

Review of The Jesus Inquest by Charles Foster

This book argues for the resurrection of Jesus being plausible. It does not and cannot claim that the resurrection is as watertight as what is found in a court of law.

Charles Foster: "One of the most powerful arguments for the integrity of the early church is that they did not iron out the discrepancies [in the gospels]"

Every man-made scripture, even ones that are claimed to be dictated by an all-knowing God have those. The scriptures get their honour as scripture from people who do not notice or care or think about the contradictions. The early Church could not change the gospels once they got around. The argument is a weak one.

Charles Foster - Jehohanan the name of the crucified man who has left remains was nailed in the ankles and had not been nailed at all in the forearms. "Presumably Jehohanan's arms had been tied in place. Tying is known to have been common."

It shows we do not know how Jesus was put up on the cross. It is very odd that the gospels do not say. Foot wounds are never mentioned at all. The John gospel seems to only care about the wound made in Jesus' side.

It is important to note that despite the Romans sending thousand upon thousands to a terrible death by crucifixion, there is only one example of the remains of such a man. This indicates that burying them was the extreme exception not the rule. And was the man somehow stolen from his cross? We do not know. If he was then stealing bodies was commoner than we think!

Charles Foster - John was an old man when he wrote the gospel and is not sure if Jesus died on the Passover Eve or the First Day of Passover so he just has Jesus dying on the latter though it is wrong and contradicts the other gospels. Foster thinks the accuracy was not important - what mattered was testifying that Jesus died on the cross.

He is being very manipulative here. The day Jesus died is hugely important. If John got that big thing wrong what else did he get wrong?

Charles Foster - "To say that John was trying to establish death is nonsensical. He was no pathologist. If he was anxious to make it clear that Jesus had died, there would be far easier ways of doing it".

Foster thinks Jesus was dead by the time he got the wound. People want to think that for it helps account for how blood and "water" came out of Jesus' side when he was pierced. The water was body fluid that separated from the blood. But John is clear that it is water. To say it was anything else is just rationalisation. Also, John speaks of Jesus' miracles so the blood and water may have been a miracle.

Charles Foster mentions that it is thought that Matthew might have invented the story of other people rising from the dead the time Jesus rose to fulfil texts such as Ezekiel 37, Isaiah 26, Zechariah 14 and Daniel 12.

Matthew does rig his gospel to fulfil prophecies that vaguely match what he wants them to match. So maybe he did.

Charles Foster relates how Seneca the Younger wrote in the first century: "Is it worthwhile to weigh down on one's own sore, and hang outstretched from a patibulum? Is there anyone who, having being fastened to that cursed piece of wood, already worn-out, distorted, swelling with bad wounds on shoulders and chest, and having many reasons for dying even before ascending on the cross, would prefer to prolong his breath?"

He has the nerve to quote this with approval and then suggest that the Turin Shroud which does not display injuries like those recounted by Seneca could be real!

Charles Foster quotes something that allegedly, according to Josephus, came from Moses. "Let him who blasphemes God be stoned to death and hung during the day, and let him be buried dishonourably and out of sight - when he has continued there for one whole day, that all the people may see him, let him be buried in the night. And thus it is that we bury all whom the laws condemn to die, upon any account whatsoever. Let our enemies that fall in battle be also buried; nor let any one dead body lie above the ground." Josephus condemned members of the Zealots who killed people and then "cast away their dead bodies without burial."

If Jesus was a secret zealot enabler and member as some suspect then was his body dumped?

Charles Foster believes Jesus' burial though not completely degrading was nevertheless dishonourable. Jesus' corpse got basic respect which included "closing the eyes, washing the corpse with ointments and perfumes, and plugging the orifices! However, "the canonical Gospels themselves plainly describe a dishonourable burial: no family tomb and no proper mourners sitting shiv'ah for seven days after the death."

The Shroud man has no orifices plugged.

Charles Foster notes that nobody records what happened to the corpses of the two men crucified with Jesus.

Maybe all three were taken and dumped while some to save face pretended that Jesus had been entombed?

