they may have had other reasons for hiding the gospels.

Perhaps Jesus never existed. Perhaps he did no spiritual or ministerial work at all and was only accepted as Christ and Saviour because he seemed to have risen from the dead. Apparitions could have been happening and later it was decided they were of a man called Jesus who in fact never lived.

If either of these was the case, then anything said about Jesus would be a problem so there would be no reason to keep back the miracle stories for it is all troublesome.

The miracles would not have been the only reason the gospels had to be kept private. The Jews hated Jesus for his teaching

more than his works. He insulted them incessantly and claimed to be the Messiah and despite the ruthlessness of Pilate he put the people of Jerusalem's lives at risk by looking for praise from them and for them as his supporters as if he was the King of the Jews when he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. When the gospel version of that teaching was mostly ignored for decades after the apostles died then the gospels were hidden all that time.

d) "Why would the gossellers have had the gospels concealed from the public eye when in an age where one had to depend on the testimony of people and writings to prove something and not on material or forensic evidence? They couldn't afford to hide the stories for people would be looking for evidence."

Anybody could have gotten away with religious type lies and plenty did in those days. The writings could have been rejected as forgeries and lies and still ended up looking credible – that was how the silly pagan religions got started. And testimony gets corrupted by bad memory and confusion and prejudice over the years so people wouldn't have known who to believe.

What about the fact that they might have hidden their books to be on the safe side? They might have found the case against their nonsense over-whelming and felt that it was best to be careful.

They wrote their gospels long before they intended them to be published to give them more authority and credibility for some people would be able to stand up and say they were written long before publication if any controversy started about the veracity of the works.

Perhaps the reason they were hidden so long was because the right time for their launch was long in coming or delayed due to unforeseen political conditions and turmoil. During the Bar Kochba revolution of the first half of the second century, Bar Kochba determined to eradicate the plague of Christianity from Palestine by persecution and murder and by burning books. He had his Jewish spies to root out Christianity. New gospels would have had to have been written after all that if they were published so any critic who could have left a refutation behind in writing would have been unlikely to manage it. Or perhaps they were just kept secret for safety.

e) "There are contradictions and errors or seeming contradictions and seeming errors in the gospels so if they had really been hidden these would have been removed".

The smaller the readership the more likely it is that errors will be safe because then it is all the less likely that they will be noticed. This argument proves the opposite of what it is alleged to prove.

Perhaps, nobody cared until it was too late. There is no evidence that the errors were even noticed before then. The gospels were not said to have been utterly infallible in the early days. Perhaps the sneaks set out as soon as they were discovered to give out their ridiculous and far-fetched and fraudulent solutions of the contradictions which were enough to make the prejudiced pretend to themselves that the conflicting writings were a perfect unity. But while it is true that some of the contradictions can be solved, the early Christians would not all have been intelligent or knowledgeable enough to see that they could be and would have perceived them as contradictions. Unless the gospels were restricted to a handful of people we cannot explain how these contradictions were allowed to stay in. It shows that the gospels were not initially treated as scripture or as good as scripture having come from the apostles. The non-apostolic origin of the gospels has been supported by much evidence today and can be considered conclusively proven.

The gospels contain so many contradictions and seeming ones that if they had been studied by the Church these would have been erased by their authors or by their disciples. The gospels were hidden instead of studied and they were released when it was too late to make many corrections. One could think that since the body of Christian dogma is full of absurdities and contradictions so it would not be surprising if Christians revered stupid books as the infallible word of God.

f) "The enemies of Christianity knew that there had to be books about it. They would have found these books and revealed their contents publicly and tried to refute them. They did not, so the gospels must have been well-known and irrefutable."

The enemies could twist things and when the books were not even mentioned in the early days by the enemies it proves they were either non-existent or hidden or perhaps they were just unimportant – which they could only be if they were considered more worthy of being laughed at than debunked. Why look for books that nobody reads like the four gospels and Acts? There were books all right but they were not much of a threat because the readership was very restricted so the books were hidden. And the enemies knew that if the books were too well known they would still be reproduced even if they were wiped off the face of the earth and Christianity could have them again. This might have made them feel it was best to ignore the books. But the view that they did not see any reason to worry about the books for they were such silly books is the most plausible one.

To argue that the enemies wanted to destroy the books and didn't because there were too many of them is ridiculous

considering the much burning that went on in those days. It is easier to think they were not destroyed because the enemies couldn't get them. They were hidden.

g) "If the Gospels were kept from general readership to be put out into the open when their lies became irrefutable then how did those responsible for them know that they would become scripture someday for that must have been their purpose in hiding them for why hide books that may not be accepted as scripture? It is ridiculous to say they planned for the Church to make scripture of their writings for they had no control over that. So what happened was they were openly preached and their validity led to them being canonised."

