

THE FIRST CHRISTIANS: ORDINARY BELIEVERS CREDULOUS

When Christianity appeared, maybe about only five per cent of the people could read and write in Palestine. They depended on what leaders and preachers told them. This is the world in which the gospels appeared. And it would have taken years for them to get known there.

According to the New Testament, Christianity spread rapidly among the Jews and the Gentiles. Acts says that three thousand people turned to Christ on the day of Pentecost. Would that be evidence that the resurrection really happened or that Jesus really existed or that the gospels are true? No for we don't know how much stuff Peter told them so they might have been baptised in the name of Jesus thinking he was a saint and that they could still be Jews. Their intent was more to repent and follow Jesus as exemplar than to express faith in the resurrection. The apostles hadn't time to check out if they were sure they believed in the resurrection even a bit.

Christianity is not the first heap of nonsense to take off so well like that. It is and always has been the case that the vast majority of Christian people cannot even defend belief in the resurrection adequately or say they have read a good defence that satisfied them or thought about thoroughly. Millions respond to altar calls on the spur of the moment and get tired of the thrill the next day and fall away. So the argument for the sensibleness of Christianity from its big quick spread is nonsense.

The asinine superstition that brides must be carried over the threshold for lady luck to smile on the married couple is popularly accepted so why shouldn't a yarn about a man rising from the dead be? Beliefs like that are not very strong – usually. There is no reason then to hold that the resurrection had anything to do with the good start Christianity got. It is forgotten that the teaching of Jesus would have been the attraction and people would easily have believed he rose from the dead without evidence that he did for they accepted resurrection or life after death anyway. There is no evidence that the resurrection was as important in the early Church as it became during the ministry of Paul therefore the resurrection is not the reason the Church got started off. It just helped in some quarters but it was not the general reason. Paul stressed the cross more than the resurrection of Jesus. It was only to the sceptical Corinthians that Paul emphasised the resurrection. Also Paul only led a branch of the Church and we have no reason to think that he had full approval of the original authorised teachers the apostles or any real approval from them at all. Christians exaggerate when they say the resurrection kick-started Christianity off.

The Gentiles converted to Christianity were terribly superstitious. They believed that the gods walked in their midst disguised as animals or people. When people like that considered the resurrection as factual it is no argument for it really being that.

For similar reasons it is fatuous to take the alleged testimony of the converted Jews to their belief in the resurrection as meaning that they were probably right. Their former religion was illogical and fanatical.

Anyway, people who couldn't figure out the principles of printing though they saw feet making prints in mud were too stupid to deserve to be listened to when they came out with a resurrection story that is more than improbable. Though their dopey ways do not indicate that everything they learned is dubious it means that they hadn't the intelligence to warrant being taken seriously when they say a miracle happened. It is always wrong to believe in a miracle unless reason and evidence compel you to. It is gullibility.

The gospels assert that many of the people were easy to fool – so easy in fact that they imagined that Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead even though the two had been seen together! If John rose he wouldn't have changed his name to Jesus and gone about saying that John was his precursor. They accused Jesus of being John pretending to be somebody else and yet they admired and trusted him. Their stupidity and ability to prefer feelings to fact shows that Jesus could have tricked them easily. No wonder he got converts who believed he rose from the dead. Jesus told simple parables that his unintelligent apostles could not understand. Jesus was lucky in that he had a trail of dopes after him.

The Samaritans worshiped Simon Magus as a divine power and they were stunned by his miracles. Simon became a Christian along with many of the Samaritans and when he saw that the apostles could give the Holy Spirit he tried to buy the same power. The tricks of Simon and the success of Bar-Jesus, or Elymas, who was a false prophet and miracle-worker that got him to the high places and the respect of well-educated men both show that there were few who would have been resistant to deception. Read about it in Acts 8 and 13.

The crowds that reputedly welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem allegedly turned against him mere days later to please the Jewish

leaders. They were more than easily led if they did that.

Peter felt that the people were easily hoodwinked when he refused to sit with the Gentiles (Galatians 2) which compromised the gospel. He was sure he could get away with exposing himself as a religious hoaxer.

Paul told the Corinthians that at the time they were called to the gospel that none of them came from influential schools of thought or educated families and were unwise by the educational standards of the time – which were low anyway to say the least. He asked them how many of them were wise and intelligent and said that the wise were not called but the unwise so that the wise would be shamed (1 Corinthians 1). Only the gullible converted to Christ. The gospel must have been totally ridiculous when no smart men joined up for smart men can still join silly Churches.

The doctrines of orthodox Christianity seem absurd to most people and still they accept them and do not understand them and follow their own crude version of them that a theologian would laugh at. If that can happen then why can't it happen if the doctrines really are ludicrous?

The argument that Luke depended on reliable eyewitnesses is invalid for we don't know how he made sure they were right or if only those who said what he wanted to hear got their stories in the gospel. Luke may have thought that the testimony was very flawed and depended on divine inspiration ie his own imagination to extract what he did not like and put things right as he saw right.

When the Mormons started up, a man called Howe collected many testimonies and affidavits that Joseph Smith the founder was not a prophet of God but a fraud and a rogue. It did the Mormons little harm. The Christian Church believes the testimonies. But what if the same thing happened with Jesus and the apostles? How do they know that the early Christian Church was not as anti-truth as the early Mormon Church. If the whole early Mormon Church despite persecution defied the facts so could the early Church. To say that the early Church wouldn't do that is just bigotry. If one religion can do it why not another? Why say that Christians wouldn't do that and Mormons would? That is sectarianism. The crimes of one religion reflect on all religion. If modern Christians would do such a thing as defy the facts or if the early Christians would then their faith isn't worth respecting. Would is the key word. The faith of one who doesn't do that but who would is a nascent faith.

CONCLUSION

The engineers of the Christian faith practiced and encouraged rash thinking and credulity. Christianity shouldn't be around these days but unfortunately despite modern sophistication it is.