Charles Foster notes how John's account of the amount of the myrrh and aloes used on Jesus at burial seems to be a copyist's mistake. There would be enough to do a hundred corpses as the text stands. Foster thinks that that a letter is missing. In the Greek we read litras hekaton but if you use the word hekaston it makes more sense. It would then mean a pound each of myrrh and aloes. "Or litra may be a measure of volume rather than weight". That would still mean a lot of spices say about three or four gallons.

The spices and oils show that the Turin Shroud is not real for there is no trace of them on the cloth and we are told in John that a lot was used.

Charles Foster deals with the young man seen at Jesus's tomb who said Jesus was not there and had risen who some say was Mark the author of the first gospel. The reason some say the man was Mark is because we need to explain why the gospel says the women told nobody that Jesus' tomb was empty and that he had risen again so if they told nobody and Mark knows what happened then he may have been the young man.

Maybe. If the young man is Mark then nobody at all told that the tomb was empty and the apostles never heard of it until Mark said. The gospel of Mark ends at a verse which says the women were at the tomb and told no one.

Charles Foster discusses the notion some have that the Mark gospel is modeled on the material about the Prophet Elijah. He says that this idea is fantasy for Mark says little about Elijah. Those who adopt the modelled theory, will tell you how Elijah was taken up to Heaven on a chariot of fire and then people wonder what happened to his body and search for him for three days and find no body. If Mark follows that pattern, then for him Jesus vanished from the tomb and you can search but there is no point. You will not get Jesus on earth but in Heaven. That theory could explain why the gospel ends giving no account of Jesus' appearances.

That is the theory and it is too much of a stretch. Charles Foster is right to dismiss it.

Charles Foster tells us how only one gospel was interested in the guards put at the tomb on Saturday. He mentions how critics think that Jesus could have been stolen on Friday night and to that he says the guards would have looked inside the tomb at the start of their watch to see if Jesus was still there. After all their role was to prevent body snatching.

Matthew is obsessed with showing the disciples did not take the body of Jesus. And who knows if the guards felt it was necessary to look in? They were liars and could have Is it that

Charles Foster says in relation to Jesus' resurrection that "supernatural explanations should be the very last resort." He says the natural explanations do not work so the supernatural is the last resort.

But you would need to be there to know if no natural explanation was possible. And as for the supernatural, you are left saying, "Ok Jesus supernaturally looks as if he rose from the dead." But you cannot say if it was God any more than you can say it was magic or some ghost raised him up. You can only say it looks as if Jesus rose which is not the same as saying he probably rose or definitely rose. You cannot say any more than that there was an appearance of a resurrection.

Charles Foster notes how Matthew's talk about the resurrected Jesus' appearances is very sparse, just four verses, but says Matthew was honest for had he been selling a gimmick he would not have mentioned how some of those who saw Jesus doubted.

The reality is that Matthew has the resurrection based on a short vision. An empty tomb is an empty tomb. You need visions if the occupant has risen. He needs to appear. But it depends on the appearance. If a man vanished from his grave and his mother and wife and son reported seeing him around the house that would not count as evidence for a resurrection. The doubting could suggest a trick or that the vision was not that convincing. Matthew had no problem saying they doubted because the Church in his day believed it strongly enough and so it did not matter. Matthew was not selling a gimmick for it

had been sold already.

Charles Foster notes how Shimon Gibson looked at the crucifixion site, the rock Golgotha, and found that though the gospels say there were three crosses there, getting three on it would have been impossible. Gibson then argues that Golgotha was just a rough name for the area and not specific which allows for the notion that the crosses might not have been exactly put up on Golgotha but the general area.

That is just a rationalisation. John makes errors and that is another one. If John records the earliest tradition that the site was Golgotha then clearly the crucifixion is non-historical.

Charles Foster notes that Gnosticism cannot be traced before the coming of Christianity. All the Gnostic doctrines and materials emerge after it and most tie into Jesus somehow.

Gnosticism had many forms but was united in the belief that the disciples of Jesus formed a secret circle with mystical rites for inducing visions and revelations and that the outward teaching of the Church was really a metaphor. Gnostics had bizarre but peaceful interpretations of the nasty scriptures such as the Old Testament ones.