

## The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom

The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom is an excellent book by Candida Moss. Sadly as good as it is the Christians will persist in writing books and lying that the apostles and the early Church gave their lives for their faith for it was so true and precious and a testament to the power of Jesus.

Jesus himself and the early Christians were responsible for a spiritual manipulation machine that called on people to let themselves be murdered over religion. Blood was spilt and it is on their heads. Jesus is presented in the gospel as a model for martyrs. He endured great suffering and an ignominious death which we refer to as his passion.

She notes that the passion story of the Gospel of Mark seems to be what was circulated first. So the fuller gospel, our current version, was preceded by it. Many agree for there is so much attention given to the martyrdom of Jesus at the expense of other material even in the fuller gospel that anything else was put on the back shelf. The four gospels spend more time in being careful with the accounts of the death of Jesus than they do with anything else. Teaching and all comes second!

Christians hold that the apostles, the witnesses of Jesus, were martyred for their faith.

Because the story of the apostles is shrouded in lies and fake stories such as the Acts of John which even the Church rejects, Moss can write, "The fact of the matter is that we simply don't know how any of the apostles died, much less whether they were martyred." She says how there were fifteen different stories of how Peter and Paul died that cannot agree prior to 600 AD. She says how Clement of Rome claimed Peter was killed because of jealousy and there is no mention of this being about his faith. Interestingly Clement never says that Peter was crucified!

That's the apostles. So what about the early Christian martyrs then?

"Christians were not constantly persecuted, hounded or targeted by the Romans. Very few Christians died, and when they did, they were often executed for what we in the modern world would call political reasons. There is a difference between persecution and prosecution." True.

The early writer St Justin Martyr wrote the Acts of Ptolemy and Lucius. He speaks of Lucius and another man volunteering to be killed for the faith. That he wrote such a dreadful tale with no condemnation of their actions shows he regarded them as heroes and sought to honour their memory and example.

It is interesting how as Moss says, Eusebius claimed that the Romans destroyed the body of St Polycarp a martyr in case the Christians might start making a Christ of him. He says that the Romans took martyrs from their graves to dump them in the sea to stop people coming to worship them as gods at their tombs.

Moss writes how the Passion of St Sebastian claims that the bodies of the apostles Peter and Paul were buried in Rome. The story goes that Sebastian was beaten to death and dumped in the sewers of Rome. He appeared to Lucina to ask her to get his body and inter it next to the two apostles. The story says she complied but another story says she had Paul's bones moved to her own home place. Another story called the Passion of Processus and Martinianus has Lucina collecting the bones of Paul and Peter as well. It is felt by Moss that despite the contradictions and time span errors in the stories that the bones were being alleged to have been moved.

Christianity has a core teaching that it is at battle against powerful fallen angels. The New Testament calls them rulers and archons and Paul speaks of Satan as the God of this world. Thus the world persecutes the Christian for it is the instrument of those evil angels. Jesus said the world hated him and then hated his followers. The danger with such a doctrine is that with persecution you cannot sit around praying and trying to dialogue with the enemy. You have to crush the enemy in self-defence. There is no time to talk and it is not about talking. Dialogue is both impossible and undesirable as Moss says.

She outlines how Christians persecuted pagans and murdered them according to Michael Gaddi for they seen their violence as necessary in the war against Satan. Not one word of the Bible says that any pagan can be truly good. The Bible theme that the whole world was possessed by evil means all that is not expressly to do with the one true God.

All that shows the importance of exposing Christian lies.

Her most important quote is, "Christian authors like Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, and Augustine refer to the deaths of other Christians or groups of Christians, often in improbably large numbers."

They lied because they wanted to create a victim mentality and get a hold over the people by making them fear the non-Christian world. It made the faith look good and true when so many were supposedly willing to die for it.

Christians think that Emperor Nero was a butcher of Christians - the Book of Revelation speaks of the beast numbered 666 who seems to be Nero and its predicted the beast will die and rise again. Indeed there was a rumour that he would.

The notes say that Nero did not make Christianity illegal through the empire for there is no mention of Nero killing Christians until the next century which is too late. And there is no mention of a law banning the faith. And also Pliny asked Trajan how to handle Christians and asked in such a way that it was clear they had religious freedom. Also, it is possible that even if the religion were illegal it did not entail prosecution unless somebody made a formal complaint against individual believers. This would not have been an everyday occurrence.

One answer is that the beast is not the real Nero but a symbolic one - the papacy? That's for another debate.

By the way, Ramsey MacMullen states that about 5 per cent of Christians went to Church in his book *The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200-400*. That to me shows the religion was really about labels and a social structure involving Church leaders than about religion as such. If religion causes trouble and hate and violence even without trying to then fake religion will be an expert at that.

I would insist that the talk about martyrs makes the Church look like it would do anything to be good and to serve what it understands as the truth. It is useful for scaremongering for it makes believers wonder what the world would do to them if it could. It creates a defensive us versus them mode. It is passive aggressive trouble making.