They didn't know but they knew that Christians might be likely to want them for scripture someday but that whatever happened they would be treasured as precious and valuable records of the life of Christ – that is, if not considered infallible and inspired. They would have thought their record was better than anybody else's.

h) "The gospels were published early for their enemies could not destroy them. If the gospels had been hidden they would have been fewer and easier to wipe them off the face of the earth. When one goes to the trouble of pulling a Christian out of his house to kill him one could easily search for books and burn them. No religion can thrive without literature. The gospels were published so widely that the enemies saw no point in destroying the books. That is why we have our gospels today."

The gospels could have survived because they were hidden just as easily as because they were published. Success depends not on the quantity of books but on publicity.

i) "Had the Christians withheld the gospels from the eyes of the world then we would be reading Jewish and pagan complaints. Don't say they didn't know they existed for they would have apprehended that the Christians had to have had books to keep Christian traditions from being lost."

This is a weak argument in the light of the fact that we can prove from the next oldest writings after the New Testament that the gospels were kept beyond the grasp of even the leaders of the Church.

If the Church let the four gospels be circulated it must have wanted them to be burned for that is what the Jews and Gentiles would have done.

Anybody can see that there must have been books. We know, and Luke 1 informs us, that there were many Christian books and gospels. Nevertheless, we have no writings against these books from pagans and the Jews. Even worse, they are not mentioned by outsiders at all. Only Christians mentioned the four gospels we have. If there were no such writings then that might explain the silence of the debunkers. Or perhaps nobody was that interested in debunking them. Maybe this was because there was no danger in the Christian books for they were not widely distributed and interest in them was negligible. Maybe though Luke 1 was right about there being a load of books and gospels about Jesus nobody but a chosen few had access to them.

If these other gospels were well-distributed why do we have barely any copies today? We know of the Church's book burning escapades. When it did such a good job of getting rid of them how much better would it have done the job of getting rid of any damning evidence about Jesus or the early Church.

Jewish and Pagan works running down the writings of the Christians must have existed but when we read that so many Christian works have been lost it is no problem to say the former were lost too.

Would the Jews and Gentiles really have thought seriously that there were hidden books? At that time, the Church had no official list of sacred New Testament books so they would have supposed that hidden books were not worth worrying about.

It is known that the early Church expected Jesus back say about a few decades after the alleged resurrection appearances so they were unlikely to have started writing gospels until late in the first century and in the early second by when they knew their expectation was a waste of energy.

k) "Why didn't the Christians say they had hidden gospels?"

Would Christians want future generations to know that the gospels were previously treated like something to be deeply ashamed of? The heretics who were into allegedly hidden tradition would have produced fake gospels forcing the Church to release the real ones eventually to counteract them. These heretics are complained about even in the New Testament itself indicating that the Church may have written the gospels late for they were certainly hidden too.

Moreover, the real explanation might be that since we have so little data from the second century about Christianity that it is possible the Christians did say they had hidden gospels and we have lost the evidence that they did.

l) Christians say that there was no reason for the early Church to keep the gospels close to the chests of a select few: “There is a difference between people being persecuted for their faith and their writings being suppressed. Times it is preferred to kill than to try and destroy the truth. The gospels could have been published freely because it was the sword that was used not the bonfire”.

This contradicts the New Testament in lots of places and persecution is one of the favourite New Testament themes (eg Acts 8). It is a strange kind of persecution that lets the persecuted have a chance to propagate their faith with literature and preaching for the Christians had sufficient freedom to do that under the nose of the legal system that persecuted them all the time according to Acts. The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christians or the martyrs’ religion. I suspect that the early Christians may have been involved in violence at what they believed was Jesus’ behest and the brutal ones were the persecuted ones.

m) Christians argue, “Christianity arose among the Jews and became basically a Gentile religion and the Jews did not care what the Gentiles believed. No Jew was likely to try and refute or suppress the gospels with their account of the resurrection for the sake of preventing poor Gentiles from being deluded for Judaism was not interested in converting them but only in keeping and evangelising those who belonged to their own race. So the gospels would have been common among Gentiles.”

When a religion spreads so fast like Christianity allegedly did the books will be the first thing that the persecutors will go for and Rome did not like Christians any more than Jews did. The Gentile Christians were keen to convert Jews for they were easier to convert for they had half of the religion of Jesus anyway.

St Paul said that the Church was the New Israel. The Gentile Christians claimed to be Jews. They said that only Jews can be saved so they are spiritually Jews and Jesus has kept the law of Moses for them to satisfy God’s claims against them. The Jews would not have liked people doing that for it made their religion mean nothing and took credibility and unity from it. They would not have tolerated it.

n) “There were probably so many different and conflicting books for there were such a lot of heretics in the infant Church that the debunker and book burner could not get around to them all and would have dropped the project before it began owing to such discouragement. So the gospels could have safely been published earlier.”

This is nonsense. The Catholic Church once burned heretical books along with heretical scriptures and even burned fairly accurate Bibles because heretics produced them. Christian books are Christian books and that is that.

There is no reason to think that the gospels were known to any outsiders never mind professional debunkers which gives us no reason to think they are probably true and inspired by the Lord.